Consultation feedback report:

Chapter 5: Section A

Version: Final
Date: 26/05/2023

5. Section A

5.1 Your feedback and our response

This chapter provides a summary of your feedback and our response to the main comments raised in relation to proposals for Section A of EWR between Oxford and Bicester.

Throughout this section text in *italics* is our response to the matters raised in your feedback.

Section A is specifically about the Oxford station area, the infrastructure supporting Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village stations, and the London Road level crossing in Bicester.

Work is already being carried out at Oxford station by Network Rail, but further work will be needed to enable the full EWR service. The interfaces between EWR and Network Rail are covered further in the Route Update Report as well as in this chapter.

Potential improvements to Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village stations are still being considered. We're also conducting further work to identify the best option for the London Road level crossing in Bicester. We'll decide upon our proposals and consult upon them before we submit our Development Consent Order (DCO) application.

At the 2021 consultation, we consulted on six concepts for the London Road level crossing. Following feedback to this consultation, we're seeking to develop an alternative solution and are not progressing with concepts 2, 3, 4 or 5 as presented. We're working towards an alternative concept, focusing on identification of the most suitable location for an alternative road bridge, investigating the potential to maintain the existing crossing for local traffic and ways to maintain connectivity for pedestrians and non-motorised traffic. For further details on how we're considering ways to move forward, and why, please refer to the Route Update Report on our website.

We have summarised and responded to the comments for individual areas in turn. Matters raised which cover either all parts of this section, or are general comments, have been summarised and responded to in the last section of this chapter. This chapter is a summary of themes raised – all of the individual matters raised and our responses can be found in the relevant alignment tables appended to this chapter.

5.1.1 Oxford station

Respondents commented on various current issues they have experienced at Oxford station (including capacity, design, transport connections, cycling facilities and parking) and how it could be enhanced as part of the EWR Project. Respondents highlighted the importance of EWR Co working strategically with other planned station improvement schemes and using the regeneration of the station to maximise economic and residential development opportunities, as well as exploring the possibility of creating a station quarter.

5.1.1.1 Station capacity

Respondents described Oxford station as overcrowded, dated, and in need of upgrading/enlarging or rebuilding to increase both passenger and train capacity. Respondents suggested that the capacity of the station would need to be increased to accommodate more passengers and train services.

Respondents also made suggestions for improving passenger flow.

We'll assess the potential effects that an increase in passenger numbers as a result of EWR services could have on Oxford station and will look at what station improvements would be needed. These could include improving options for reaching the station via sustainable travel such as walking and cycling; improvements to local roads to manage traffic travelling to stations; and upgrades that enhance the customer experience.

Network Rail and Oxford City Council are currently working together on schemes to overhaul Oxford station and the surrounding area, including the Oxford Station Master Plan. In addition, Network Rail's Oxford Corridor Phase 2 scheme will provide additional track capacity with high-speed crossovers; replace the Botley Road bridge, making it higher for road traffic and safer, whilst enhancing the pedestrian and cycling paths; and will provide a new platform 5 and a western entrance to the station. It also includes a separate bridge span that will allow a further through platform to be added in future. We'll seek to integrate any proposals we have at Oxford station with these schemes as far as reasonably practicable.

EWR would support existing freight services between Oxford and Bletchley. Where capacity is available around planned passenger services, additional freight paths will be considered.

At Oxford station, we have assumed that the Cowley Plus scheme (a Network Rail scheme that proposes to re-open the Cowley Branch Line to passenger traffic) will free up capacity at Platforms 1 and 2 by offering options for Chiltern and EWR services to turn around on the Cowley Branch Line. If the Cowley Plus Scheme does not go ahead we would progress a South Oxford turnback (a short length of track, south of Oxford station), which would allow a train to turn around without occupying a platform at Oxford station. This would be subject to further capacity analysis and timetable modelling to confirm the preferred option.

We had considered providing an additional platform on the eastern side of the station, but this was discounted as it would require the demolition of properties and the demolition or relocation of the Rewley Road swing bridge; a Scheduled Monument.

At Oxford North Junction, we're working with industry stakeholders to seek to provide a solution to the issue of track capacity. If issues cannot be resolved by an operational solution then we would consider, with agreement from DfT and Network Rail, an infrastructure intervention at the junction. This could include an additional track from Oxford North Junction joining the main line just before Walton Well bridge or installation of crossovers within the existing railway footprint. No properties would be directly impacted by this.

5.1.1.2 Impact on roads/congestion – Botley Road

Respondents commented on the potential congestion on the Botley Road and underpass.

As part of Network Rail's Oxford Corridor Phase 2 scheme, Botley Road bridge is being enhanced to increase headroom and improve pedestrian and cycling provision. We'll work closely with Network Rail and seek to integrate any proposals we have at Oxford station with this and any other schemes for the area to reduce the impacts on Botley Road and surrounding areas as far as reasonably practicable. Further information and contact details for the Botley Road project are available here.

5.1.1.3 Industry coordination

Respondents highlighted the need for EWR Co to work strategically and collaboratively with other relevant stakeholders and projects in the area, to help unlock growth in the region and facilitate the delivery of planned improvements. A few respondents felt that proposals to allow turnback facilities south of Oxford station could conflict with existing plans for the area.

We recognise that there are a number of established industry and local authority-led schemes in the Oxford area, including the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS); Oxfordshire Connect investment programme; the OxCam Arc Spatial Framework England's Economic Heartland connectivity studies and transport strategy; Botley Road Programme proposals; Network Rail's Oxford Corridor Phase 2 scheme and the Oxford station Master Plan. We'll seek to coordinate proposals for EWR with these stakeholders and schemes. For example, plans for the EWR South Oxford Turnback would integrate with the proposed Network Rail Cowley Plus scheme. We'll continue to work closely with members of the Oxford Connect Project Development and Delivery Group.

5.1.1.4 Infrastructure

Respondents queried the feasibility of specific elements of EWR, such as proposals for north of Oxford station and the proposed South Oxford Turnback. The Canal & River Trust

commented that specific consents and assessments would be required to protect the structural integrity of the canal, where the Jericho Line crosses it.

Oxford City Council raised the need to improve rail infrastructure to meet growing demand, create an iconic gateway to support Oxford as a world leading global innovation ecosystem and providing an efficient city centre transport interchange.

As part of the Oxford Projects Development and Delivery Group, we're working closely with Network Rail, Oxford City Council, Train Operating Companies and other key stakeholders to collaborate on planned schemes including Oxford Corridor Phase 2, Oxford Station Masterplan and Oxfordshire Connect. Our aim is to develop a plan for capacity enhancements at Oxford which meets the needs of EWR whilst seeking to integrate with other schemes to help contribute to wider growth at Oxford.

The South Oxford Turnback shouldn't affect any other planned schemes such as the Beckett Street car park, and would be constructed within the current rail corridor. We'll engage with the Canal & River Trust in regard to the Jericho line as part of the ongoing design and delivery of EWR. The South Oxford Turnback would be designed to be complementary to the Cowley Plus scheme.

5.1.1.5 Noise

Respondents raised concerns regarding additional noise that would occur as a result of increased turn-back facilities south of Oxford station.

We recognise that noise and vibration from both the construction and operation of the railway is an important issue for local communities, and we're committed to considering measures that will reduce this. At a later stage in the planning and development process, we'll develop a noise policy, which will set out a plan designed to mitigate noise and vibration to avoid any significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life.

5.1.1.6 Station access

Respondents commented on the need for improved bus connectivity with the station and integration with routes across Oxford, including better pedestrian connections, improved cycling facilities and car parking.

Respondents highlighted the need for better pedestrian connections with the station and for improved cycle facilities including more cycle racks, secure cycle parking and a bike repair facility, as well as safe and segregated cycle routes away from the station. A small number of respondents felt that provision for sustainable transport should be prioritised over that for private vehicles, saying there should be no additional car parking.

Oxfordshire County Council suggested active travel and public transport connectivity should be prioritised. They have suggested a reduction in car parking to further improve access for non-car modes and provide upgraded facilities around the station for cyclists and bus users. Oxford City Council was also in support of prioritising active travel, asking for cycling provision to be tripled in support of the Oxford Transport Strategy.

Respondents also commented that car parking is important for station use, with suggestions for a park and ride facility and a drop off and pick-up area.

National Highways expressed concern that the delivery of an upgraded Oxford station and provision of improved rail connections may increase demand on the A34 and M40 beyond current capacity. They requested further details on demand forecasting and traffic modelling.

We'll work with key stakeholders including Oxford City Council and Network Rail, to promote active and sustainable travel. This may include exploring how we can increase secure cycle parking facilities, enhance safe walking and cycling routes and introduce additional cycle facilities. We'll also seek to work with other organisations, including bus operators, to improve facilities at EWR stations. Whilst we're not responsible for bus routes, we note the comments regarding ensuring access from across the city and will consider this feedback as we engage with stakeholders.

Whilst we prioritise active travel, public transport, and sustainable modes in our proposals for EWR, we also recognise that some people may continue to need to access the station by car. That's why we'll work with local stakeholders to seek to understand wider aspirations for car travel in and around Oxford and the consequential requirements for parking for the station.

5.1.1.7 Station design

Respondents suggested that access should be improved on the west side of the station, allowing both entry and exit and direct access to platforms 1, 2 and 3. Respondents also commented on the existing footbridge - one felt a tunnel would be more accessible, and another said that localised flooding needs to be addressed.
Respondents said the design for Oxford should complement the heritage and architecture of the city.

Regarding station design, Oxford City Council asked for careful planning to account for lost space for the transport interchange due to the proposed additional track. Oxford City Council stated, "There should be a smooth transition from one mode of transport to another including sufficient walkways so pedestrians are not having to navigate their way around bus lanes, taxi ranks and other traffic flow."

As part of Network Rail's Oxford Corridor Phase 2 scheme, an additional platform and a new west entrance to the station would be provided, accessible via Roger Dudman Way. We understand Network Rail has no plans to replace the current footbridge at the station as it provides an accessible lift which provides level access for people who require it.

We want to provide a service which is suitable for a diverse range of users, including disabled people, and so our proposed improvements at Oxford station will follow current rail legislation and modern standards, driven by a requirement to consider inclusive design including access for disabled people, older people, people with young children and people travelling with luggage.

As part of our work with the Oxford Project Development and Delivery Group we'll seek to share consultation feedback regarding heritage and architecture with Network Rail and other key stakeholders as we move forward, so it can be considered as proposals for the station are progressed.

At Oxford North Junction, we're working with industry stakeholders to seek to provide a solution to the issue of track capacity. If issues cannot be resolved by an operational solution then we would consider, with agreement from DfT and Network Rail, an infrastructure intervention at the junction. This could include an additional track from Oxford North Junction joining the main line just before Walton Well bridge or installation of crossovers within the existing railway footprint. Whilst designs are still to be developed it is anticipated that these infrastructure interventions would be within the existing railway footprint and not impact any space that could be used for a transport interchange.

We take climate change and the future risk of flooding seriously and would continue to develop our approach to understanding and mitigating any project-related risks linked to climate change. This includes considering changes to climatic conditions and extreme events within the design of the Project. We'll develop flood risk assessments to help inform the design process, and engage regularly with the Environment Agency, to share information, data and modelling to support this work.

5.1.1.8 Station facilities

Several respondents made suggestions for improved facilities at Oxford station. These included meeting and conference areas, platform canopies and more covered space, improved retail (including food and drink shops, bike repair and maintenance, post office services), changing rooms, more and better-quality toilets and expanded, comfortable waiting areas with seating.
On station facilities, Oxford City Council requested improvements to ticketing, waiting areas, food/beverage/convenience offerings, and accessibility for cycling/pedestrians/public transport users.

Network Rail and Oxford City Council are currently collaborating on schemes to overhaul the station and surrounding area, and we'll seek to integrate any proposals we have at Oxford station with these as far as reasonably practicable.

5.1.1.9 Track design - improved signalling

Respondents suggested that signalling improvements could reduce the need for extra tracks and platforms and help with capacity at Oxford Station.
Network Rail suggested a modern colour light signalling system be installed in the Oxford area to support a revised track layout and platform capacity at Oxford station.

We're considering a number of proposals for north of Oxford station, which involves reviewing whether further new high-speed cross overs can increase capacity in this area (Network Rail's Oxford Corridor Phase 2 scheme is providing some). As part of this, signalling requirements in the area are being reviewed, and information will be shared at the statutory consultation which we expect to take place in the first half of 2024.

5.1.1.10 Cowley Branch Line

Respondents including Network Rail expressed support for wider rail industry proposals in and around the Oxford area, including reopening the lines to Cowley for passenger services.

We understand that having two train operators sharing Platforms 1 and 2 at Oxford station could cause capacity issues, which could be mitigated by the proposed Network Rail Cowley Plus scheme, or a South Oxford turnback, which would allow trains to be turned back outside of the station, freeing platform capacity.

5.1.1.11 Support for the proposals

Respondents expressed support for EWR proposals for Oxford station, citing increased services and connectivity; regeneration of the area; improved facilities; and the plans for Botley Road bridge as reasons.

We're pleased to see comments from respondents supporting the EWR proposals.

5.1.2 Oxford Parkway

Respondents commented on various current aspects of Oxford Parkway station (including capacity, cycle and bus access, facilities and parking), as well as the potential for an increase in traffic on the surrounding Strategic Road Network as a result of EWR.

5.1.2.1 Capacity

Respondents suggested that the capacity of Oxford Parkway would need to be increased. Oxford City Council gave the view that an expansion of passenger capacity at Oxford Parkway would support sustainable connectivity and create an opportunity to reduce car parking at Oxford station. This would both encourage people to use parkway stations and limit private vehicle movement in and out of Oxford.

Based on demand forecasting, we have undertaken capacity modelling work using existing demand data to understand the likely upgrades which are required. We're appraising facilities including the station concourse, car park and cycle racks. We'll publish further details on the required upgrades at the statutory consultation.

5.1.2.2 Parking

Respondents suggested that parking was insufficient and that more is needed.

Respondents proposed that adequate electric vehicle charging points are installed at the car park. Respondents also suggested that sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling should be prioritised to align with net zero goals. Some respondents were concerned about the effect an increase in cars would have on the local highway network.

We have considered these responses carefully and will continue to consider how parking can be optimised at the station. For example, as we develop our proposals we'll be undertaking traffic surveys and modelling work to understand future capacity requirements. We'll also consider how to provide suitable parking facilities for motorcycles and charge points for electric vehicles, as well as parking for disabled people. We continue to work with organisations such as bus operators, to seek to understand how we can interface with other forms of public transport and provide consistent onward travel information. Further information will be made available at the statutory consultation.

Whilst we're not responsible for bus routes, we'll consider access to stations from rural areas and surrounding villages as we continue to engage with bus operators. We remain committed to promoting and prioritising clean and connected active and sustainable travel for those travelling to EWR stations, whilst recognising some people would continue to need to drive to access the station.

5.1.2.3 Station access

Respondents suggested that transport connections to the station needs improvement, including improving the connectivity between Oxford Parkway and Oxford City centre. Respondents commented on the need for good access via sustainable transport, including buses, walking and cycling.

Other suggestions included improvements to the A4165 bridge, including the narrow path on the east side, and a new staircase being added at Oxford Parkway between the station entrance and Banbury Road.

We have undertaken studies and modelling work to understand the upgrades that would likely be required at Oxford Parkway station to improve access and we'll publish further details on these at the statutory consultation.

Whilst we're prioritising walking, wheeling and cycling, public transport and sustainable modes, we recognise that some people would continue to need to access the station by car including some disabled people using parking for disabled people. That's why we're working with local stakeholders to seek to understand wider aspirations for car travel in and around Oxford and Oxford Parkway and the consequential requirements for parking.

We acknowledge the comments made regarding the A4165 bridge; however this would be a matter for Oxfordshire County Council and National Highways.

5.1.2.4 Station facilities

Respondents suggested that facilities at Oxford Parkway need to be increased or improved, including larger, better shelters to fully cover the platforms as well as larger, heated waiting areas. Other suggestions included adding a café, more ticket machines, more drop off points outside the station and a permanent taxi rank.

We'll look at the suitability of all existing station facilities as we carry out further design work - information on this will be shared at the statutory consultation. Any new or improved facilities that we propose would be designed to improve the customer experience by focusing on the areas that people have told us matter to them the most.

5.1.2.5 Cycling and walking

Cycling and walking suggestions included segregated routes; cycle storage and improved racks; widened pavements; improved routes and signage; and retaining footbridges.

We'll work with key stakeholders including Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council to promote active and sustainable travel to and from the station. This may include exploring how we can increase secure cycle parking facilities, enhance safe walking and cycling routes, consider segregated routes and introduce additional cycle facilities.

5.1.2.6 Bus services

Respondents said more frequent and additional routes for bus services departing and arriving at Oxford Parkway are needed, as well as buses that stop at the station entrance and better integration between bus and rail services. Respondents also suggested installing bus shelters, enabling direct pedestrian entry from the A4260 and A4165 bus stops, and creating a bus interchange on Banbury Road overbridge.

We'll continue to work with other organisations, including bus operators, to seek to improve facilities at EWR stations. Whilst we're not responsible for bus routes, we note the comments regarding access to the station and will consider this feedback as we engage with stakeholders.

5.1.2.7 The Strategic Road Network (SRN)

Respondents recommended that the impacts of EWR services at Oxford Parkway station on the SRN must be assessed and mitigated, and that more information needs to be provided on the potential impacts, such as an increase in levels of traffic and disruption to roads.

National Highways consider it essential that rail infrastructure includes all necessary futureproofing where interfacing with the road network and advises to allow for both reasonable background growth and growth resulting as a consequence of expected investments.

We'll continue to consult and engage with National Highways as our proposals develop. We'll undertake further traffic surveys and modelling to better understand the potential impact of our proposals on the SRN, considering traffic during the construction period as well as the implications of additional passenger demand and car journeys on local and strategic road networks once EWR is operational.

At the statutory consultation, we'll share our proposals for how construction work would be carried out and how we would mitigate any disruption to local people and the road network. This will also look at how we would communicate with communities during the construction of EWR.

5.1.2.8 Support for our proposals

A number of respondents including Network Rail were positive about or supportive of our proposals for Oxford Parkway, which we were pleased to see.

5.1.2.9 Biodiversity Net Gain

Respondents suggested EWR Co should consider Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) principles by enhancing the biodiversity of the immediate area through new habitat creation, tree and hedge planting and installation of artificial nesting and roosting sites.

We're committed to protecting the environment by finding approaches to delivery that avoid, reduce or mitigate negative environmental impacts. As part of this, the Project has committed to delivering 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) along the route. BNG requires that habitats for wildlife are enhanced and left in a measurably better state than they were pre-development. This approach supports the Government's 25-year Environment Plan.

It is our intention to build on the commitment of BNG made in relation to the section of EWR that is currently under construction between Bicester to Bletchley. To achieve this, the company would continue to prioritise avoiding high value and priority habitats. We'll also consider enhancing some existing habitats and look at opportunities to create new habitats. Further information on plans for achieving 10% BNG would be provided at the statutory consultation.

5.1.3 Bicester Village station

Respondents commented on current access to and connections with Bicester Village station, and EWR Co's proposed works to the station, with responses both supporting and opposing the plans. Some made suggestions for station improvements. Some expressed a preference for Bicester North station to be used for EWR services instead.

5.1.3.1 Preference for Bicester North

Respondents suggested that Bicester North station should be used for EWR services, rather than Bicester Village station.

Bicester North station is on the London (Marylebone) – Birmingham (Snow Hill) line and is around half a mile northwest of the existing railway corridor linking Oxford to Bletchley. It would not be possible for Oxford – Bletchley – Cambridge trains to call at Bicester North unless new tracks were constructed to link the Oxford – Bletchley line to Bicester North station. The additional sections of track would add considerable cost to the Project and would necessitate the demolition of numerous buildings, including homes. The resulting detour via Bicester North would add several minutes to all journeys passing through Bicester on the Oxford – Bletchley corridor. For these reasons, the use of Bicester North station for EWR services was not progressed.

5.1.3.2 Coordination with wider development - Cherwell District Local Plan

Respondents noted that the EWR proposals should take Cherwell District Council's Local Plan into consideration and tie into relevant planning proposals.

We agree that the Project should align as closely as reasonably practicable with local and central government policies, particularly on key issues like active travel and climate change. Assessment Factor 15, consistency with local plans, is one of our Assessment Factors and would include consideration of the adopted Cherwell District Council Local Plan for proposals in this area. In Bicester, we recognise that the Cherwell District Local Plan will be a key document and we look forward to contributing to its development through the consultation process.

5.1.3.3 Station access

Respondents said access to Bicester Village station needs to be improved, calling for improved active travel and first mile, last mile (FMLM) travel options such as improved pedestrian access via a southern entrance; secure cycle storage; improved bus access; a shuttle service between the station and Bicester Village; and pick up/drop off points to reduce congestion. Respondents stated that these improvements should take account of the new developments being built. Respondents suggested that any provision for sustainable travel (e.g., cycling, walking) and interchange with other public transport (e.g., buses) should be prioritised over provision for private cars.

There was significant support for improving access to provide a high-quality intermodal transport interchange, making connections between rail and other modes of transport easier, particularly public transport and other sustainable modes.

Oxfordshire County Council raised the case at Bicester for parking provision not to be increased, due to the Air Quality Management Area.

One of our core priorities is to increase connectivity across the Oxford to Cambridge area. That's why our station design work will also consider local connectivity, bus services and the experience of travelling to and from an EWR station. We're committed to promoting and prioritising both active and sustainable transport modes, including the provision of secure cycle parking facilities; safe walking and cycling routes; improved bus access; and pick up/drop off points. These aspects will be further developed as the Project progresses.

We'll continue working with other organisations, including bus operators, to understand requirements for interchange with bus services at stations and for providing onward travel information. Although we're not responsible for bus routes, we note requests for consideration of access to the station from rural areas and surrounding villages, including a shuttle bus, and will consider this feedback as we continue discussions with operators. While we're prioritising walking, wheeling and cycling, public transport and sustainable modes, we also recognise that some people would continue to need to access the station by car, including some disabled people using parking for disabled people. We'll work with local stakeholders to understand wider aspirations for car travel in and around Bicester and the consequent requirements for parking.

5.1.3.4 Current station – facilities

Respondents commented on the existing facilities at Bicester Village station, saying the station is confusing, does not provide enough facilities in general, and that better platform facilities are needed. Suggestions included improved waiting facilities; platform canopies and seating; toilet facilities; ticket machines; signage; and sustainable solutions such as solar

powered canopies and LED lighting. Further suggestions were made regarding an additional overbridge to improve capacity; reducing the height of the existing overbridge; and installing an escalator to improve passenger accessibility. Respondents said that improvements should not be at the expense of Bicester residents.

Others said the current facilities and staff are good.

We'll look at the suitability of all existing station facilities as we carry out further design work - information on this will be shared at the statutory consultation. Any new or improved facilities that we propose will be designed to improve the customer experience by focusing on areas that people have told us matter to them the most. We'll seek to consider any potential impacts on Bicester residents.

5.1.3.5 Access to Bicester Village shopping centre

Respondents said that good access from the station to Bicester Village shopping centre is needed and highlighted current issues with car parking. Suggestions included a pedestrian and cycle route, a bus link and clear directions from the station to the shopping centre. It was said that improvements would encourage more tourists and visitors.

We recognise that lots of people travel to Bicester Village shopping centre by rail and we'll work with stakeholders to seek to provide good pedestrian links when EWR services are running. We'll also aim to maintain access throughout the construction period as far as reasonably practicable. There is already a direct walking route from Bicester Village station to the shopping centre, but we'll consider whether there are opportunities to improve access further.

One of EWR's core priorities is to increase connectivity across the Oxford to Cambridge region. That's why our station design work will also consider local connectivity, bus services and the experience of travelling to and from an EWR station, including door-to-door connectivity. We're committed to promoting and prioritising both active and sustainable transport modes, including the provision of secure cycle parking facilities and safe walking and cycling routes. As mentioned, we also recognise that some people would continue to need to access the station by car, and so we'll work with local stakeholders to understand wider aspirations for car travel in and around Bicester and the consequent requirements for parking.

The designs for accessing the station will be developed further as the Project progresses and will be shared at the statutory consultation. As outlined above, we'll also seek to continue working with other organisations, including bus operators, to understand requirements for interchange facilities and how best we can provide onward travel information to passengers.

5.1.3.6 Connectivity to Bicester North station

Respondents suggested that connectivity between Bicester Village and Bicester North stations should be improved, for example using an off-road system (e.g., guided busway) that is free for train ticket holders or considering different modes of transport to produce a seamless door-to-door travel experience.

As part of our ongoing work looking at how we can improve access to the station and encourage active travel, we'll consider how EWR can support improved local connectivity (by bus, cycling and walking), including between Bicester Village station and Bicester North station. Works to Bicester Village station may be required to serve the increased patronage resulting from EWR services.

Again, whilst we're not responsible for bus routes or ticketing for other modes of travel, we've noted these suggestions and will consider them during our on-going discussions with bus operators. More information will be provided at the statutory consultation.

5.1.3.7 General opposition

There was some general opposition to our proposals for Bicester Village station, with respondents expressing concern that Bicester does not have the infrastructure, capacity or facilities to support the additional visitors that EWR would bring.

As mentioned above, the suitability of all existing station facilities, including capacity, will be considered during our further design work, and information will be available at statutory consultation.

5.1.3.8 Parking

Respondents provided contrasting opinions on parking. Some said more parking is needed at the station, particularly to the east side, to increase capacity and prevent parking on residential streets. Suggestions also included charging points for electric vehicles, secure parking for motorcycles, re-purposing or moving Bicester Village shopping centre's car park, and free parking for train passengers.

Others felt that no additional parking should be provided to encourage sustainable travel and to align with policies like net zero carbon. Respondents also noted that Bicester Village station and Oxford Parkway station already have large parking facilities.

We have considered these responses carefully and will continue to think about how best to design parking facilities at the station. Further information will be shared at the statutory consultation.

We'll undertake traffic surveys and modelling work to understand future capacity requirements, and we'll consider suitable parking facilities for motorcycles, charge points for electric vehicles and parking for disabled persons. Whilst outside of our remit, we'll seek to discuss parking fees with the Train Operating Company responsible for the station (Chiltern Railways). We'll also continue working with other organisations, such as bus operators, to understand how EWR can connect with other public transport and provide consistent onward travel information. We remain committed to promoting and prioritising clean and connected active and sustainable travel to EWR stations, whilst recognising some people would continue to need to drive to access the railway.

5.1.3.9 Alternative solutions

Respondents suggested changes to the existing station, including moving it to a different location, building an additional platform and widening it to introduce more lines for freight trains.

Oxfordshire County Council raised that the proposals for the railway in the Oxford to Bicester area need to accommodate additional passengers in terms of sustainable interchange facilities and first mile last mile (FMLM) accessibility for cyclists, pedestrians and public transport users.

We recognise that work may be required to increase capacity at Bicester Village station, and information on how we're considering this further will be shared at the statutory consultation. We're not proposing to relocate the station as it would not represent good value for money and would raise several environmental concerns. Analysis undertaken shows that the existing track has sufficient capacity to enable future services.

5.1.3.10 Support for the proposals

There was support for the Project and the increased services and connectivity it would bring to Bicester, particularly for Bicester Village shopping centre. There was also support for our proposals for station improvements at Bicester Village. Some people felt that EWR would help to reduce road use and support modal shift, particularly by enhancing the accessibility of the Bicester Village shopping centre to visitors.

Respondents including Network Rail were positive about or supportive of our proposals, which we were pleased to see.

5.1.4 London Road level crossing

Respondents made suggestions about what EWR Co should consider as proposals for the London Road level crossing are developed, including crossing accessibility; concept design; construction; safety and cost; and potential negative impacts on roads, the community, businesses and the environment. Some responses expressed support for the closure of the level crossing and some expressed opposition.

Cherwell District Council highlighted how the solution at the London Road level crossing needs to fit with the long-standing transport strategy for the area which aims to remove through-trips from the town centre onto the peripheral roads to enable the central area to have the capacity for local trips, with a priority for sustainable modes. Oxfordshire County Council also believed increased barrier down time or closure of the crossing requires an adequate package of mitigation, as well as consideration of personal security, cleaning and maintenance activities.

Network Rail supports the proposal to close the London Road level crossing, and would like to work with EWR Co to agree the infrastructure interventions required to support the increased train services into Oxford.

At the 2021 consultation, we consulted on six concepts for the London Road level crossing. Following feedback to this consultation, we're seeking to develop an alternative solution and are not progressing with concepts 2, 3, 4 or 5 as presented. We're working towards an alternative concept, focusing on identification of the most suitable location for an alternative road bridge, investigating the potential to maintain the existing crossing for local traffic and ways to maintain connectivity for pedestrians and non-motorised traffic. For further details on how we're considering ways to move forward, and why, please refer to the Route Update Report on our website.

We're committed to providing a safe means to cross the railway and, where closure of crossings is essential, minimising the impact on local communities as far as is practicable.

Since the non-statutory consultation, and in response to the Affordable Connections Project (please see the Economic and Technical Report published with this Consultation Feedback Report) we have carried out further options analysis at each level crossing along the EWR route. Where analysis has identified further potential options (including keeping the London Road level crossing in Bicester open) these are confirmed within the Economic and Technical Report. Before preferred options can be confirmed, safety, risk and traffic assessments need to be completed. This work will be carried out at the next stage and presented for comment at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.1 Accessibility

There were three main themes identified by respondents in relation to the accessibility of the proposals for the London Road level crossing: access for emergency services, access for Non-Motorised Users (NMU) including pedestrians and access for public transport.

We understand that level crossings play an important role in local connectivity and we recognise people's concerns about the potential closure of the London Road level crossing. We recognise that safe, accessible alternatives to level crossings are important for all users.

5.1.4.2 Access for Emergency Services

Respondents expressed concern over access for emergency services should the London Road level crossing be closed.

Emergency service access is an important consideration as we develop our proposals for the level crossing. The emergency services were invited to participate in the 2019 and 2021 consultations. Following the detailed design of the concept for London Road level crossing, the emergency services will be engaged on a one-to-one basis to gain their feedback and to discuss any mitigation required.

5.1.4.3 Access for Non-Motorised Users (NMU)

Respondents also raised concerns about the design of any pedestrian bridge that might replace the level crossing, highlighting the need for it to be usable for a diverse range of end users, including disabled people. Other footbridges in the area, including Garth Park, were referenced as examples of bridge design that are suitable for a range of users including disabled people and older people.

Respondents expressed concern about accessibility, for example whether a bridge or underpass replacing the level crossing would be designed for ease of use by cyclists, with a separate cycle lane. Respondents said that cycle access should be direct and allow for a reasonable speed of traffic flow to make it attractive for users. Respondents said that the bridge and ramps should be wide enough for a range of users, pedestrians including disabled people. Respondents suggested they would prefer a dedicated underpass to a bridge and mentioned the need to separate NMUs from vehicles; and that priority should be given to NMUs and solutions that will encourage active travel.

Respondents suggested that, if it were closed to motorised traffic, the new NMU crossing could be integrated into the local community and landscape. There were suggestions about providing a turning circle suitable for buses and a car park to give people the opportunity to have a shorter walk into the town centre. There were also suggestions to landscape the area using plants and shrubs to create a pleasant environment.

Respondents suggested that guidance from the British Horse Society on bridges should be followed when choosing the final option and designing/delivering the scheme.

We understand that level crossings play an important role in local connectivity and allowing people to move around their communities and recognise local people's concerns about the potential closure of London Road level crossing. We also recognise that Concept 1 and Concept

6, which would close the level crossing without a vehicular replacement, raised concerns for many local people.

We have carefully considered the options at London Road, Bicester, and put forward the options presented at the 2021 consultation – all of which were to shut the crossing. Since the closure of the 2021 consultation we are also now considering ways we can maintain the existing crossing for local traffic.

We understand that safe, accessible alternatives to the level crossings are important for all users. We have taken all consultation feedback into consideration as we have developed the proposals, including the need for cycle access across the railway and the potential impacts of a road bridge in this location.

We're also working with England's Economic Heartland on door-to-door connectivity, which includes consideration of emerging modes and micro-mobility such as electric scooters. We would also endeavour to provide ongoing access during construction, subject to safety considerations.

As part of any bridge proposals that are progressed, bridge design, accessibility, safety, visual impact, access for disabled people and road noise will be some of the factors considered during the design process.

The preferred option will be selected following a rigorous process using a range of Assessment Factors (including environmental impacts and opportunities (14) and safety risk (13)) which are outlined in the Consultation Technical Report. Further information will be presented at the statutory consultation.

We note respondents' specific comments including in relation to Garth Park footbridge, direct cycle access allowing for reasonable speed of cycle traffic flow and separate cycle and pedestrian lanes. These comments will be further considered as part of the ongoing design process. The preferred option will be selected following a rigorous process using a range of Assessment Factors which are outlined in the Consultation Technical Report.

We're aware of "Advice on bridges, gradients and steps in England and Wales" published by the British Horse Society. During the next stage of design, we'll take into account the contents of this document.

Further information on our proposals for London Road level crossing will be made available at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.4 Access for vehicles including public transport

Both Buckinghamshire Council and Cherwell District Council suggested the closure of the London Road level crossing in Bicester should incorporate mitigation to deal with any subsequent increased traffic along the A41. They asked for alternative overbridges and other crossing points to be considered.

Respondents also expressed concern about how public transport services would be affected by the road closure, citing a lack of alternative routes for buses and changes to journey times.

We recognise that level crossings play a role in local connectivity and that closing the vehicle access across the railway may change the way traffic moves around Bicester. We're undertaking detailed traffic modelling in consultation with Oxfordshire County Council and, where necessary, will undertake traffic surveys to understand current traffic flows at the London Road level crossing. This will help us understand how the proposals might affect the local area, including the impact on Oxford Road, Launton Road, A41 and the town centre. We'll continue to work with key stakeholders to understand any interdependencies and identify potential mitigations from the chosen option where required. During the option selection process, the impact on journey times and distance will be considered. Further information will be shared at statutory consultation.

We'll continue working with other organisations, including bus operators, to understand requirements including interfaces and interchange with bus services at stations and providing onward travel information.

We have noted requests to consider how public transport services would be affected (including how buses would be able to continue to access the station) which we'll do as we develop discussions with bus operators.

We're also working with England's Economic Heartland on door-to-door connectivity, which includes consideration of emerging modes and micro-mobility such as electric scooters.

We understand that closing level crossings raises concerns for local residents, which is why we have proposed several options at each crossing location along the EWR route.

We're committed to providing a safe means to cross the railway and, where diversions are essential, minimising their impact on local communities as far as is practicable.

5.1.4.5 Air quality

Respondents expressed concern over levels of pollution potentially increasing due to changes to the road layout, traffic and construction works.

We take our commitment to delivering sustainable transport very seriously and will aim to reduce the negative impact EWR may have on air quality as far as reasonably practicable.

We're developing our proposals for EWR in line with UK Government policy and law, including the Clean Air Strategy. Our team will work with local authorities along the route (including Oxford County Council and Cherwell District Council) to understand current air quality in communities and relevant Air Quality Management Areas. We'll develop a Preliminary Environment Information Report (PEIR) to describe the likely environmental effects of the proposals. This will identify potentially significant adverse impacts (and ways to avoid or reduce them where possible) as well as any beneficial environmental impacts. The PEIR will include information on the baseline air quality environment and relevant air quality standards and targets. The likely risks from both building and operating EWR, as well as proposed mitigation and control measures, will be detailed in the PEIR which will be shared at the statutory consultation. An Environmental Statement (ES) will be submitted as part of the Development Consent Order (DCO) application. This will include assessment of potential changes in nitrogen oxides, fine particulates and dust, in accordance with best practice and guidance such as that set by the Institute of Air Quality Management and other recognised bodies.

We'll prepare a Code of Construction Practice, or similar document, which will set out the potential environmental impacts that could arise during construction and how we would mitigate these. We'll continue to engage with local people and communities to understand the arrangements which are least disruptive to people's lives and businesses and will ensure that appropriate measures are put in place. We're looking at what vehicles and equipment will be used during the construction and operation of the railway, as well as how to manage work sites to avoid and reduce any dust creation.

5.1.4.6 Alignment with policy

Respondents stated the need to align the scheme with the local, regional and national policies such as those related to climate change, residential development and future plans for roads and active travel projects, including the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

We're mindful that EWR must seek to align as closely as possible with local and central government policies, particularly on key issues such as active travel and climate change. We'll continue to consider consistency with local plans as we develop the Project to derive as much benefit as possible from EWR for the Oxford to Cambridge area. We'll work with local authorities and other stakeholders to align proposals with shared outcomes, where reasonably practicable.

5.1.4.7 Alternative solutions

Respondents suggested alternative solutions to those we put forward, including a bridge at an alternative site; a bridge over the existing car park or a bus-only bridge; keeping the level crossing open; a new station platform at Bicester Village station; raising the railway line over the road; tunnelling the railway; moving the station to the other side of the A41; and keeping the level crossing in its existing format but closing the road at the level crossing to all traffic except emergency vehicles, public transport, taxis, pedestrians and cyclists (i.e. a 'bus gate'). Some respondents suggested that an overbridge at Bicester Village station could be used to maintain connectivity during construction.

Respondents suggested temporary solutions during construction to reduce disruption, including using the station bridge for NMUs and creating a temporary platform at Gavray Drive.

There were some suggestions that the level of the railway line should be changed to prevent significant changes being required to London Road, either by raising the tracks or lowering them into a cutting.

Network Rail believe that at the site of the London Road level crossing there is an opportunity to create an optimised environment including pedestrian footbridge and urban realm that enhances passenger experience at Bicester Village station.

Oxfordshire County Council's preference is to maintain road access across the railway as it will keep routes open for all modes of transport.

During the consultation we received suggestions for variations to our overbridge concepts and we have considered these in the development of our proposals. Bridge construction is challenging in respect of the space needed due to the gradients required for vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists, and leaving sufficient clearance for potential overhead electric line equipment. This all requires substantial approach distances and presents significant challenges in designing solutions which reduce the impact to residents and local businesses. A bus-only bridge would require similar construction and so is unlikely to be a good-value-for-money replacement.

We continue to consider a range of ways to maintain NMU connectivity at London Road and we'll discuss the potential of using the existing station footbridge with Chiltern Railways who operate the station. A temporary platform at Gavray Drive isn't required, as it isn't intended to shut Bicester Village station during construction while keeping the railway open.

Changing the level of the railway isn't practicable at this location due to the topography and other features in the area, as well as potential impacts on nearby properties such as adverse effects on light, noise and air quality, and the requirement for land take and demolition to accommodate additional infrastructure. It would also create substantial engineering challenges and significant cost increases.

To change the level of the railway, the 'Bicester Chord' (which links the EWR line to the Chiltern Line towards London) is already at the steepest acceptable gradient for trains. The junction with the EWR line is therefore a fixed point and there isn't enough space for the railway to drop, or rise, to the level necessary before it reaches London Road. There are also watercourses in the area which currently pass under the railway which would need to be diverted if the railway were to be lowered. It would also require the station to be rebuilt and various other railway features to be rebuilt or reconfigured across around 3km of railway due to the area of works required to achieve an acceptable gradient. In addition, by placing the railway in a dip, with steep gradients either side, trains would consume more energy when pulling away from the station. Some of the section of line that would be affected also sits within a flood plain, meaning the new cutting would be prone to flooding and would require an extensive pumped drainage system. Further information about how we have considered alternatives to the level crossing will be presented at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.8 Appraisal process/Assessment Factors

Respondents stated that no options should have been ruled out and one suggested including resilience to extreme weather as an Assessment Factor.

National Highways recommend an assessment of traffic impacts to demonstrate that the impact of the construction works would not have an unacceptable performance impact on the SRN.

To ensure the options being developed and consulted on meet the project objectives set by the Government, and to take a consistent approach to decision-making, a range of Assessment Factors have been developed and agreed upon with the Department for Transport as the Project's sponsor. Some Assessment Factors assist in certain selection decisions to a greater degree than others and where that is the case, these have been regarded as 'differentiating' Assessment Factors. For level crossings, we have identified the differentiating Assessment Factors as: transport user benefits (1) (including car drivers), capital costs (3), operating costs (4), short distance connectivity (6) and environmental impacts and opportunities (14). These will enable the selection of the emerging preferred options. The selection of emerging preferred options as part of the ongoing design and consultation process is necessary to arrive at a final solution.

The effects of climate change and extreme weather events, such as storms and flooding, are vital considerations as we develop the concepts and design for EWR. We follow relevant standards and guidance in this regard, to ensure the railway is resilient and sustainable in the long-term.

5.1.4.9 Bridge design

Respondents stated a need for carefully considered, attractive and sustainable bridge, rather than an impractical, low-quality bridge.

There were comments opposing the replacement of London Road level crossing with a road bridge. Concerns over the potential impact of a bridge included that it would be visually intrusive, contribute to increased road noise and would be disruptive and costly to construct. There were also concerns raised about whether a bridge would be accessible for all users and potential hazards caused by high winds.

Buckinghamshire Council has suggested that alternative overbridges along the A41 be considered to mitigate any increased traffic from the closure of the London Road level crossing.

Cherwell District Council similarly suggested a bridge to deal with any additional traffic that may occur from the disruption of level crossings.

We have carefully considered the options at the London Road level crossing which we presented at the consultation – all of which were to shut the crossing. Work to develop the options is ongoing, including consideration of keeping the crossing open. More information, including the potential impacts of a road bridge in this location, will be shared at the statutory consultation.

Accessibility, safety, visual impact, road noise and cost are all factors that are considered as part of the design process. We will present further detail on our proposals at statutory consultation.

5.1.4.10 Combined concepts

Respondents suggest considering combining elements from the different concepts presented during the consultation, to arrive at a final option. This included delivering Concept 1 (accessible bridge for non-motorised users) with additional improvements; providing alternative road crossing locations combined with a bridge suitable for a range of users including disabled people; combining Concept 1 and 6 (alternative road crossing locations); combining Concept 1 with 2 (road underpass at London Road) or 4 (road underpass alongside

London Road); and combining Concept 5 (road bridge alongside London Road) or 6 with a NMU underpass.

We have taken your feedback on board and are considered combining concepts as part of our proposals. We are working to identify an accessible solution for both a range of pedestrian and vehicle users and within this will consider combinations of options. Our emerging preferred option will be selected through the application of a range of Assessment Factors, as outlined in the Consultation Technical Report.

Since the closure of the 2021 consultation additional work has been undertaken that has impacted the options being considered for London Road level crossing.

Following the feedback we received, we're also giving further consideration to a NMU underpass. Further information will be shared at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.11 Construction

Respondents generally accepted short-term disruption to provide long-term improvements. However, they said disruption for residents and the environment should be minimised. They stated the level of disruption should be considered when choosing the final option.

Respondents suggested that by compromising the needs of both residents and train operating companies during construction, disruption could be reduced. They also provided feedback on the need for clear signage about road closures and diversions during the construction of EWR and careful consideration of the materials that will be used.

National Highways said that consideration should be given to the potential for conflicting construction programmes and propose that it (National Highways) and EWR Co plan and work collaboratively to avoid, reduce or mitigate any potential effects of overlapping construction work in the area on local communities and the travelling public and businesses.

We are considering both long and short-term impacts of the Project through the option selection and design process both during construction and operation. At the next stage we'll consider how to seek to maintain access across the railway for pedestrians and cyclists both during construction, including the potential for diversions, temporary structures or access via other routes.

We'll prepare a CoCP, or similar document, which will include consideration of potential impacts on public roads and rights of way that could arise during construction and how we would mitigate these.

5.1.4.12 Cost

Respondents were concerned about cost, which they said should be considered when choosing the final option. There were responses in favour of choosing the lowest cost option, while others argued that the option that caused the least disruption, both during construction and operation, should be selected.

Cherwell District Council is concerned that the proposals to allow level crossing barriers to be removed to minimise traffic in the Bicester Village station area would be a "complex and potentially costly issue".

Additionally, National Highways is concerned that any decisions to modify rail infrastructure would be "costly and highly disruptive".

We have considered the consultation feedback as we have continued to develop our proposals. Cost forms part of the Assessment Factors used to select options to be taken forward, with 3. capital costs (3), operating costs (4), and overall affordability (5) being considered as part of the process. However, cost is one of several Assessment Factors, so isn't the sole deciding factor in the selection of options. Rather, it is considered alongside other Assessment Factors which are outlined in the Consultation Technical Report.

5.1.4.13 Environmental impact

Respondents expressed concern regarding the concept options and the impact that these will have on the environment. Respondents expressed concern over long-term flooding risk from Concepts 2 and 4.

Natural England specifically expressed concern about the potential impacts arising from the approach to the London Road Crossing at Bicester to species and habitats of principle importance at Gavray Drive Meadows Local Wildlife Site.

Environmental sustainability is central to the decisions we make as we develop the proposals for EWR. We want to make sure that the railway is designed, constructed, operated and maintained in an environmentally responsible way that reduces negative environmental impacts. We want to not only reduce negative impact but to enhance the environment in line with the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and our own vision for EWR: to protect and enhance the natural and historic environment; to be a net zero carbon railway; to ensure the resilience of the infrastructure; and to contribute to the wellbeing of communities and customers.

We recognise the importance of biodiversity and protecting the habitats of local wildlife including Gavray Drive Meadows Local Wildlife Site, priority habitats such as woodland and

ancient woodland as well as parks and greenspaces. As part of our commitment to changing the environment for the better, we are thinking carefully about protected species and their habitats when designing the railway. A programme of habitat surveys and species-specific surveys is designed to help understand where species and habitats are in the landscape and how they are used, enabling the project to avoid, reduce, mitigate and if necessary, compensate for identified impacts throughout the design of the railway. The PEIR will include information regarding the ecology and biodiversity baseline supported by survey data, preliminary construction and operation assessment of impact on designated sites, habitats and species. This will be presented at the statutory consultation with a full ES being submitted as part of the DCO application.

We'll develop flood risk assessments to help inform the design process, which will incorporate planning for the future requirements of a changing climate. We take climate change and the future risk of flooding seriously and will continue to develop our approach to understanding and mitigating any project-related risks linked to climate change. This includes considering changes to climatic conditions and extreme events within the design of the Project.

Work is ongoing in this area, and we have established ongoing and regular engagement with the Environment Agency, to share information, data and modelling to support this work. We're also looking at ways to reduce flood risk by considering appropriate flood protection measures and flood compensation. Additionally, in light of the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events associated with climate change, best industry practice and new standards, the condition and capacity of the railway drainage systems are also being reviewed with a view to reducing the future risk of the railway flooding.

Option 2 (Online underpass and NMU bridge) and Option 4 (Offline underpass (west) and NMU bridge) could increase the flooding risk due to the underpasses, although impacts could be mitigated by the installation of pumping equipment. These factors are being considered as the concepts are developed. More information will be provided at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.14 Impact on local community and businesses

Respondents expressed concern over potential community severance due to road closure and limits on travelling to and from the town centre, particularly for residents living on the other side of train line from the town centre (south and east), Graven Hill or Langford Village. Respondents requested more information about the impact of proposals on Charbridge Lane and vehicular access to Claypit allotments.

Respondents expressed concern over limited access to facilities such as shops, sport centre, health facilities and others due to road closure. They also noted the impact on the accessibility of the health services hub at Graven Hill, which they say needs to be accessible to everyone in Bicester.

Other concerns related to the impact on traffic of closing the level crossing, with respondents anticipating that this would be increased or that diversions would add to journey times.

Respondents also raised concerns regarding the negative impact on their wellbeing, and the impact on the local environment such as disruption to footpaths, green spaces, and conservation areas.

Respondents expressed concern over disruption to local businesses during construction, as well as impacts on the town centre in general, including loss of income; and requested minimal disruption to avoid potential negative economic impacts.

Respondents also suggested that the proposals would be better for the community.

National Highways believe that consideration should be given to the potential for conflicting construction programmes; they are concerned about the impact and potential effects of overlapping construction work to local communities, businesses, and the travelling public.

We considered the impact of the proposed concepts at London Road on community facilities during the option selection process. Charbridge Lane previously crossed the railway via a level crossing. As part of EWR Alliance and Network Rail's Connection Stage 1 work, Charbridge Lane level crossing has already been replaced by a road bridge. As a result, vehicular access to Claypits allotments isn't expected to be affected by any of the Options for the London Road level crossing currently under consideration.

We're committed to reducing and mitigating any disruption during the planning, construction and operation of EWR as far as reasonably practicable. We're continuing to consider the potential impacts of our proposals and how we can work with communities and their representatives to keep those who may be impacted up to date with activity and progress. This will include consideration of communities south of the railway line, living in communities such as Graven Hill and Langford. As mentioned above, we'll set out the steps we'll take to reduce or mitigate any potential disruption during construction – such as noise and vibration, impacts on air quality, impacts on public rights of way, land and impacts on traffic.

During subsequent design work, following the completion of the 2021 consultation, we have given consideration to alternative options which result in retention of the level crossing. This would address some of the concerns regarding impact on the community that are raised by respondents.

We recognise that there are businesses who could be affected by our proposals, including the Bicester Village outlet retail park, as well as a number of business parks and commercial

estates in the area with direct links to London Road or Station Approach. As mentioned above, we have outlined some of these stakeholders in the Consultation Technical Report. We recognise local concerns and the importance of the concepts on local businesses and residents - that's why we encouraged people to respond to the consultation with their views.

The preferred option will be selected following a rigorous process using a range of Assessment Factors (including environmental impacts and opportunities (14) and its assessment factor considerations - community, traffic and transport, landscape and visual) as outlined in the Consultation Technical Report. This will be presented at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.15 Impact on homes

Respondents expressed concern over potential demolition of residential and historic buildings in Bicester, especially in the area around Bicester Village station, and the requirement for people to relocate to other areas. They said they would prefer the solution that would be least intrusive. Respondents also expressed concern over property values decreasing as a result of EWR.

We're aware that our proposals may affect people's homes and businesses. When preparing the concepts proposed at the 2021 consultation, optioneering work took place which sought to reduce disruption for local communities as far as reasonably practicable. The optioneering work took into account the demolition of residential, community and commercial buildings within each option alongside other Assessment Factors as detailed in the Consultation Technical Report. The demolition of buildings is considered under Assessment Factor 14 - environmental impacts and opportunities, under the supporting consideration, community.

As we develop our plans, we'll aim to further avoid negative impact on people's land and property and mitigate any impacts that we cannot avoid. We'll present further detail on our plans, including any impacts on land and property, at the statutory consultation.

At every stage in the project's development, we'll seek to talk to all those who may be directly affected by our proposals. During the consultation we contacted all potentially affected landowners and we also ran a separate consultation, which included specific consultation questions around land, including the Proposed Need to Sell Property Scheme. Where land is acquired or proposed to be acquired, the Compensation Code sets out the circumstances in which compensation is payable. More information is available in the Guide to Compulsory Acquisition and Compensation on our website. If an individual is unable to sell their property due to EWR, they could be eligible to sell their property to us in accordance with the Proposed Need to Sell Property Scheme.

We understand local concerns about the impact of EWR's proposals on local historic buildings and heritage. As with any major project, EWR will comply with relevant legislation regarding

listed buildings and will seek to reduce the number of properties affected. Where there are opportunities to repurpose historic buildings, we'll work with local stakeholders to explore potential uses.

5.1.4.16 Impact on roads

Respondents were concerned about negative impacts of the potential road closure, such as increased traffic and pollution in other locations such as Oxford Road, Launton Road, the A41 and the town centre, increased journey times (including public transport) and disrupting traffic flow. They were also concerned about other areas becoming less safe due to increased congestion. They stated alternative routes and measures to mitigate congestion should be provided.

Respondents expressed a preference for either a bridge or an underpass should the level crossing be closed. Some suggested that restrictions, such as speed or weight limits, could be introduced to help manage vehicle access at the level crossing.

National Highways recognised the benefits that EWR services will have and believes EWR will impact roads by relieving congestion on the road network but were concerned about the impact of construction to the A34 and the M40.

We recognise that level crossings play a role in local connectivity and that closing the vehicle access across the railway may change the way traffic moves around Bicester. Although the UK has a strong safety record on level crossings, current guidance from the regulator (the Office of Rail and Road) says that we must consider closing level crossings. Faster and more frequent trains raise the level of risk and more frequent services also means that level crossing barriers will be down for longer periods of time. We'll be carrying out traffic modelling and risk assessments at the next stage of the design process, to help inform the option selection process.

We recognise that Concept 1 and Concept 6, which close the level crossing without a vehicular replacement, raised concerns for many local people. As described in the introduction to this chapter, at the 2021 consultation, we consulted on six concepts for the London Road level crossing. Following feedback to this consultation, we're seeking we are working towards an alternative concept, focusing on identification of the most suitable location for an alternative road bridge, investigating the potential to maintain the existing crossing for local traffic and ways to maintain connectivity for pedestrians and non-motorised traffic. We're undertaking detailed traffic modelling in consultation with Oxfordshire County Council and, where necessary, will undertake traffic surveys to understand current traffic flows at the London Road level crossing and how our proposals might affect the local area. The preferred option will be presented at the statutory consultation.

We're also working closely with Oxfordshire County Council as the highway authority for London Road to seek to understand current and future plans for the local road network and how our proposals may have an effect on or seek to align with these. During the option selection process, the impact on journey times and distance will be considered.

5.1.4.17 Visual impact

Respondents expressed concern that proposals for the level crossing could have a negative visual impact. There were also calls for the design of any bridge or underpass that may replace the level crossing to be in keeping with the character of the town.

Network Rail said that they think Concepts 3 and 5 are unacceptable due to their visual impacts to nearby properties.

All level crossing concepts are being assessed against the environmental impacts and opportunities Assessment Factor (14) to consider their potential visual impacts, including possible mitigations. We're carefully considering how the development can be designed to blend in with the local environment and our PEIR will look at this. This will be presented at the statutory consultation, with an ES being submitted as part of the DCO application.

5.1.4.18 Barrier down time

Respondents expressed concern over the duration of the barrier down time, both current and future, and the impact this has on road congestion as it can make the road unusable.

Cherwell District Council states that increased barrier downtime or a closure of the London Road level crossing would not be acceptable, if there were not an adequate package of mitigation measures. Oxfordshire County Council echoes this view, highlighting the need for mitigation in the case of increased barrier downtime.

We understand concerns about the impact of the level crossing barrier down time on people's journeys, both in its existing state and in future. This is why we presented options for closing the level crossing at the non-statutory consultation with provision of alternative means of crossing the railway. However, during subsequent design work the options have been expanded to include options which result in retention of the level crossing, with particular regard to the needs of the local community.

Currently the London Road level crossing is used by trains between London Marylebone and Oxford and for freight from other parts of the UK. EWR would add passenger services from Oxford/Cambridge and may see some more freight on the line. The interface of these increased services means that trains would arrive at the level crossing at different times in the hour, in both directions, which means that the barriers would likely be down for a significant

period in every hour. At the 2021 consultation, we estimated this to be in the region of up to 50 minutes in the hour based on the proposed future services. We're developing our designs and further assessing down time and we'll share more detail at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.19 Noise

Respondents said that noise protection from both the train line and road traffic is needed. There were also calls for the design of any bridge or underpass that may replace the level crossing to incorporate noise mitigation measures.

Cherwell District Council asked that information about noise and vibration is addressed in the technical environmental reports.

We're aware that noise from both the construction and operation of a railway is an important issue for local communities, as well as potential noise impacts arising from any crossing of the railway. While at this early stage in the planning process we have not yet produced a noise policy, we would seek to effectively manage noise and vibration to avoid significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life, including in this location.

We'll carry out comprehensive assessments and modelling to simulate potential noise and vibration impacts along the whole route as part of the assessments on any mitigations required. The assessments will form part of the ES submitted as part of the DCO application. It will also be included in the PEIR which will be shared at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.20 General opposition to the proposed concepts

Respondents said they do not support any of the concepts, saying each has drawbacks and therefore it is difficult to choose one to support.

Respondents opposed the closure of the London Road level crossing. Respondents also opposed replacing London Road level crossing with a road bridge or underpass due to concerns about construction disruption and cost, visual intrusion, damage to local heritage, lack of space, access for a range of users including disabled people, increased carbon emissions, and reduced air quality.

We understand local people's concerns about the level crossing and its potential replacement, which is why we consulted on a wide range of concepts to understand local views. We have taken this feedback into account. As described in the introduction to this chapter at the 2021 consultation, we consulted on six concepts for the London Road level crossing. Following feedback to this consultation, we're seeking to develop an alternative solution and are not progressing with concepts 2, 3, 4 or 5 as presented. We're working towards an alternative concept, focusing on identification of the most suitable location for an alternative road bridge,

investigating the potential to maintain the existing crossing for local traffic and ways to maintain connectivity for pedestrians and non-motorised traffic. The preferred option will be presented at the statutory consultation, alongside information on matters such as environmental impact and mitigations, traffic, and how disruption during the construction period will be managed.

5.1.4.21 Rail services during construction

Respondents expressed concern over potential disruption to commuters and existing rail services during construction.

We'll seek to reduce disruption from construction as far as reasonably practicable. At the next stage of the Project we'll bring forward proposals for the construction duration, as well as the approach that we would take to construction, to enable people to see how the work would be carried out, how it could affect them and to help them plan their journeys.

Our proposals will include consideration of how trains, or rail replacement services, would operate during construction. Communication with local communities is of vital importance throughout the Project and we'll seek to understand best practice from other major infrastructure projects to incorporate into our plans. Our contractors would work to published standards and would aim to reduce disruption as far as reasonably practicable.

5.1.4.22 Safety

Respondents stated that safety for all users is a priority and should be considered while choosing the final option.

Oxfordshire County Council believes that safety for all users must be the number one priority, they suggest that an assessment category should be introduced to include it.

Safety is a key priority for us and a primary consideration in the option design and selection process, not only for those using the railway but for all other users, including drivers and pedestrians. It is important that any proposals for the London Road level crossing have safety as a key principle within their design. At the next stage we'll undertake safety risk assessments which will inform the development of the design. Information on this will be shared at the statutory consultation.

5.1.4.23 Traffic surveys/modelling

Respondents expressed a need for additional traffic modelling in the area.

National Highways believes that there should be more detailed information presented in relation to demand forecasting and traffic modelling.

In the next stage of design, we'll undertake traffic surveys and modelling in relation to the London Road level crossing to understand what impact our proposals will have on traffic flows. This will support our decision making and to help us to mitigate any potential disruption from the preferred option.

5.1.4.24 General support for closure of level crossings

Respondents supported the closure of the London Road level crossing, with some support for specific concepts. Respondents supported an underpass or bridge solution, however all concepts were listed as being supported in the consultation feedback.

Respondents were against any new level crossings due to safety issues and a potential increase in traffic. Respondents also noted that there are alternatives for road traffic and felt that closure of the level crossing would not be a problem.

At the non-statutory consultation, we presented the position that the London Road level crossing would be closed. Since then we have carried out analysis on further potential options including retaining the current facility. Before a preferred option can be confirmed safety risk assessments and traffic assessments need to be completed. This work will be carried out at the next stage and presented at a statutory consultation. We're not proposing to add any new level crossings.

5.1.5 Other comments related to Section A

Other comments raised regarding the proposals for Section A included accessibility; track capacity; journey times; and potential negative impacts of the plans on communities and the environment, as well as general support and concern.

5.1.5.1 Accessibility

Respondents said access to the centre of Bicester needs to be improved, particularly for traffic.

Respondents said that pedestrian access should be prioritised, including footpaths and bridleways, and that it should be easy to access sustainable onward travel options.

Oxford City Council has stated that they believe station interchange is overly focussed on the private vehicle with under-provision for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport. They recommend investment to improve connectivity between modes of transport (for example, having sufficient walkways).

Oxfordshire County Council states that accessibility and mobility issues must be considered from the outset of the Project. They also believe that the proposals for the railway in the

Oxford to Bicester area need to accommodate additional passengers who are cyclists, pedestrians, and public transport users. They believe that sustainable transport access should be prioritised before car access.

Cherwell District Council recommends holistic mitigation solutions in order to deliver sustainable FMLM transport access to stations along the route.

One of EWR's core priorities is to increase connectivity across the region. This includes consideration local connectivity, bus services and customer experience while travelling to and from EWR stations. We'll seek to promote and prioritise both active and sustainable transport modes, including the provision of secure cycle parking facilities and safe walking and cycling routes.

As part of the station design work, we're exploring door-to-door access around the station, based on user needs. We'll also continue working with organisations, including bus operators, to understand their requirements including interfaces and interchange with bus services at stations and providing onward travel information. Although we're not responsible for bus routes, we have received requests to consider access to the station from rural areas and surrounding villages and will consider this feedback as we develop discussions with operators.

Whilst we would prioritise walking, wheeling and cycling, public transport and sustainable modes, we also recognise that some people would continue to need to access stations by car including some disabled people using parking for disabled persons. We're working with local stakeholders to understand wider aspirations for car travel in and around Oxford, Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village and the subsequent requirements for parking.

We have undertaken modelling work, which is based on demand forecasting, to understand the likely upgrades which are required. We have appraised facilities including the station concourse, car park and cycle racks. We'll publish further details on the required upgrades at the statutory consultation.

We'll consider footpaths, bridleways and byways intersected by the railway and will aim to reduce any impacts on these rights of way.

Where EWR could alter current access to the town centre, for example at the London Road level crossing, we would aim to reduce this as far as reasonably practicable by providing alternative routes.

5.1.5.2 Alternative solutions

Respondents offered alternative solutions on how to address accessibility issues, such as a mini roundabout on the A41 just past the railway bridge, with a road down to the back of Bicester Village; and a ring road to discourage through traffic.

We aren't responsible for the road infrastructure at Bicester and consider that the proposals raised by respondents are not required to mitigate the impacts of EWR.

We'll work with Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council and other stakeholders to ensure that EWR does not adversely impact the local road network, will provide consultation feedback to them and will engage with them prior to and during the statutory consultation.

5.1.5.3 Environmental impact

Respondents suggested that proposals need to consider how to avoid destroying or changing the appearance of the Oxfordshire countryside, as well as how to incorporate existing infrastructure to reduce environmental impacts.

Historic England expressed concern about the impact of the proposals at Oxford station about the Scheduled Monuments Rewley Abbey 1003650, and Rewley Road LNWR Swing Bridge 1003651.

We'll work to identify and reduce impacts and protect the countryside wherever reasonably practicable. We'll carefully consider how EWR can be designed to blend in with the local landscape, for example by using landscape earthworks to soften the appearance of embankments, or appropriate planting to screen views of engineering earthworks.

We recognise that access to the countryside is important and will work to reduce impacts to public rights of way. To help reduce impacts, we are following the environmental mitigation hierarchy by seeking to avoid significant adverse effects on the countryside and where this isn't possible, seeking to reduce and mitigate impacts and if necessary, looking at compensation. At this stage we are primarily focused on trying to avoid and reduce impacts, by making decisions that help us 'design out' the potential for environmental impacts.

We're looking to ensure that landscape mitigation measures are closely integrated with the ecological requirements of both the Project and the wider area to ensure that the environmental legacy of the works is positive and to support our commitment to 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. This commitment requires that habitats for wildlife are enhanced and left in a measurably better state than they were pre-development. This approach supports the Government's 25-year Environment Plan.

We'll develop a PEIR which will include information regarding baseline soils environment, including presence of best and most versatile (BMV) land, and existing agricultural and forestry land use and agricultural land holdings. Potential impacts and likely effects on agricultural and forestry land use and agricultural land holdings arising from land-take, demolitions of key agricultural infrastructure, severance and changes in accessibility will be presented as part of the PEIR and will be presented at the statutory consultation which we expect to take place in the first half of 2024. An ES will then be submitted as part of the DCO application.

We'll avoid direct impacts on the most significant nationally and internationally designated environmental assets including, National Nature Reserves, Ramsar Sites, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation and candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and candidate Special Protection Areas, Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees.

5.1.5.4 Impact on communities

Some responses expressed concern that EWR could negatively affect village life and that it could fragment access to villages. Respondents suggested that the railway should avoid villages, towns and cities unless needed for stations.

We're committed to ensuring so far as reasonably practicable that the Project is able to mitigate disruption during the planning, construction and operation of the railway.

We'll continue to consider the impact of planned work as the Project progresses and work with affected communities and their representatives to ensure people impacted by the work are kept up to date with activity and progress.

We'll focus on key groups including local residents, businesses and station users but also consider those who are more broadly impacted, such as road users and cyclists. This will include listening to views on how we carry out the work (i.e., the nature of any closures).

5.1.5.5 Journey times

Respondents said that the journey from Oxford to Bicester should be shorter.

It is unlikely that the EWR service would be significantly quicker than the current 14-minute journey time as it would stop at Oxford Parkway, like the current Chiltern Railways service does. We'll look at potential improvements at Oxford North Junction, which may result in improvements to journey times, but further design and analysis will be required before we can comment on any time saving. Information on this will be shared at the statutory consultation.

5.1.5.6 Oxfordshire Rail Corridor growth

Respondents referred to the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study (ORCS), highlighting that EWR has the potential to unlock housing and employment sites across the region and achieve significant growth.

Oxford City Council referred to the ORCS to emphasise that infrastructure transformation is necessary to support housing, employment growth, and the city itself as a leading global innovation ecosystem.

Oxfordshire County Council noted that most passenger services should be extended across Oxford in order to link different areas of growth.

Unlocking employment and growth is a key part of the case for EWR. Connecting key areas along the route will make places more appealing for people wanting to start and grow all types of businesses. It will help attract and retain the best talent in the region and bring businesses closer to their supply chains, research sectors, competitors and other sectors, creating jobs We recognise this and we'll continue to work with key organisations in the region so that EWR forms part of the wider growth strategy.

5.1.5.7 Opposition

There was some opposition to the proposals for Oxford to Bicester, with suggestions that they were either unnecessary or would have a negative impact on Bicester with little benefit for people living there. Some respondents said they do not support EWR as they don't think there is a requirement for increased rail services in the area.

We recognise local concerns and will continue to work to mitigate the impacts of the Project and reduce disruption during construction. EWR was set up by the Government as a once in a generation opportunity to provide frequent, fast and reliable rail links for communities between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge. EWR is a key component of the development of the Oxford-Cambridge area, the UK's leading region for research, development and innovation. This area has been identified as an area of growth for the UK and providing transport choices for businesses and residents is a vital part of that plan.

Since the 2021 consultation the Affordable Connections Project re-examined and confirmed the need for EWR (please see the Economic and Technical Report published with this Consultation Feedback Report).

5.1.5.8 Station design

One respondent suggested that more stations should be built along the route. Another said that station improvements should integrate with the proposed Oxford station masterplan. One more highlighted the need for better understanding of passenger numbers in order to effectively plan improvements at existing stations.

Oxfordshire County Council also encouraged coordination with the emerging station masterplan, stating "The Councils endorse the comments in the Consultation Document for the EWR to consider and coordinate with the ongoing station master planning work".

A station is currently being built at Winslow, and a high-level platform at Bletchley, however there are no plans to build any new stations in the Oxford area. We agree that there will need to be collaboration between all stakeholders at stations across the route, in particular with Train Operating Companies such as Chiltern Railways, and also with Network Rail. We'll be carrying out further analysis of passenger numbers and flow through the stations, and we'll discuss the findings with relevant stakeholders to identify any potential station improvements as part of the EWR Project.

5.1.5.9 Support

Respondents were positive about or supportive of the proposals for Section A, which we were pleased to see.