



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
& PETERBOROUGH**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Agenda Item: 2.2

## Wisbech Rail

- To: Transport and Infrastructure Committee
- Meeting Date: 16 November 2022
- Public report: Yes
- Lead Member: Mayor Dr Nik Johnson
- From: Anna Graham, Transport Programme Manager
- Key decision: No
- Forward Plan ref: N/A
- Recommendations: The Transport and Infrastructure Committee is asked to decide the approach for Wisbech Rail, either:
- a) Continue to promote and lobby for heavy rail based on the information provided by the 2020 business case and GRIP 3b and recognise that potential delivery of Wisbech to Cambridge timeframe is linked to the delivery of Ely Area Capacity Enhancements (EACE) or,
  - b) Undertake an Options Assessment Report to provide the economic analysis on mode options, including existing information on heavy rail, based on a service operating between Wisbech and March which removes the current dependency on EACE whilst still being mindful of the future strategy to link into Cambridge.
  - c) If option b) is selected recommend to the Combined Authority Board to approve the drawdown of £80,000 from the Medium-Term Financial Plan for the development of an Options Assessment Report and to seek delegated authority to the Interim Head of Transport to enter into a Development Services agreement with Network Rail following consultation with the Monitoring Officer and Chief Financial Officer.

Voting arrangements: For items a) and b) A simple majority of all Members present and voting

For item c) A vote in favour by at least two thirds of all Members (or their Substitute Members) appointed by the Constituent Councils, to include the Members appointed by Cambridgeshire County Council or Peterborough City Council, or their Substitute Members

To be carried, the vote must include the vote of the Mayor, or the Deputy Mayor when acting in place of the Mayor.

# 1 Purpose

- 1.1 The paper seeks Members views on the next steps for Wisbech Rail and subject to approval of option b) seek Combined Authority approval for the drawdown of funding to enable an options assessment report to be carried out.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 A Business Case and Governance in Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) 3b was completed in the summer of 2020 and identified that a heavy rail, with a two trains per hour service direct to Cambridge from Wisbech, and a centrally located station, would be a viable option.
- 2.2 Following engagement with Department for Transport (DfT), Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Network Rail, the March 2021 Combined Authority Board agreed that Network Rail would undertake a review of the existing work and assess options for the Wisbech to March line. It was intended the outcome of this work would coincide with the results of the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements (EACE) Outline Business Case.
- 2.3 Network Rail undertook:
  - Business Case review;
  - PACE (Project Acceleration in a Controlled Environment) review of documentation;
  - Engineering review; and
  - High Level Light Rail.

## 3. Network Rail Review

- 3.1 Network Rail's review concluded that there was a strong strategic focus within the 2020 business case, which supported the need for public transport links from Wisbech and the potential benefits of connecting to Cambridge.
- 3.2 Significantly, however, Network Rail recommended removing assumptions about EACE. The Wisbech to Cambridge 2020 business case assumed that EACE would provide the necessary infrastructure upgrades to enable increased services to Cambridge and as a result these costs were not included within the Wisbech to Cambridge Business Case. In Network Rail's view this assumption should not have been included and therefore all costs required for Wisbech to Cambridge should be part of the business case as a standalone project.
- 3.3 It was also assumed that one train path may be available at Ely North Junction and a further train path could be sought through EACE. Network Rail's work has shown that there is currently no capacity at Ely and securing future train paths is highly competitive and there is no guarantee the Wisbech to Cambridge would be successful.
- 3.4 Whilst the EACE Outline Business case demonstrates decarbonisation and connectivity benefits, it does, however, require a significant funding, with a total cost of over £450 million. Government have not yet announced the next steps for EACE.
- 3.5 Network Rail's review of the 2020 Wisbech Rail Business Case also noted that:
  - The passenger demand figures are different – higher - to those that have been prepared for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Business Case;
  - The assessment of cost for each mode option needed greater detail; and,
  - Further detail around timetabling at Cambridge would be needed.

- 3.6 In addition to the review of the existing work, Network Rail also produced a high-level feasibility study for light rail, this was produced following engagement with DfT and ORR whose view was that further options needed to be considered. The report concluded that there is potential for a light rail passenger operation between March and Wisbech highlighting Tram-Train or Very Light Rail could be used. However, economic assessment of each light rail mode and a potential autonomous pod initiative were not provided within the report and would require further development to understand Benefit Cost Ratios.
- 3.7 The Network Rail review concluded that lower cost light rail may offer a more credible transport solution and recommended further work be undertaken to examine light rail options.
- 3.8 An initial proposal for Wisbech Rail next steps outlined an approach which included the development of a business case for a service between Wisbech and March and sought to develop light rail to an outline business case standard. Engagement with Fenland District Council and Members it was agreed that transport connectivity for Wisbech was a priority, however, heavy rail continued to be supported.
- 3.9 Following this initial engagement two options are presented for consideration, the first is to continue to press for heavy rail recognising that potential delivery of Wisbech to Cambridge timeframe is linked to the delivery of EACE. Secondly, an Option Assessment Report is developed rather than a complete business case to provide the economic analysis on mode options, including existing information on heavy rail, based on a service operating between Wisbech and March which removes the current dependency on EACE whilst still being mindful of the future strategy to link into Cambridge.

### 3 Financial Implications

- 4.1 Network Rail has estimated £300,000 for the next phase of work to produce an options assessment Report. Wisbech Rail currently has £230,000 approved budget available. Subject to the approval of the Options Assessment Report option £80,000 to be drawn down from the Medium-Term Financial Plan, totalling £310,000. £300,000 needed for the Network Rail Options Assessment Report and £10,000 for any additional engagement with strategic stakeholders.
- 4.2 The MTFP has £5.7 million subject to approval for Wisbech Rail in 2022/23.

### 4 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Subject to the approval of recommendation b) the Combined Authority will enter into a Basic Services agreement with Network Rail to undertake the Option Assessment Report.

### 5 Public Health Implications

- 6.1 The objectives of increasing connectivity to Wisbech are to improve access to employment and educational opportunities, and to support economic growth in a sustainable manner which enables improved health.
- 6.2 In addition, the existing preliminary designs include a cycleway to encourage active travel supporting both health and improved wellbeing.

### 6 Environmental and Climate Change Implications

7.1 Wisbech Rail seeks to provide an alternative to car use – supporting economic growth in a sustainable way.

## 7 Other Significant Implications

8.1 None.

## 8 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1 – Wisbech Rail Project Review

9.2 Appendix 2 – Options Assessment Report Scope

9.3 Appendix 3 – Wisbech to March Light Rail Potential Final Report

## 9 Background Papers

10.1 None.