

Wokingham Borough Council wants trains to pick up the pace

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Wokingham Borough Council has said it is campaigning to improve train journey times between stations in Wokingham borough and London Waterloo.

The hope is faster trains will encourage more people to use the service.

Currently, the 36-mile journey takes an hour and 17 minutes. However, the council says South Western Railway, the operator, could reduce this to just 59 minutes by introducing “fast” trains that don’t stop at stations between Twickenham and the capital.

The council says Network Rail considered this [in 2017](#). Furthermore, in 2014 the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership [concluded that speeding up the journey](#) by roughly this amount would bring economic benefits of up to £91 million locally.

Now, with passenger numbers either stagnating or falling at Earley, Winnersh Triangle, Winnersh and Wokingham stations during at least the four years prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the council believes the time is right to revisit the idea and make train travel a more attractive option again.

It says doing so will reduce car usage, which is a key priority as it strives to meet its pledge to address the climate emergency by playing as full a role as possible in reducing the borough's carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.

The council is doing all it can to promote active and sustainable alternatives and is **seeking people's views** until 19 August on its Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, which proposes a raft of improvements across the borough and will help get Government funding.

The proposal to improve train journey times has the support of all parties after a motion was unanimously agreed at a full council meeting on 21 July.

Joining forces for a more sustainable future

Cllr Paul Fishwick (Liberal Democrat / Wokingham Borough Partnership), executive member for active travel, highways and transport, said: "I was delighted to second this motion as everyone on this council recognises the importance of tackling the climate emergency.

"We also cannot allow political differences to stand in the way of reducing air pollution, a major health hazard to which car usage is a significant contributor, nor the health and economic benefits of making public transport more accessible and desirable for everyone.

"As well as helping the environment, we're determined to do all we can to support residents by making rail journeys into London – where many of them work – more attractive."

Cllr Charles Margetts (Conservative), member for Finchampstead North, who proposed the motion, said: "I thank Paul for seconding this – it goes to show what is possible when we all work together for residents' benefit. I've travelled on this line for many years and it has seen some investment but journey times remain the greatest barrier to greater usage.

"A fast train from Earley took 49 minutes in 1975 so we're actually going backwards at an alarming rate – in fact, the journey time between London and Wokingham has increased by seven minutes in the past 10 years when we need to speed times up to encourage alternatives to driving.

"Now some choose to drive part of the way before boarding a train, which is understandable but far from ideal. Quicker services would benefit the operator while bringing significant investment to the area and, most importantly, help the environment by reducing car use – something we all agree is needed."