



Transport & Infrastructure Committee		Agenda Item
15 November 2023		3
Title:	Public Questions	
Public Report:	Yes	

Question 1 – from Clive Freeman, Chair of Bramley Line Heritage Railway (BLHR) Trust

To	Transport and Infrastructure Committee
	<p>Question:</p> <p>The BLHR over the years has been in contact with various members of the CPCA and NR regarding the use of and the reopening of the Wisbech March rail link as a heritage line to promote tourism in the area. The BLHR thoughts on running a Heritage Railway would be to have a station in the Redmoor Lane Area with either an entrance to the station on to the West bound side of A47, this would allow for a clockwise circular bus route into Wisbech via B198 and back along A1101 onto the A47 via Elmhall roundabout and left into the station. The bus would not have to cross the A47 traffic to exit or enter the station.</p> <p>The alternative would be turn into Redmoor Lane from the A47, B198 and Redmoor Lane roundabout, this still allows for a clockwise circular bus route round Wisbech. Then run the train on the current single line track bed to March, with a yard at Waldersea and a station at Coldham. At the Twenty Foot River crossing put a stop on the Coldham side of the B1101 or repair the 2314 bridge crossing over the Twenty Foot River then continue to March crossing the B1101 Elm Road and enter March station via Whitemoor junction. BLHR believe there would be various options as to where the train could enter the station. All of this will be a subject of discussion with interested parties and availability of land to the BLHR, if CPCA & NR decide they are not going for a commuter route.</p> <p>In Coventry they have a Very Light Rail Project (About Coventry Very Light Rail – Coventry City Council) which suggested a build cost in 2019 of £7m per km, they said this is in comparison to between 35 and 60m for traditional tram systems. On their website it now suggests £10m per km for the VLRP so based on that the W/ M link would be well in excess of £100m for that system, because of the A47 issue, getting into Wisbech for a new station, access to March station and the 20ft river bridge repair. The other option BLHR has thought might be a solution to both aspects of rail transport is to run VLR and heavy rail side by side as the route was originally built with two lines.</p> <p>As stated by Railfuture East Anglia's Paul Hollinghurst in the September 2023 meeting there have been previous surveys and reports done over the years with no decision made on the line. With the Kings Speech not specifically saying HS2 money would be reallocated to other rail projects, after it was hinted at in the PM's office release on the 4th Oct 23, and the NR funding being set for the next period 2024 to 2029 as BLHR understands it. Therefore, no change at Ely North Junction for at least 5 years and therefore not having a start date on Wisbech/ March rail line till after this.</p> <p>BLHR would like to therefore ask the following question: - Will the CPCA and NR give permission for the BLHR to have a lease to run and develop a heritage railway between Wisbech and March to benefit tourism in the area and pass on the history and heritage legacy of the railway in the area because of how it affected so many people's lives?</p>

	<p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>We welcome and appreciate the public interest shown in the reopening of the Wisbech to March railway line. There is an update on this topic on today's TIC agenda which will hopefully provide clarity on where we are currently.</p> <p>The Combined Authority recognises that the reopening of the line could provide a positive impact on many areas of life for our communities and is committed to working with Network Rail and other stakeholders to assess its viability. As part of this work, 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 project output of a balanced modal appraisal of all rail options to facilitate a passenger service between March and Wisbech based on a shuttle service.</p> <p>Network Rail is currently undertaking a study into the feasibility of reopening the Wisbech to March line and in line with previous TIC representations, CPCA has engaged Network Rail to undertake an Options Assessment Report to consider all on-rail modal options, considering four possible options, these are: conventional rail; tram-train; light rail; and very light rail.</p> <p>The study will be finalised and returned to CPCA by Spring of 2024</p> <p>As well as the Network Rail study, CPCA have had initial exploratory conversations around alternatives to rail options, to include autonomous vehicles. Whatever, the proposed solution is it should offer value for money for local communities and to the tax payer.</p>
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Question 2 – from Peter Wakefield - Vice-Chair, Railfuture East Anglia

To	Transport and Infrastructure Committee
	<p><u>Question:</u></p> <p>At the Transport and Infrastructure Committee meeting on 15th March 2023 in response to a public question it was stated that "The Combined Authority is working with Network Rail around the appraisal of options for the link between Wisbech and March." and "A further report will be provided to the Committee in summer 2023". This was later delayed to "the September TIC meeting", then to the "November TIC meeting" and it is now reported that this will be available by "31st March 2024".</p> <p>There also appears to be no reported progress on the "Alternatives to rail" options which the CPCA are looking at.</p> <p>This further delay is very frustrating to those of us who have been campaigning for the railway reopening for the past ten years. What confidence do you have that the NR report will be available for the new date which is 9 months later than the original plan of summer 2023? Also, can the committee give some information about the "Alternatives to rail" options, which again seems to be running substantially late?</p>
	<p><u>Response:</u></p> <p>We welcome and appreciate the public interest shown in the reopening of the Wisbech to March railway line. There is an update on this topic on today's TIC agenda which will hopefully provide clarity on where we are currently.</p> <p>The Combined Authority recognises that the reopening of the line could provide a positive impact on many areas of life for our communities and is committed to working with Network Rail and other stakeholders to assess its viability. As part of this work, 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 project</p>

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Question 3 – from Paul Hollinghurst, resident of Cambridge working in Cambourne

<p>To</p>	<p>Transport and Infrastructure Committee</p>
<p>Question:</p> <p>The government's "Rural Mobility Fund Evaluation: Interim Report" has just been published and the information paints a bleak picture of DRT.</p> <p>Roger French OBE, former Managing Director of Brighton and Hove buses:, who travels widely and has sampled many DRT operations summarises with the damning "Whichever way you cut the data and try and dress it up as DRT "reaching parts of rural communities conventional buses just can't reach" these results confirm what we have been saying on here for the last four years, it's an absolute hopeless cause and a scandalous waste of public money."</p> <p>This seems to be a good assessment for Ting which is stated as costing £42 per passenger. Now the CPCA appears to be planning to spend BSIP+ funding on more such services with a total of £900k on Fenland, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire DRT trials.</p> <p>There is an alternative to DRT which seems to hold much more promise - semi-flexible services. These are where each service has at least one a fixed departure or arrival time but can vary its route beyond this in response to bookings. This has a big advantage of adding certainty that it will operate at specified times, and these times can be chosen by the operating authority to match things like getting people to work or education in a particular town, as opposed to DRT where someone's important journey work can be made impossible by someone else pre-booking a conflicting leisure journey. This type of service can be used, for example, to provide a predictable connection at a railway station, or service to a hospital at a predictable time each day, unlike DRT which is driven by random and therefore conflicting user bookings.</p> <p>Examples of semi-flexible services are Wiltshire Connect 101 serving the rural area around Devizes successfully for over 20 years, Book-a-Bus 99 serving the area around Chichester, and G2Gate serving Dedworth.</p> <p>Has the CPCA assessed how a semi-flexible service would compare to DRT? If not, then this should be done before a further £900k is wasted on DRT at a time when conventional timetabled bus routes are struggling through lack of funding even though they carry many times the number of passengers DRT will ever achieve.</p>	

Response

Several studies have detailed a number of potential benefits from the use of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT). It can offer a flexible and adaptive passenger transport service that can adjust to the changing needs and preferences of passengers.

Some of the potential benefits could include:

- Flexibility and Convenience
- Improved Accessibility
- Cost-Efficiency
- Reduced Congestion and Emissions
- Tailored Services for Specific Groups
- Technology Integration
- Adaptability to Changing Urban Dynamics
- Reduced Need for Personal Vehicle Ownership

Therefore, the Combined Authority maintains an openness to the prospective expansion and adoption of further DRT services in the future. The pilots for which, still require some shaping and development. It is therefore distinctly possible that a semi-flexible service may be integrated into the passenger transport network as a viable alternative to the suggested DRT pilot. As further work is undertaken to develop the pilot this concept will be considered.

Question 4 – from Richard Wood, Cambridge Area Bus Users

To Transport and Infrastructure Committee

Question:

WITH REFERENCE TO:

Agenda Item 7

2.15 Bus stop infrastructure programme

2.17 Bus Stop Audit

Both actions are overdue; much current bus stop infrastructure is seriously deficient.

Whilst operators run low-floor, accessible vehicles – the latest accommodating two reference wheelchairs of 1.2 m – they are inaccessible to passengers using mobility aids if bus stop infrastructure is deficient.

Two examples of Cambridge city stops accessed via a grass verge:

- Eland Way (Gazelle Way, Cherry Hinton) 0500STEVE013 is disconnected from the footway by 10 m of sloping grass verge.
- Whittle Avenue (Addenbrooke's Road, Trumpington) 0500CCITY552 consists of a bus stop flag, on a street-lighting column, on a grass verge, separated from the nearby residential development by decorative planting and a cycle lane.

Elsewhere defective bus stop islands have been constructed between a continuous cycleway and the carriageway. An island less than 2.5 m wide, cannot accommodate a reference wheelchair of 1.2 m and the bus's 1.2 m access ramp. Two examples:

- Blinco Grove (outbound) 0500CCITY036 – from the Hills Road (Purbeck Road to Addenbrooke's) remodelling – has an inadequate island of 1.90 m width, with RTPI at the downstream end of the island, facing downstream, inaccessible to a wheelchair user.
- Union Lane (inbound) 0500CCITY083 – from the Greater Cambridge Partnership's remodelling of Milton Road – has an inadequate island of 1.90 m width, and some other sub-optimal features.

In the light of the examples cited above, will the Transport & Infrastructure Committee commit to addressing the issues raised in Bus stop infrastructure – siting and design, Joint position paper from Cambridge Area Bus Users and Living Streets Cambridge (which was recently sent to key stakeholders) by

specifying bus stop design parameters, monitoring new installations, developing a guidance manual and, in the interim adopting TfL's Accessible Bus Stop Design Guidance as a default?

Response

We are grateful for this information from Cambridge Bus Users about non-standard bus stops. CPCA has inherited from Cambridgeshire County Council a bus stop network which has not been maintained or improved for a number of years. The items mentioned by Cambridge Bus Users are part of a wider but unquantified problem and therefore we have instituted an authority-wide audit of all bus stops, of which we estimate there are nearly 3000. That the examples raised in this question are recent installations simply quantifies the scale of work, the cost and decision-making that this project will entail. This audit includes accurate GPS-location, listing of facilities and photographs of each stop and location. It is only through carrying out this extensive major audit that we have been able to prepare a budget that will provide a lasting and systematic, rather than haphazard, upgrade to meet DDA and other equalities requirements. Budgets are being approved, staff recruited, and vehicles leased to address the issues and we are in contact with CCC over the access to the many small parcels of land involved. This is a large-scale programme which will take several years to carry through and the order in which upgrades will be carried out will rely on the data obtained from the audit.

We are committed to high standards; however, the adoption of Transport for London's (TfL) guidelines may not be wholly appropriate for the geography and demographics for the people and environment of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. We will be investigating best practice and liaising with peers from other local authorities (with similar challenges) to ensure we set and continue to meet excellent standards for the people of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.