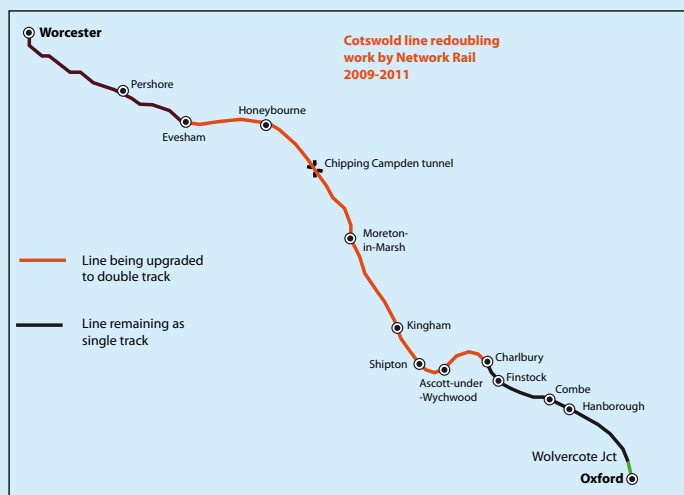


Sixties cuts are reversed



Work began in July on reinstating 20 miles of double track on the route from Oxford to Worcester. A team of 100 engineers was out in force to implement the £105million scheme – on the line between Evesham and Charlbury in the north Cotswolds – which will take two years to complete.

The engineers are repositioning nearly 10 miles of existing single track to make room for double track, constructing 21 miles of new surface concrete cable route, installing 30 miles of new cable and relocating 60 sets of signal equipment.

They will also be installing an extra track through 157-year-old Chipping Campden tunnel which was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

The Network Rail engineers used a unique state-of-the-art track construction train and will create a 32-mile double-track section in the centre of the route, from Charlbury to Evesham. But single track will remain in place between Charlbury and Wolvercote junction, north of Oxford, and between Evesham and Worcester.

Extra platforms will be built at Charlbury and Ascott-under-Wychwood station.

More than 12,000 tonnes of materials will be removed from the 886-yard tunnel. A new 2,000-yard drain will be installed to alleviate flooding in the future.

“One of the biggest challenges for this first phase is finding the opportunity to carry out the work without disrupting the daily operation of the railway and the community,” said Chris Rayner, route director for Network Rail.

“To minimise any disruptions, we will be constructing infrastructure off-site whenever possible, provide diversionary route as an alternative and carry out our work in phases without having to close a long stretch of line at one time.”

Transport Minister Chris Mole said: “This important multimillion pound project will revitalise local services and increase reliability. It is an excellent illustration of the Government’s determination to continue to improve our railway network.”

First Great Western’s project manager, Martin Barnett said: “The North Cotswolds line is a particularly congested part of the railway, which means small delays tend to have more of an effect on our customers than they should.”

A combination of replacement buses and diverted trains will maintain services.

The Oxford-Worcester-Wolverhampton line was singled in the late 1960s and in some cases the track was repositioned into the centre of the trackbed.

Railfuture was represented at the official launch of the project in March, which was attended by Lord Adonis and Tory leader David Cameron.

NEWS IN BRIEF

◆◆◆◆ Airtrack

After years of dithering, the application to build Airtrack (the southern rail approach to Heathrow Airport via Staines and the M25 motorway) has gone in under the Transport & Works Act procedure.

The project is being promoted by BAA and services would operate from Reading, Guildford and London Waterloo.

Some Heathrow Express services could also be extended to Staines.

The project would connect Heathrow Terminal 5 to the national rail network and would involve tunnelling from Heathrow Terminal 5 to Stanwell Moor, building a new rail line across Stanwell Moor and Staines Moor, building a new section of track in Staines town centre, remodelling Staines station and building a train depot at Feltham.

All being well, TWA powers could be granted towards the end of 2010 although it will take five years before trains start running.

◆◆◆◆ Cross-Bristol hope

Alan Matthews of the Portishead Railway Group is pleased about progress to reopen the branch, which is at stage three of the eight-stage reopening process.

North Somerset District Council, supports the idea, which involves a cross-Bristol service, not just a “pootle” into Temple Meads.

◆◆◆◆ Home thoughts

A new consultants’ report has examined plans to reopen the Leicester-Coalville-Burton Line.

One rail campaigner commented: “By applying the same chicken entrails that Network Rail were forced to use at Uckfield in Sussex, these consultants have worked out that you would need to build 286,000 [not a misprint] houses to justify the line.

“Back in the real world the BNP are winning seats in Coalville. A viable route to Leicester would do wonders for the local employment

market and for the sense of being connected to a wider economy generally.

“The decision to postpone the reopening of this line is grist to the extremist mill. The yachties of Portishead may well get a cross-town service. The working class get Brian Souter’s belching trundlers.”

◆◆◆◆ East-West

Railfuture’s Peter Wakefield has written to local councillors on the route of the East-West rail link reminding them of the importance of supporting the scheme and offering them additional information if they need it.

◆◆◆◆ New station

A new London Overground station, Imperial Wharf, was expected to open in late September on the West London Line (Clapham Junction-Willesden Junction). When and if the Chelsea-Hackney line is built, Imperial Wharf will serve both lines.

◆◆◆◆ Potential reopening

A partnership of local authorities, Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance, rail groups and other public bodies appointed The Railway Consultancy Ltd to carry out a study to assess the potential for upgrading the Sandbach-Northwich line for passenger services, including a new station at Middlewich, the largest town in Cheshire without a rail station.

The consultants have ruled that the scheme is potentially viable and now councillors are keen to reconnect Northwich, Middlewich, Sandbach and Crewe.

The consultants’ full report is at <http://www.middlewichstation.org.uk/Report/TRCLreport090703.pdf>

◆◆◆◆ Franchise mess

Rail franchising is in “a mess” the House of Commons transport committee has decided. It called for one franchise to be kept in the public sector as a benchmark for the rest.

Study into airport rail links

Which is the best airport? This may seem a strange question for Railfuture to consider – but for some journeys flying is the only reasonable method.

In that case, it makes sense for the passengers to use rail – and sometimes bus or coach – for their journey to and from the airport.

The Railfuture international committee has therefore undertaken a study of all British airports and classified them according to the quality of their public transport links and also how well these are advertised.

For example, Gatwick and Birmingham are excellent examples of airports served by fast trains in more than one direction, even though improvements could still

be made to make life better for passengers. Belfast City Airport has no rail link but at least enjoys a bus link into the city centre and an interchange to trains.

Blackpool Airport has a rail link but is served only by local trains.

We also found some airports with inconvenient and/or poorly publicised bus links which do not even connect to the nearest main line station.

Railfuture branches have provided much useful local information, which is being incorporated into the international committee’s report, to be issued in October.

If you would like a copy, please send a large SAE to Howard Thomas, 24 South Primrose Hill, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 2RG.