

Proposed Stratford Parkway Station Questions for WCC

This note focuses on four issues that are not adequately covered in the Steer Davies Gleave's report on the proposed Stratford Parkway station. They include:

- (i) Most people would like to see more people travelling by train, rather than by car. This could be achieved, either by upgrading Stratford station and providing a better car park, or by building a new Parkway station at Bishopton. The consultants dismiss the first option on grounds that adequate parking cannot be provided at, or near, the current station.
- (ii) The current station acts as an arrival point for rail-based visitors to the town. However, most of the station traffic – nearly 80% -- consists of students and OAPs who travel on reduced fare tickets. The expected diversion of full fare travellers to the Parkway station will reduce ticket sales and car park revenue at Stratford by over £200,000 per year which will adversely affect the current station. It is already seriously run down and the parkway station will make things worse.
- (iii) The benefit/cost analysis – which seems to show that persuading 100 car drivers per day to leave their cars behind and travel by rail instead – would generate £100 million in benefits (by reducing the external costs of car use). However, these benefits are not unique to the parkway station. The same benefits would apply to the existing station if it was refurbished and more car parking provided.
- (iv) Finally, a number of costs have been omitted from the analysis. These affect the financial viability of the scheme and should be included before any final decisions are taken.

1. Encouraging more car users to use rail

The over-riding project objective is to encourage more car users to switch to rail. Few people would disagree with this objective. However, there are several ways of doing this, including: (i) leaving Stratford station as it is and building a new Parkway station; or (ii) refurbishing the existing station buildings and footbridge and building a larger car park.

The consultant's report dismisses the second option on grounds that the current car park has a "long and narrow shape" which effectively prevents it being re-developed to provide sufficient extra parking spaces (see para. 7.14). It argues that the current station only has 72 spaces under its control and, following the Cattle Market development, could only be expanded to 140 spaces. Even with an extra deck, it could only accommodate 255 parking spaces (para. 7.15).

Table 4.13 sets out the 2024/25 weekday parking demand (including natural growth, traffic generated by strategic Park & Ride and housing developments at Bishopton and Shottery). It shows that weekday parking demand would result in 72 cars parking at the town station and 182 at the Parkway station (total 254). If the Parkway station was not built, this traffic could be accommodated at Stratford station with an extra deck. But there would be no spare capacity left to accommodate future traffic growth.

However, the report's assertions about lack of parking at Stratford station are overstated. The Cattle Market is currently being redeveloped, guided by a development brief prepared by SDC. The developer will also have to make Section 106 payments. If a larger station car park was required, why was this not written into the development brief? Furthermore, the Section 106 payments offer scope for changing the boundary of the existing car park to improve its awkward shape, or even to relocate some parking onto the other side of the track where it could form part of the Morrison's car park. The public will simply not believe that a refurbished station, plus a suitable car park, could not be provided on the existing site for less than the £5.14 million WCC proposes to spend on the Parkway station.

Refurbishing the existing station would also generate additional rail traffic. Para 4.30 of the report argues that "An additional perceived journey time reduction is applied at Stratford Parkway station to represent the fully equipped and modern "new build" station in relation to the existing facility at Stratford-upon-Avon. The improvement is represented as a 5% fare equivalent benefit, converted to a journey time reduction." The "new build" Parkway station is unmanned, has no buildings (presumably no toilets) and tickets will have to be purchased from a machine. A refurbished Stratford station would be far more attractive. It has buildings, toilets, a cafe and a number of classic Victorian features. Once refurbished, it would become an attraction in its own right offering a fare equivalent benefit well in excess of the 5% fare reduction associated with Stratford Parkway.

Finally, we do not believe DfT would appreciate seeing money spent on a Parkway station when a cheaper alternative – which appears to generate almost the same benefits¹ -- was available. As the Campaign for Better Transport argues, "DfT needs to reject schemes where promoters have given inadequate consideration to other options."

Our conclusion is that the report has failed to show that the required parking could not be provided at the existing station and might even produce a higher benefit/cost ratio.

2. Likely impact of the Parkway station on the existing town station

The report says very little about the likely impact of the Parkway station on the existing town station (the "missing" chapter!). The weekday passenger demand at Stratford station in 2007/08 (entries only) was: full fare, 175; season tickets, 80; and students and OAPs, 960 (nearly 80% of the total). Table 4.12 shows how Stratford station is likely to be affected by the Parkway. By 2024/25, existing traffic with growth and planned housing developments, produces 665 one-way trips per day. This drops to 590 with the Parkway station (i.e., a loss of 75 passengers per day). Over a full year, assuming half the losses are full fare passengers and the other half season ticket holders, this adds up to a revenue loss of about £163,000 per year. The existing station would also lose about £75,000 in parking revenue.

¹ Tables 4.8 and 4.9 show that Strategic Park & Ride would generate an additional 56 one-way weekday trips per day if Stratford station was new (refurbished), while the Parkway would generate 60 per day – a difference of only four passengers.

What impact will this have on the town's station? Will it remain as a manned station? Will it be worth maintaining the buildings and footbridge to a high standard? Will it even be worth keeping the station open?

There will inevitably be some adverse impacts which the report has not spelled out.

3. The Benefit/Cost analysis

The non-user impacts – which make up most of the benefits -- are spelled out in paras. 6.19 to 6.21. They appear to be made up of the “external costs of car use” (i.e., the costs that car users impose on other car users by adding to road congestion) and take the form of time savings to business travellers and other users when car users switch to rail. The figures are high. With Bishopton and Shottery developments included, the NPV of these impacts, over the 60-year appraisal period, amounts to about £21.7 million. So, as Table 4.13 shows, if 114 cars per day (in 2024/25) are parked at the station with their occupants travelling by rail, it would save roughly £21.7 million in external costs. Working backwards – and ignoring things like growth of traffic, etc. – this suggests that each car parked at the station generates a net benefit of about £34 per day.

How is this figure calculated, since the ordinary citizen would find such a number incredible. Apart from anything else, it suggests – in benefit/cost parlance – that it may be worth spending £10 million to persuade just over 100 cars per day (Birmingham commuters) to use rail instead of road, since it would produce a benefit/cost ratio of over 2. Furthermore, these benefits are not unique to the Parkway station. If upgrading Stratford station and providing better car parking persuaded more people to use rail, the benefits would apply equally to that option.

The consultants need to explain, step by step, how the figure of £21.7 million has been calculated and also need to estimate the likely benefits associated with a refurbished Stratford station.

4. Costs that have been omitted

A number of costs -- which adversely affect the financial viability of the Parkway station -- have been omitted from the report. They include:

- (i) A station building is shown on the plans, but no station building and ticket office are included in the costs. Rail tickets are presumably dispensed from a machine.
- (ii) There are no parking ticket machines and no entry/exit barriers.
- (iii) There are no station staff – the station is un-manned. We question whether this is feasible with a new station – surely there would need to be staff during an initial settling in period.
- (iv) A footbridge connects both platforms by way of stairs and lifts. Since the station is un-manned, it is unclear what would happen if the lift doors jammed, or the lift got stuck between floors.
- (v) No maintenance costs have been included for the Parkway car park. If about 182 vehicles per day (Table 4.13) use the car park, there will surely need to be some cleaning and minor maintenance?

- (vi) No car park costs have been included, since the new station is assumed to use spaces in the existing Park & Ride site. This is not strictly correct. The existing spaces in the Park & Ride site have an opportunity cost. When the site starts operating as a genuine P&R facility, the spare spaces will fill up and additional car parking will then have to be provided. The benefit/cost analysis should recognise this by assuming that the 182+ spaces may have to be replaced in, say, 2022.
- (vii) The extra costs of catering for the additional 220 one-way passengers per day has not been included. These passengers could only be accommodated by having longer trains and/or increasing frequency of service. Just as the costs of the new station have to be debited against the additional revenue earned, so must the costs of providing additional train capacity.

The report should be updated to include a rough estimate of these costs.

Strategic Park & Ride -- Tables 4.8 and 4.9

The total size of the market included in the analysis is 169 passengers, including drivers and passengers. The anticipated abstraction from car to rail, if Stratford-upon-Avon were a new station, is shown below.

Table 4.8 Driver and Passenger Trips to Central Birmingham Included

Origin	Trips
Chipping Norton	1
Cirencester	1
Evesham	47
Shipston on Stour	6
Stow on the Wold	1
TOTAL	56

If the new station at Stratford Parkway were introduced instead, the abstraction would be as below.

Table 4.9 Driver and Passenger Trips to Central Birmingham Included

Origin	Trips
Chipping Norton	1
Cirencester	1
Evesham	50
Shipston on Stour	7
Stow on the Wold	1
TOTAL	60

It can be seen that the increment between the two scenarios is **four** passengers.

Total Demand 2024/25, Plus Relevant Text

The demand generated by the new developments will not reach maturity until 2024/25. The weekday passenger numbers and parking numbers for that year are shown in the tables below.

Table 4.12 2024/25 Weekday Passenger Demand

Demand Source	Stratford-upon-Avon		Stratford Parkway		Increment
	DM	DS	DM	DS	
Existing with growth	655	559	-	275	179
Strategic P&R	655	559	-	279	183
Land at Bishopton and Birmingham Road	661	564	-	300	203
Land at Shoterly	665	590	-	295	220

Note: DM = do minimum demand; DS = do something demand.

It can be seen that, when the demand from the development is added to the demand from background growth, there is a considerable increase in the incremental demand in the Do Something scenario.

Table 4.13 2024/25 Weekday Parking Demand

Demand Source	Stratford-upon-Avon		Stratford Parkway		Increment
	DM	DS	DM	DS	
Existing with growth	140	68	-	175	103
Strategic P&R	140	69	-	177	105
Land at Bishopton and Birmingham Road	140	69	-	177	105
Land at Shoterly	140	72	-	182	114

The key driver of growth in demand for parking is the introduction of the link road to the west of Stratford, allowing passengers to access the station from the south of the town without going through town.