

Stratford Parkway Station

Outline Business Case for Warwickshire County Council

Report

January 2010

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Executive Summary

Overview

Warwickshire County Council has commissioned a study to investigate the business case for the development of a railway station adjacent to the site of the bus-based park-and-ride site in Bishopton, Stratford-upon-Avon. The study has been undertaken as a feasibility study with the intention of providing a body of evidence to inform the public consultation and stakeholder interaction due to follow.

The Council has a strong track record for delivering new railway stations. In recent years Warwick Parkway and Coleshill Parkway have opened, both delivered through innovative and effective partnerships to the benefit of passengers and stakeholders across the industry. This provides a strong body of experience for this scheme at Stratford Parkway.

Strategic Context

An initial study in 2003 considered the possibility of a Parkway station at the Bishopton site, adjacent to the junction of the A46 and A3400 roads and close to the M40. The site is currently used for bus-based park-and-ride, but there is also space available to provide parking for rail-based trips. In 2008 a further study was undertaken that indicated there would be significant demand for a rail station located at this site.

There are two principal drivers for this study:

- The ambition to provide an increased frequency of off peak train service between Stratford and Birmingham as part of the West Midlands Region Rail Development Plan, coupled with committed improvements to the infrastructure, rolling stock and Saturday service; and,
- The reduction in number of existing car parking spaces at the Stratford town centre station, due to local developments, will constrain the ability of passengers to access this station.

The effect of these two factors together is to compound the case for the new station. Without additional car parking capacity, the improved service would not reach its full potential, as there would be suppression of growth in demand through parking constraints on people accessing the services by car.

An independent review of the West Midlands Regional Funding Allocation Transport Programme in October 2008 identified the Stratford Parkway station as one of the schemes that could be funded through the RFA2 route before 2012, but this might require both rail industry and Major Scheme Business Case appraisal.

The scheme has been included within the current Regional Funding Allocation “Quick Win” schemes.

Stratford Parkway is consistent with the County Council’s policy to encourage modal shift away from the private car, and promote accessibility to sustainable modes of transport. The station is promoted in the Local Transport Plan 2006-2011 (LTP2) as an initiative that would improve access to the rail network and reduce passenger journey times.

Stakeholder Support

The principle of a parkway station to serve Stratford and its hinterland is widely supported by rail industry stakeholders, and as such provides a strong basis for garnering wider stakeholder support.

Network Rail is investing in the infrastructure on the North Warwickshire Line through linespeed improvements and signalling enhancements, thereby improving the line capability. The provision of a station at the proposed location appears feasible though more detailed investigations would be needed should the project progress further.

London Midland, the train operator providing services between Stratford and Birmingham, are enthusiastic about revitalising this route. There is a franchise commitment to introduce modern Class 172 rolling stock, and recent passenger growth has been strong.

Chiltern Railways has a limited service to Stratford, but with the fulfilment of their Evergreen 3 investment plans within the next couple of years, there is the potential to re-cast the timetable for the franchise and to consider increasing the frequency on the Stratford branch.

Centro, the Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) for the West Midlands, are fully supportive of developing the route to Stratford. They have promoted it through the West Midlands Region Rail Development Plan.

The improvements to rail services are wholly consistent with aspirations for economic development. The contribution of Stratford itself to the regional economy has been recognised by Advantage West Midlands, the regional development agency, as crucial and decided worthy of investment planned to complement the £100 million redevelopment of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre under a Masterplan for the whole of Stratford called "World Class Stratford".

Infrastructure Issues

The West Midlands and Chilterns Route Utilisation Strategy process is now underway with the consultation document to be published early in 2010. Options for Stratford Parkway have been included within the scoping work.

The rail routes through the proposed station site connect Stratford-upon-Avon with Birmingham to the north, and via Warwick and Leamington Spa to London, Oxford and a wide range of destinations to the south. Stratford is the terminus of the routes.

The proposed site is on reasonably straight and level track, approximately one mile north of Stratford-upon-Avon's existing station. Network Rail has confirmed that it is appropriate for station construction and that it is unlikely any signalling or infrastructure alterations would be required. Since new diesel trains being acquired by the London Midland franchise now have carriages of 24.5m length, it is suggested that 147m platforms should be constructed to comfortably accommodate 6-car vehicles. Network Rail agrees with this provision for platform length.

Warwickshire County Council is preparing to commission a study to take the station to GRIP3 within Network Rail's GRIP scheme development process.

Operational Issues

The London Midland services through the proposed station form part of the complex network of suburban services radiating from Birmingham Snow Hill. In the off-peak there is an hourly service to Stratford-upon-Avon via Shirley, whereas the weekday peak periods provide two trains per hour.

Chiltern Railways run through services between Stratford-upon-Avon and London Marylebone on an approximately 2-hourly frequency. The long turnaround times at Stratford-upon-Avon provide sufficient opportunity for additional calls at Stratford Parkway.

The ability to stop weekday off-peak Birmingham trains at the new station is limited by the current short turnaround times, and the minimum of 6 minutes allowed by the Rules of the Plan. However, the operation of a half-hourly service at other times of the week demonstrate that the weekday off-peak timetable could be recast to allow more time at the Stratford end of the journey, thereby enabling all trains to call at the new parkway station.

Demand and Revenue Forecasts

The analysis undertaken in this study has demonstrated that there is the potential for a strong uptake of demand for the new parkway station.

The current car park at Stratford-upon-Avon provides 72 spaces, and until recently had a typical weekday occupancy in excess of 85%. However, a temporary car park on the former cattle market site adjacent to the station has recently opened charging a similar rate, increasing the total number of spaces available to 320. Plans to re-develop part of this site are progressing, and the total future number of spaces is expected to be reduced to no greater than 140.

The opportunity to provide a multi-deck car park at Stratford town centre has been considered, but there are a number of practical constraints - the shape of the land available, access arrangements for high-sided vehicles to/from the station and the track (e.g. for maintenance) and the visual impact of such a structure relative to the environmental considerations for a "World Class Stratford", the £100m masterplan for the 2020 Vision for Stratford.

Passenger demand growth on this route has been strong in recent years, and was more than 6% in 2007-08. Future sources of demand for the station have been examined in this study, including the potential to attract strategic park and ride traffic from regions further south of Stratford currently driving to Birmingham for work, and from new developments at either Birmingham Road and Bishopton Lane or at Shottery. (A new link road is proposed within the new Shottery development which would reduce access time to the station).

Demand for the rail travel to and from Stratford will depend on which of the developments proposed in Stratford goes ahead; Bishopton or Shottery. With the Bishopton developments, net_rail demand (at both Stratford stations) is anticipated to increase by 114,000 passenger trips per annum in 2024/25, or 94,000 with Shottery. This figure assumes the inclusion of the benefit of the regular 2 tph off-peak service, as advised by Warwickshire County Council, and the introduction of the improved modern rolling stock, both expected within the next two years.

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It is clear from our analysis that demand is generated both from the improved access provided by Stratford Parkway station to a significant part of Stratford town and its hinterland, as well as as well as attracting a significant number of passengers to the new station due to the capacity constraints of the existing town station parking. A typical weekday would see a total of up to 807 passengers using both Stratford stations.

Specifically, it is estimated that the total parking requirement for Stratford-upon-Avon station will be 182 (up from 98 today) driven by the service improvements alone. This exceeds the 140 spaces that are assumed to be available. In this situation there will be no comparable alternative parking (in terms of cost and/or location) and therefore it is assumed that the additional demand would be capped at 42 additional vehicles. Therefore under this option, without the new parkway station, only 50% of the additional possible demand (84) is realised and there is no capacity available for background growth or the additional growth generated by the Bishopton or Shottery developments.

Appraisal Results

A financial and economic appraisal has been produced from this high level business case analysis. The approach is consistent with the DfT *WebTag* guidance, an important consideration in making the case for the proposed station.

The base cost for the station is £4.5m, and making an allowance for risk of 25 percent, brings the total to £5.6m.

Warwickshire County Council has extensive experience in procuring and delivering new stations, and has done so at a discount of up to 30% of costs normally associated with station constructions. For the purposes of this appraisal, such cost savings have not been included, but opportunities for outturn costs to be lower than quoted must be recognised.

The ongoing annual costs associated with running the station have been assumed to be a £47,250 Long Term Charge and £48,980 direct TOC costs. These estimates are based on work carried out by Warwickshire County Council and validated by Steer Davies Gleave examining the operating costs of similar stations.

The operating costs have been calculated on the assumption that all trains will be able to call at the proposed station within the existing diagrams. This implies that neither additional rolling stock nor on-train staff would be required. In addition, no account has been taken of staff costs that would need to be covered if the station were to be manned.

The net impact on the rail industry is made up of the increase in ticket revenue and the additional operating costs. For the purposes of this assessment it has been assumed that parking revenue is retained by the Warwickshire County Council.

The present value of rail ticket revenue is £8.5 to £9.7 million (depending on the development scenario), comfortably exceeding the present value of operating costs (£2.1 million) over the sixty year appraisal, which results in a private sector net present value benefit of £6.5 million to £7.7 million.

The construction cost of the station equates to a present value of £5.6 million when converted to appraisal consistent units. The minimum 10% local contribution (£0.6 million) is shown with the remainder being assumed to be provided through the

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Regional Funding Allocation (RFA). It is noted that this assumption does not affect the economic performance of the scheme.

The economic appraisal shows a total present value of benefits of up to £37.6 million (with the development at Shottery) exceeding the total present value of costs of £7.8 million. The ratio between the two represents a BCR of 4.8:1, demonstrating a high value for money case for the project to proceed.

Station Design

The design of the station infrastructure reflects the basic requirements of a new station, assumed to be unmanned, and would comprise:

- Platform length of 147m to accommodate 6-car trains;
- On-platform waiting areas;
- A pedestrian link to Bishopton Lane; and,
- Lift and step access to meet DDA-compliant requirements.

The existence of the bus-based park-and-ride site with more than 700 spaces means that significant infrastructure is already in place, both in terms of access arrangements, security and parking facilities.

It is proposed that additional car parking for the rail station would be provided, and that passengers would purchase a car parking ticket from machines for display within their vehicles. The current method of paying on board for those passengers using the bus-based park-and-ride would be retained.

Alternative Options

A number of alternative options have been considered rather than the creation of a new station at Bishopton. These have included:

- the multi-decking of the existing town centre station car park;
- the expansion of other station car parks;
- the location of a new station at a different site; and,
- the introduction of a coach-based park-and-ride facility at Bishopton.

None of these would appear to offer the same attractions and benefits as a parkway station at Bishopton, either on environmental grounds or practical feasibility. A significant advantage of the proposed Stratford Parkway is that the “land-side” infrastructure is largely in place, supported by good access arrangements.

Summary

The principle of a station at Stratford Parkway is widely supported by the rail industry, and meets with their aspirations and ambitions for the route to Stratford-upon-Avon.

The presence of a large car park at the proposed location arising from the bus-based park-and-ride site ensures that a significant number of the issues associated with the introduction of a parkway station have already been overcome, and will lower the construction costs relative to similar station initiatives.

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There are no significant operational issues that prevent the station from receiving a good level of service. The introduction of a 2 tph off-peak service will generate additional demand for the route, and Stratford Parkway will be well-placed to take advantage of these improvements. However, without the new station, it appears that these service improvements will not, at Stratford, reach their full potential, as any additional demand would meet significant constraints in accessing the service by car. There is therefore substantial synergy between the new station and enhanced train service proposals.

The station is forecast to cater for a total of 190,000 single trips per annum, based on 2024/25 demand levels. From both Stratford stations, there could be up to 114,000 trips new to rail, depending on the developments that occur. Passenger demand growth has been strong in recent years, in excess of 6% during 2007/8, and there are good reasons to expect further growth.

The financial and economic appraisal has yielded a BCR of between 4.0:1 and 4.8:1, depending on the developments that occur in the town. This is a strong ratio and it is recommended that the output from this analysis is sufficient to provide Warwickshire County Council with the confidence to progress the scheme further in order to move towards a target implementation date of March 2012.