



Transport & Infrastructure Committee	Agenda Item
15 November 2023	10

Title:	Wisbech Rail (also known as March to Wisbech Modal Appraisal)
Report of:	Matthew Lutz, Transport Programme Manager
Lead Member:	Cllr Anna Smith, Chair of Transport and Infrastructure Committee
Public Report:	Yes
Key Decision:	No
Voting Arrangements:	No vote required

Recommendations:	
A	To note the development in relation to the Wisbech Rail project.

Strategic Objective(s):	
The proposals within this report fit under the following strategic objective(s):	
X	Achieving good growth – Wisbech Rail aims to facilitate growth within both March and Wisbech
X	Increased connectivity – Wisbech Rail will increase the connectivity between March and Wisbech

1. Purpose	
1.1	To give an update about the Wisbech Rail project following a request by Transport and Infrastructure Committee members.

2. Proposal	
2.1	To note progress on the project and offer feedback on the Wisbech Rail project.

3. Background

3.1	Background <p>The railway from March to Wisbech was opened by the Eastern Counties Railway in 1847 and became part of the Great Eastern Railway in 1862. Originally built as a double track railway to serve the Port of Wisbech, it was later extended to Watlington Junction on the Ely to King's Lynn route. The line from March to Wisbech; the Wisbech Goods Branch, Engineer's Line Reference (ELR) WIG, runs from March East Junction at 85 miles 78 chains to the nominal end of the line at 93 miles 49 chains at Wisbech. Passenger service ceased in 1968. The track has been substantially removed beyond Weasenham Lane level crossing at 93 miles 15 chains. The remaining rail corridor remains in Network Rail Ownership.</p>
3.2	<p>The line was constructed as a twin track railway but was single lined in 1972. From 1972 to 2000 it was used for freight only operations as far as the Metal Box and Purina sites, located south of Wisbech. The March end of the line continues to be used to access Whitemoor Yard in conjunction with the chord line from March West Junction and to support shunting movements, but only as far as 86 miles 18 chains.</p>
3.3	<p>The line was operated on the "One Train" principle with a Train Staff (OTS), and therefore facilitated only one train operating on the line at any one time. Since 2000, the line has been officially described in the Network Rail Sectional Appendix as "Out of Use" (temporarily), from 86 miles 18 chains to Wisbech". The line has not been formally closed, nor has it been subject to Network Change, taking it out of the existing National Rail railway network.</p>
3.4	Work completed to date <p>CPCA commissioned Mott Macdonald to investigate options to introduce a transport link between March and Wisbech. The work undertaken by Mott MacDonald began in 2015, and a significant number of documents were produced to inform the development of the proposed transport link. Key documents were updated and re-issued in 2020.</p> <p>In 2021/2022:• Network Rail Design Delivery undertook a feasibility review of proposals developed by Mott MacDonald on behalf of CPCA. The review was informed by 9 key documents and other supporting information.</p> <p>Network Rail's Light Rail Knowledge team considered the options for adopting suitable light rail technology and operational solutions. This was done without a constraint of complying with current national rail design and operating standards – other than at any interface with the current rail network.</p> <p>In response to a request from CPCA, Network Rail's Eastern Region Development Group produced a report capturing Network Rail's view on the Wisbech Rail GRIP 3 documentation. The report broadly covered four areas which identified gaps in existing documentation and provided a list of recommendations/requirements to address them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business Case review• PACE / GRIP review including PM review of documentation• Engineering review• Light Rail feasibility
3.5	Scope of current work. <p>In line with previous TIC representations, CPCA has engaged Network Rail to undertake an Options Assessment Report to consider all on-rail modal options.</p>
3.6	<p>Network Rail are considering opportunities to introduce a shuttle passenger service between March and Wisbech in Cambridgeshire to improve transport connectivity and access to the commuting markets nearby to support job opportunities and the economic regeneration of the region. The objective of these enhancements is to facilitate the following project outputs:</p>

	<p>A balanced modal appraisal of all rail options to facilitate a passenger service between March and Wisbech based on a shuttle service.</p> <p>Transport options considered to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conventional rail • tram-train • light rail • very light rail
3.7	<p>Network Rail's Engineering Services team are working with Network Rail's Light Rail Team to identify the proposed infrastructure enhancements required. The output of this is a Strategic Option Appraisal Report.</p>
3.8	<p>The Strategic Option Appraisal Report will inform the development by Network Rail's Sponsorship team of a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) including cost and economic analysis for the provision of a passenger service between March and Wisbech in Cambridgeshire.</p>
3.9	<p>Progress to date</p> <p>The first phase is the Strategic Option Appraisal Report by Network Rail's Engineering Services and Light Rail Knowledge team.</p>
3.10	<p>Four options are being considered based on a minimum credible infrastructure solution approach with the intention of developing enhanced infrastructure requirements that can be developed when a decision on further funding is agreed. By considering only core requirements, the minimum credible infrastructure solution for each solution can be set as a baseline, with non-core requirements noted. This approach sets a lower bound Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) balanced with Operational Expenditure (OPEX). Assuming further funding is agreed relevant identified 'non-core' elements can then be developed further.</p>
3.11	<p>Four core options are considered in this report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 1: Provision of a heavy (conventional) rail transport link • Option 2: Provision of a tram train (hybrid heavy/light rail) transport system (with sub-options relating to connectivity with existing local system) • Option 3: Provision of a tram (light rail) transport system • Option 4: Provision of a very light rail (VLR) transport system
3.12	<p>These are being considered cognisant of stakeholder aspirations that include uninterrupted connectivity to the wider mainline rail network and integration with local infrastructure. These stakeholder aspirations are set in the context of local environmental characteristics and the impacts of any solution. Other significant considerations are interfaces between rail and highway corridors, rolling stock and future maintenance and operation.</p>
3.13	<p>This Strategic Option Appraisal report will include several drawings to visually represent the current existing landscape and each mode of transport considered. Schedules of Quantities will also be provided to support cost planning.</p>
3.14	<p>The report framework has been created and existing information is being reviewed for applicability and potential referencing. Access to additional information has been provided by Fenland District Council representatives. The core reference drawing has been substantially completed and is attached to this update (see Appendix). The drawing is in draft. It is intended to provide a visual representation of the scheme area and the majority of the main points of interest along the potential rail corridor.</p>
3.15	<p>In early June, a combined site visit was undertaken. This has allowed Network Rail to see the corridor first-hand, the station interface at March and associated structures along the route. Points of interest have been highlighted and the site visit facilitated informed discussion on site. Representatives from the sponsorship, light rail team and engineering services attended. Points of note identified include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with March station and potential termination, connection and stabling facilities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norwood Road bridge: This rail overbridge (road over rail) is located just outside of the curve to the north of March station. It is a bi-directional single carriageway currently restricted to single lane working (traffic controlled). The approaches are at a steep incline and options will be constrained by its location and the approaches. The interface with the proposed rail modal types will need to be considered further. • Level crossings: Interfaces between a new/re-established rail corridor and the local road network (adopted and local farm access) are numerous. Engineering Services level crossing team working with the Light Rail and Knowledge team are considering these interfaces and their usage and need in any future scheme • Chain Bridge and Level Crossing: A substantial river crossing and adjacent level crossing. Busy local road • Wisbech Bypass Level Crossing: Busy highway interface • Weasenham Lane Level Crossing: Busy highway interface and adjacent to numerous heavy/haulage traffic. Both Wisbech Bypass and Weasenham Lane level crossings are near/adjacent to a potential employment zone identified by the local authority. • Wisbech: Traffic weight restrictions on highway network influences/dictates traffic flow to level crossings in the vicinity. • Integrity of support structures: In terms of collision protection, this will need to be considered including from derailed rolling stock and from errant road vehicles using the highway network. • Bridge and culverts: All identified overline and underline structures including culverts will require assessment as part of the reinstatement of the line, with the potential for extensive strengthening/reconstruction work. • Under bridges are assumed to have been designed for heavy rail rolling stock (both in service and rail mounted maintenance vehicles). This capacity will need to be assessed. It is anticipated that all underline structures will require remedial works (including strengthening) and increased/renewed maintenance to bring them into operational use.
3.16	Information has been obtained from a number of Network Rail sources and databases including GeoRINM, various structures databases and environmental mapping sources. This is in ongoing.
3.17	Only core information is given in the Strategic Option Appraisal report interlaced with elements of the scheme plans.
3.18	The outputs from this Strategic Option Appraisal Report is intended to inform the sponsorship team's overarching report.
3.19	The final Network Rail report will encompass a balanced modal appraisal of all rail options based on identified stakeholder aspirations, cost planning and economic considerations together with benefits and differences identified for each option.
3.20	The final report delivered by the Network Rail Sponsor will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outputs from Strategic Option Appraisal Report • Cost planning and economic analysis for each modal option
3.21	The final report is due to be shared with CPCA by 31 March, 2024.
3.22	Engagement has taken place between CPCA, Fenland District Council and Network Rail.
3.23	<p>Alternatives to rail</p> <p>CPCA are exploring comparator options, such as autonomous vehicles, that could provide an innovative and potentially low-cost alternative to rail-guided solutions between Wisbech and March. These could possibly offer a quicker, cheaper and a better service than other transport solutions. Moreover, there is significant potential for extending such options beyond the March to Wisbech corridor, to provide rural connectivity to other Fenland towns and cities, as well as a green solution for cities such as Ely, Peterborough and Cambridge, which would be a major step forward for rural and intra city connectivity.</p>

4. Appendices

4.1	Appendix A: March to Wisbech Modal Appraisal
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5. Implications

Financial Implications

5.1	Funding for this study has been from DfT TCF pot. There is a further £5m of funding the MTFP for further development work in future years
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Legal Implications

6.1	There are no legal implications at this stage.
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Public Health Implications

7.1	N/A.
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Environmental & Climate Change Implications

8.1	The construction of a sustainable transport link between Wisbech and March would decrease the carbon emissions of this movement. During the development of this project further consideration should and will be given to the quantity of embedded carbon used to construct the scheme, alongside the mitigation of any environmental disbenefits.
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Other Significant Implications

9.1	N/A.
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Background Papers

10.1	Wisbech – March Rail drawing (October 2023) Wisbech March drawing.pdf
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