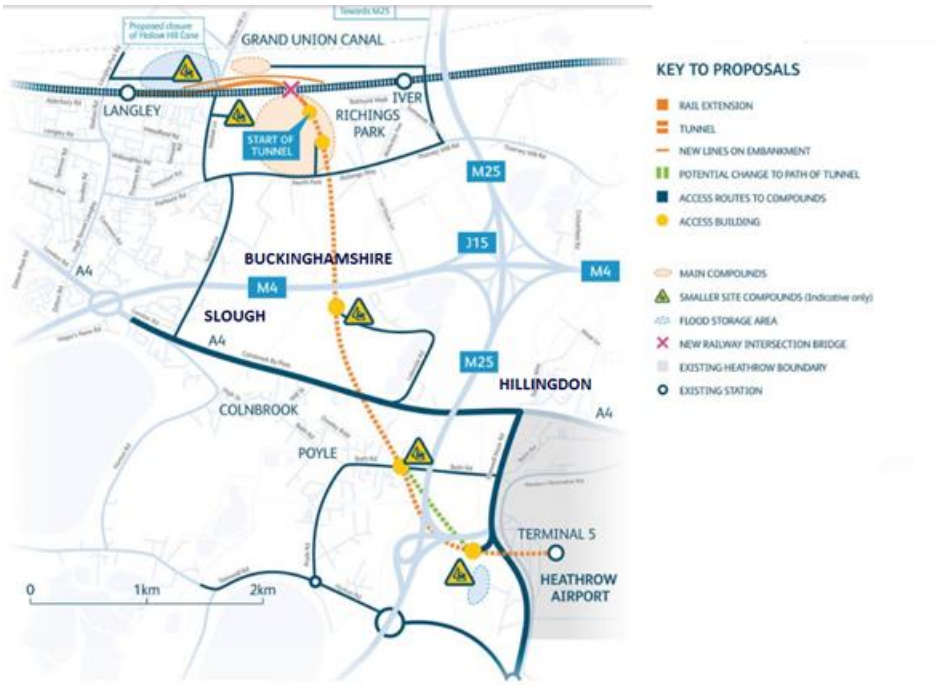
Report to Wexham and Ivers Community Board – 22 September 2020

Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH)

1. Introduction

Network Rail NR) propose to construct and operate a new 6.5km rail link between the Great Western Main Line (GWML) and Heathrow Airport. The WRLtH line would leave the GWML between Langley and Iver stations go under the GWML and then descend into a tunnel before crossing under North Park and the M4. NR has decided to close Hollow Hill Lane (HHL) south of the Grand Union Canal bridge, i.e. in Slough, as the WRLTH line cuts across HHL north of Chequers bridge.



The proposed rail link is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the 2008 Planning Act and Buckinghamshire Council is a statutory host authority. NR would submitted their application to the Planning Inspectorate, who would hold an Examination before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport to grant or refuse planning consent. The decision would also allow NR to purchase the land for the project.

In addition to providing a rail option from the South Coast, South West, South Wales and West Midlands without going into London Paddington, WRLtH could provide options for residents in the county to access Heathrow via Slough station. East West Rail will also provide a direct rail travel to Heathrow option via services to Oxford and Reading. WRLtH would enable travellers to Heathrow to go by train rather than car, reducing congestion and emissions on the M4 and M25. It would be part of the country's move towards reducing carbon emissions to 'net zero' by 2050. The WRLtH project is seen by Government as a two runway project i.e. it is not dependent on Heathrow expansion.

In June, local Councillors and the Cabinet Member for Transport, Nick Naylor, agreed that whilst the WRLtH project is likely to be beneficial to the UK it will have a significant impact on the Ivers community. It was decided to take a joint approach with the Parish, Colne Valley Regional Park and the Council to present the best case to government to secure mitigation for the community. The Council position is that NR should part fund &/ or otherwise support delivery of the Iver Relief Road due to WRLtH's permanent closure of Hollow Hill Lane.

Community Impacts

In 2016, Slough Borough Council carried out a temporary closure of HHL. The closure had a major impact on traffic in the Ivers as drivers had to use alternative routes to travel north and south to and from Slough for work, schooling, shopping and services. Resident's specific comments on the impacts on their daily lives include:

' Travelling from Iver to Colnbrook for work even at 5 am going via Langley High Street there was congestion that added 10 minutes to the journey with queues along Langley Park Road as well as the High St. Returning the impact still was felt at 10pm. Later in the rush hour this delay added 20 to 25 minutes to the journey in each direction.'

' Taking and collecting children from school in Langley travelling from Colnbrook via Sutton Lane/Parlaunt Rd/Langley High St at 8.30am/4.15pm the queues along all these roads added 30 minutes to the journey time. The same was experienced by parents travelling from Richings Park to schools in Langley.'

' Residents living in Richings Park had great difficulty in turning out of the village roads onto Richings Way/North Park as traffic was queued back from the width restrictions in either direction. Residents living along North Park/Richings Way had difficulty in accessing their properties. Congestion was solid from Sutton Lane along North Park at peak rush hours (7.30 – 9 am, 5 – 7 pm) back to at least St Leonards Walk and sometimes to the Tower Arms.'

As the WRLtH lead on the Community Board Infrastructure Group, Councillor Wendy Matthews summarises that:

The impact on the quality of life of the local community was significant, having to spend many hours travelling very short distances locally. It affected residents' abilities to get to work, get children to school or access the doctor, dentist, hospital or other services. Long term the effect on the whole fabric of the local communities will be devastating. Many commented that it felt like they were being cut off from outside connections and isolated because of the difficulties in travelling anywhere.

There was also a significant impact on local business. Businesses including Pinewood will be requested to either include their day to day experiences in the joint Buckinghamshire evidence or make their own submissions to NR, the local MP and government.

2. Community Evidence

As part of the Community Board Infrastructure Group work a site visit was undertaken on 4 September to collate evidence on the impacts WRLtH would have in the Ivers. Further discussions have since been undertaken with Buckinghamshire and Iver Parish councillors to refine these community issues and identify possible solutions. A summary of the issues, solutions and potential joint approach is set out in the table below for four locations

(1) High Street to Thorney Lane North

Issue	**Solution**	**WRLtH approach**
No parking which causes congestion on High Street which significantly worsened when Hollow Hill Lane (HHL) closed for Slough trial	Redevelop area south of High Street and include parking	Policy hook in submitted Local Plan and policy proposal in draft Neighbourhood Plan
Narrow junction from Thorney Lane North into High Street causes HGVs to block road	Road geometry means not possible to widen. Reduce HGVs using this route and long term provide Iver Relief Road	No construction vehicles via this route. Require WRLTH to use Iver Model which shows if HHL closed significant reduction in vehicle movements if Iver Relief Road (IRR) provided. Seek funding towards IRR &/ or assistance by NR as landowner for IRR future delivery
Incremental additional development and increased traffic including Thorney Business Park	Each new development considers how their traffic adds to existing traffic	Include current and planned development traffic in baseline for WRLtH Environmental Assessment
Developments don't have community facilities so need to access High Street/ other locations in Iver, Slough and Hillingdon		Include in Bucks Community evidence seeking host community mitigation fund
Poor air quality due to high levels of HGVs	Reduce HGVs using this route and long term provide Iver Relief Road	Increase measurement (locations and types of pollutants) in Ivers AQMA area.
Congestion caused by no parking at Church	Parking on Swan Road	Include in Traffic Assessment
Air Quality for 2 Schools and 3 Nurseries	Monitoring to provide evidence and seek solution through AQMA Plan	Include in baseline for WRLTH Environmental Assessment. No construction vehicles via this route
Blue light services and bus service access when HGVs block road	Alternative routes used when HHL temporarily closed and addition time for journeys	Include in revised Scope for NR Assessment

(2) North Park and Richings Park

Issue	Solution	WRLtH approach
Cumulative impacts with CEMEX for Richings Park and North Park residents	Monitoring of CEMEX conditions and Liaison Committee communication	Require that CEMEX material utilised for construction and WRLTH spoil be used in restoration to reduce/ remove double whammy impacts
Traffic significantly worsened when Hollow Hill Lane (HHL) closed for Slough trial causing long periods of gridlock		Include in baseline for WRLTH Environmental Assessment. Limit construction vehicles via route east to Thorney Park Road
Congestion worsened by traffic calming when HHL closed		Include in Traffic Assessment
Flooding and concerns about changes to groundwater including impacts on underwater streams and clay/ gravel lenses	NR provide explanation of how water levels to be managed and where water is to be pumped to/ stored when dewatering excavations & tunnel and then longer term in operation	Water & Flood and Minerals & Resources chapters in Environmental Assessment to be reviewed against these points and require monitoring to be reported to Council and community
Impact of water levels on utilities and need to undertake works including roadworks		Include in baseline for WRLTH Environmental Assessment (EA). Require additional community mitigation if knock on impacts
Construction impacts (noise, dust, visual etc) on Richings Park and North Park residents	Communication/ community alerts of when most significant impacts during construction	Require NR to provide a lessons learnt section in EA documents from other NR projects near housing (i.e. Oxford – Bicester)
Road access to WRLTH infrastructure. Accepted that CEMEX access location not ideal but lest worse option	Design road to be used for part of N-S section of IRR	Seek NR agreement to future proof road off North Park for possible use in IRR
Operational impacts from rail line and tunnel	Explanation by NR of noise, vibration etc	Mitigation in application and monitoring to enable additional measures for community if impacts worse/ different
Air Quality including congestion at Tower Arms junction	Monitoring to provide evidence and seek solution through AQMA Plan	Include in baseline for WRLTH Environmental Assessment. Limit construction vehicles via route

(3) Chequers Bridge to Mansion Lane

Issue	Solution	WRLtH approach
Access by plant and materials via Mansion Lane and canal bridge	Explanation by NR of haul routes	Improvements to canal bridge solely to provide mitigation for impacts on Mansion Lane residents and not to provide access for circa 5 years of construction then operational access. Requirement requiring all material by rail. Lessons from Iver Station construction.
Haul road from Thorney BP to Mansion Lane	Design road to be used for part of E-W section of IRR	Seek NR agreement to design haul road to future proof for possible use in IRR
Journey delays when HHL closed	Short to medium term provide cycling/ walking route over GWML in view of loss of HHL and Dog Kennel bridge. Long term provide Iver Relief Road	NR include information on journey times in in Traffic Assessment and IPC/ members provide evidence on severance in Bucks Community evidence
Loss of walking/cycling routes within CVRP	Consider with CVRP partners options for wider network	Support case for replacement walking and cycling route with Community Board evidence on health issues and need to promote local active travel
Air Quality for Nursery	Monitoring to provide evidence and seek solution through AQMA Plan	Include in baseline for WRLTH Environmental Assessment.

(4) Langley Park Road and Wood Lane

Issue	Solution	WRLtH approach
Langley Bridge (in Slough) issues with HGV width and flooding	Seek Slough confirmation of programme with NR to address issues	Include in Traffic Assessment. Seek longer term agreement that this route (B470 west and south of Mansion Lane junction through Slough) is most appropriate for higher traffic levels as supported by Slough Langley High Street scheme
Congestion significantly worsened at rush hours when Hollow Hill Lane (HHL) closed for Slough trial	Reduce HGVs using this route (& onto High Street) and long term provide Iver Relief Road through future development plans	Require NR and other developers to consider holistic solution of IRR. Iver Model of HHL closure shows significant increase in traffic on B470 and A412 (at top and bottom of Wood Lane).

3. Technical Evidence

Buckinghamshire Council, as highway authority and in its other statutory roles is compiling technical evidence to support the joint case for mitigation. On the impacts of construction traffic and the closure of HHL this includes:

- Traffic modelling including use of the new Iver Model to show the impacts of WRLtH on journey times and where this would lead to more traffic and/ or roads and junctions which are less safe due to the increase in traffic.
- Place and Movement Study. This is an established technical approach for recognising the needs of different road users, including pedestrians going to and from home, work and local services. It looks at how a section of highway works and so can be a basis for deciding which activities should be prioritised. For example, whether planning policy and decisions could work to reduce HGV numbers on a road with local shops and used by children and parents to get to schools and nurseries. This visual tool can be used by the community as well as the Council's Highways team to bring to life the impacts of WRLtH. It is also a possible tool for use on the AQMA Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan and the case for the IRR.
- Healthy Streets Assessment. This well established approach assesses the area against ten criteria and helps us understand the issues that affect people's experience of using a street and spending time there. This has been used to help consider what changes could be made to improve the experience and will establish a baseline of the current community, environment and health difficulties currently faced in Iver. Critically this would capture the communities view through a survey, for example, of the Iver High Street and how the WRLtH project could affect its use.

4. Next Steps

Network Rail has advised us that they are looking to submit the application for WRLtH to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) in or after September 2021. In the coming year NR will be:

- seeking views on they should consult and engage with the Council and community
- requesting an Opinion from the Planning Inspectorate on how they assess the project on which PINS have to ask for the Council's comments
- undertaking a further round of consultation
- revising the application to take on board comments and
- undertaking an updated technical assessment

Working jointly the Council, Parish and partners will use the community and technical evidence to make the best case for local mitigation and push Network Rail to explain the project to the local community more effectively than they have done so before. We want to be in a position to start negotiating with NR well before they finalise their application next year.