

# Rail plan 'could reduce traffic'

A NEW rail link between Bicester and Oxford could potentially see 550 fewer commuter cars using the roads by 2016 as drivers switch to the train.

Chiltern Railways has submitted plans to the Government to create a new route between Oxford and London Marylebone, via Bicester.

If the scheme gets the go-ahead, passengers will be able to travel from Bicester to Oxford in just 14 minutes.

A new station near the Water Eaton Park and Ride site will mean journeys to the capital will take 58 minutes and the Oxford-to-Marylebone trip 66 minutes.

The rail firm predicts there could be 550 less car journeys in peak travel times by 2016 in North Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire County Council estimates that at the moment, on weekdays between 8am and 9am, about 1,368 vehicles use the A41, heading southbound from Bicester.

It says about 2,429 motorists use the A34 near Weston-on-the-Green, with 790 using the A44 south of Pear Tree, and 744 using the A4165 at Water Eaton.

Chiltern Railways senior development manager Allen Dare said commuting between Bicester and Oxford would be much easier and the new rail route would have an impact on traffic on the A34.

He said: "By 2016, our computer models forecast an additional 1,200 rail journeys in the morning peak hour, 8am to 9am, across north Oxfordshire.

"This includes local rail journeys on the new route between Bicester and Oxford, and also new longer-distance rail journeys from the area, such as Water Eaton Parkway to London or Oxford to High Wycombe.

"In general we expect that 45 per cent of this will be transferred from cars.

"So there will be around 550 less car journeys across north Oxfordshire in the peak hour by 2016, although we cannot be specific that these would all be on the A34."

Ian Hudspeth, Oxfordshire County Council's cabinet member for growth and infrastructure, said that with thousands of new homes due to be built across the county, improving transport between Bicester and Oxford and elsewhere would be a challenge.

He said: "The council supports Chiltern Railways' plans in principle but inevitably a major scheme such as this will have a number of secondary effects on the environment and the people of Oxfordshire.

"As a consultee on the plans, we are at this stage looking closely at the details of the application before deciding on our formal response."