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March to Wisbech Transport Corridor

Interim Report

6 February 2020

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Purpose of this Interim Report	1
1.2	Study Area	1
1.3	The need for intervention	2
1.4	Client strategic objectives	2
2	Work to date on preparing the Scheme Full Business Case and GRIP 3 design	4
2.1	March to Wisbech Transport Corridor Full Business Case programme	4
2.1.1	Network Rail engagement	4
2.2	Key deliverables to date	4
2.3	Related projects	5
3	Key findings: Options Assessment Report	6
3.1	Context	6
3.2	Identifying potential options	6
3.3	Selecting the preferred option	7
3.4	Progressing the March to Wisbech transport corridor full business case	8
4	Key findings: GRIP 2 Heavy Rail Feasibility Report	9
4.1	Scope	9
4.2	Conclusions	9
5	Key findings: Railway Operations Report	11
5.1	Context	11
5.2	Conclusions	11
6	Key findings: Delivery Strategy	13
6.1	Introduction	13
6.2	Funding and financing	13
6.3	Structuring and delivering the scheme	14
6.4	Programme and next steps	15
7	Summary of conclusions and next steps	16
7.1	Initial conclusions	16
7.2	Next steps	16

1 Introduction

This Interim Report presents a summary of the key findings to date with respect to the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme. This section provides an overview of the scheme, including the background and scheme objectives, and a policy context in which the proposals for the delivery of this scheme have been made.

1.1 Purpose of this Interim Report

Mott MacDonald was engaged by Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), acting for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) (the client), in January 2019 to prepare a GRIP 3¹ design and Full Business Case (FBC) for the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor. The transport corridor is a largely extant, but closed, seven-mile-long rail corridor between these two settlements in Fenland District, Cambridgeshire. This builds on earlier work by Mott MacDonald to prepare an Outline Business Case for the scheme in 2015 for CCC.

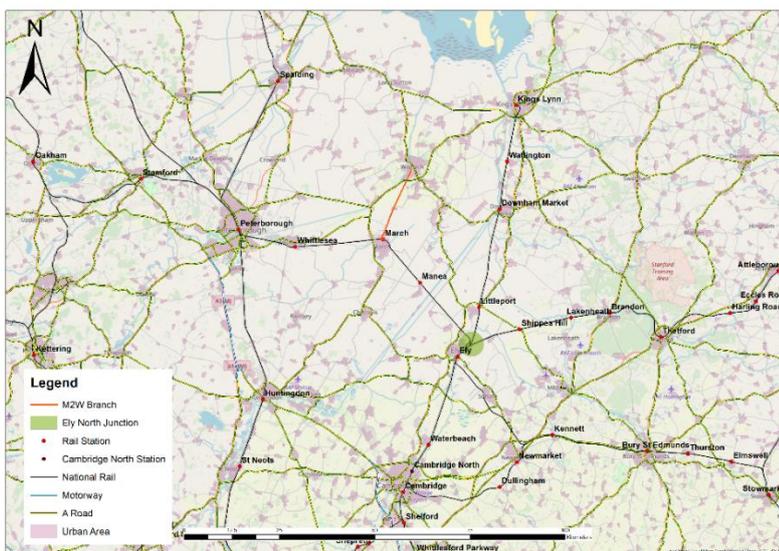
The purpose of this Interim Report is to summarise work done to date and key next steps in the project programme. This is intended to be used to inform members of the Transport and Infrastructure Committee at the meeting in March 2020.

Work to date includes the Options Assessment Report, Delivery Strategy, Railway Operations Report, and related GRIP 2 technical studies. All findings are in draft form until the final GRIP 3 design and full business case have been submitted and signed off by the client team.

1.2 Study Area

The study area for the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor is shown in **Figure 1.1**.

Figure 1.1: March to Wisbech Transport Corridor Study Area



Source: Mott MacDonald

¹ GRIP = Governance for Railway Investment Projects, a management and control process developed by Network Rail for delivering projects on the National Rail network. GRIP 2 is the project feasibility stage, GRIP 3 is the option selection stage.

1.3 The need for intervention

The CPCA's overarching objective for this project is to achieve sustainable growth by addressing inadequate transport connectivity between Cambridge and north Cambridgeshire. While Cambridge is one of the fastest growing and most highly skilled economies in the UK, Wisbech, and the wider north Cambridgeshire area, is a relatively low skilled and low wage economy, and it experiences high levels of socioeconomic deprivation.

The relative isolation of Wisbech and its surrounding settlements is a factor in both the lower earnings and productivity and the adverse socio-economic outcomes of this area. Improving connectivity to Cambridge offers the opportunity to transform Wisbech as a place for inward investment and provide much enhanced accessibility to key services and employment opportunities for its residents. Conversely, Cambridge is under significant labour supply pressure which may close off potential employment growth, given constraints on local housing development.

Connecting Wisbech into the Cambridge economy could provide a crucial solution to this. The evidence is that such a solution will require a rapid, direct service which will be attractive to commuters and businesses. Based on the indicative journey time assessments, only rail-based options offering direct services between Wisbech and Cambridge are consistent with the project objectives. This is explored further in the remainder of this report.

1.4 Client strategic objectives

The scheme's 2015 Outline Business Case (OBC) defined a set of scheme objectives. As part of this engagement to develop the FBC for the scheme, these objectives have been refreshed in light of changes in the regional governance context and associated strategy and planning documentation. The objectives are structured around the main impacts that the Department for Transport (DfT) define for transport interventions:

- Economic;
- Environmental;
- Societal; and
- Financial.

These objectives, which have been used in appraising the various options that have been developed for the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor, are summarised in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1: March to Wisbech Transport Corridor Distilled Scheme Objectives

ID	Impact	Detail
A	Economy	Improve access to key employment and education sites (Alconbury, Peterborough Centre, Ely, Cambridge Science Park, Cambridge Biomedical Campus & Cambridge Centre)
	Economy	Improve connectivity to major centres for inward investment to Wisbech (Cambridge, Peterborough, London and Stansted Airport)
	Economy	Support delivery of housing – Fenland Local Plan and Wisbech Garden Town which allows key employment locations to continue to grow
B	Environmental	Help to support economic growth in a sustainable manner by providing an attractive alternative to car travel, reducing associated externalities
C	Social	Improve local access to key services, e.g. medical facilities, colleges and universities (located in major centres, e.g. Cambridge, Huntingdon, King's Lynn and Peterborough)
	Social	Support the regeneration of the town centre and existing urban area
D	Financial	To minimise long term commitments for public revenue support

Source: Mott MacDonald

2 Work to date on preparing the Scheme Full Business Case and GRIP 3 design

2.1 March to Wisbech Transport Corridor Full Business Case programme

The March to Wisbech Transport Corridor Full Business Case (FBC) has been developed over 2019 and is anticipated to be finalised by mid-2020. Specific milestones in this engagement are as follows:

Table 2.1: March to Wisbech Transport Corridor: Core Options

Milestone	Programme
Inception and detailed project planning	Jan 2019
Business Case Development, Option Generation and Sifting	Feb 2019 – Nov 2019
Development Planning & Station Location	Mar 2019 – May 2019
Scheme Design & Engineering	Mar 2019 – Jun 2020
Operational Analysis	Jun 19 – Jan 2020
Rail Scheme Delivery & Funding	Sep 2019 – May 2020
Full Business Case	May 2020 – Jul 2020

Source: Mott MacDonald

It is anticipated that the full business case will be submitted to the CPCA Board for approval in July 2020.

2.1.1 Network Rail engagement

Difficulties in engaging with Network Rail delayed progress on the study throughout 2019. In order to develop GRIP 3 design, Mott MacDonald require information on the existing railway infrastructure between March and Wisbech, and in the March Station area. During much of 2019, CPCA, CCC and Mott MacDonald was not able to progress engagement with Network Rail significantly, despite repeated attempts to do so. This has hindered delivery of the project relative to its originally anticipated completion date of April 2020.

In late 2019, following further discussions with Network Rail regarding access to their infrastructure, it has been confirmed that visual surveys and bridge inspections can take place in February and March 2020. The programme set out in **Table 2.1** is based on this revised Network Rail survey and engagement timetable, and represents a three month delay to the original project timetable. The CPCA judges it is preferable to proceed on this revised programme as the surveys and related information provided by Network Rail will provide additional data on which to base GRIP 3 design for the scheme. This should allow design assumptions to be validated, reducing the level of uncertainty and increasing the accuracy of cost estimates.

2.2 Key deliverables to date

The scope and key conclusions of key study deliverables to date are provided in subsequent sections of this report as follows:

- Section 3 presents the key findings from the Options Assessment Report

- Section 4 sets out a summary of the draft GRIP 2 report
- Section 5 reviews the key findings from the draft Railway Operations Report
- Section 6 presents the draft summary of the Delivery Strategy.

Findings from these studies are inputting to development of the preferred scheme option in the FBC and associated GRIP 3 design and engineering studies.

2.3 Related projects

The key study deliverables to date identify a number of related infrastructure projects on which the March to Wisbech scheme is potentially dependent if it is to fulfil its identified client objectives, particularly the Ely North Junction investment programme (Ely Area Capacity Enhancement). Assessment of the feasibility or deliverability of these related projects is beyond the scope of this study. Key assumptions regarding related projects include:

- The Options Assessment Report and Delivery Strategy assume that all related projects will be delivered in time for the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme to be fully operational by 2027/28 financial year;
- The GRIP 2 Heavy Rail feasibility report assumes that Ely Area Capacity Enhancement facilitates two paths per hour for Wisbech to Cambridge heavy rail services.

3 Key findings: Options Assessment Report

The CPCA's overarching objective for this project is to achieve sustainable growth by addressing inadequate transport connectivity between Cambridge and north Cambridgeshire. This Options Assessment Report (OAR) forms part of the business case development process for the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor and sets out the process by which a preferred option has been identified for further development during the project's Full Business Case phase.

3.1 Context

The CPCA seeks to double the size of the economy of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough over 25 years while ensuring all communities share in this increased prosperity. By better integrating north Cambridgeshire into the Cambridge labour market, the public transport options assessed in this study will help to support sustainable and inclusive growth while also alleviating stress on Cambridge's overheated housing market.

The economies and the population of Cambridge and north Cambridgeshire are distinctive and have limited interaction. Challenges in travelling between the two areas appears to be a significant factor behind this, with north/south corridors in the area being generally of limited capacity, low quality, and often indirect routing. Wisbech, in particular, suffers from poor connectivity, as one of the largest towns in the country without a dedicated rail link. As a result, travel by private vehicle from Wisbech to Cambridge takes over an hour (despite a distance of under 35 miles) and public transport between the two areas is not possible without interchange.

These transport challenges are a significant factor in preventing residents of Wisbech and north Cambridgeshire commuting to the employment opportunities in and around Cambridge and may also hinder inward investment into north Cambridgeshire.

Improved access to Wisbech also supports the combined authority and Fenland District Council's ambitions to substantially grow the town via a major dedicated urban extension, known as Wisbech Garden Town. This planned development comprises 12,000 new homes in the town, with further growth proposed to double its size over a 40-year period.

The CPCA's plans to provide a dedicated public-transport link between Wisbech and Cambridge are one aspect of its wider strategy for the region. In addition to the north-south public transport link between Wisbech and Cambridge assessed in this report, the CPCA also has plans to improve east-west connectivity to Wisbech via dualling the A47 corridor, along with a package of local measures to address congestion within Wisbech.

3.2 Identifying potential options

In line with the DfT Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG), guidance, the OAR has considered a wide variety of options to identify which ones best address the underlying challenges in the study area and the CPCA's objectives for the project. Options were structured around three main variables:

- **Mode** – conventional National Rail options; a “hybrid” tram-train mode, able to run on both the dedicated extant rail corridor between Wisbech and March and on-street within Wisbech;

and, in line with TAG guidance, a lower cost alternative of a guided busway, akin to the existing busways in Cambridgeshire and using conventional bus services.

- **Service Pattern** – between one and three services per hour from Wisbech, with destinations considered that include a “shuttle” service to March only, and “through” services to Cambridge and Peterborough.
- **Station location** – a variety of locations for a new station or stations in Wisbech, including a parkway option, options of various degrees of proximity to the existing town centre, and options within the planned garden town urban extension.

3.3 Selecting the preferred option

Following identification of this “long list” of potential options, Mott MacDonald undertook an initial sifting process based on a qualitative multicriteria assessment of their fit to the project’s objectives. A short-list of three core options, with a number of sensitivities around these core options, was taken forward for more detailed assessment. A description of these options and a summary of findings from this appraisal are set out in the table below.

Table 3.1: March to Wisbech Transport Corridor: Core Options

ID	Mode	Service	Station Location	Capital Cost Estimate (£Q2 2019)	Benefit Cost Ratio
DS1	Tram-Train	Wisbech-Ely-Cambridge 2tph	Wisbech Town	152.5	2.5 – 3.0
DS2	National Rail	Wisbech-Ely-Cambridge 2tph	Wisbech Town	200.4	2.0 – 2.5
DS3 (LC)	Guided busway	Wisbech-March 3bph	Wisbech Town	75.1	0.5 – 1.0

Source: Mott MacDonald analysis

Mott MacDonald prepared a capital cost estimate for each of these options and also undertook an appraisal of their core (‘established’) monetised impacts based on passenger demand modelling. To be conservative, and consistent with TAG, demand modelling of the shortlisted options excluded growth associated with Wisbech Garden Town.

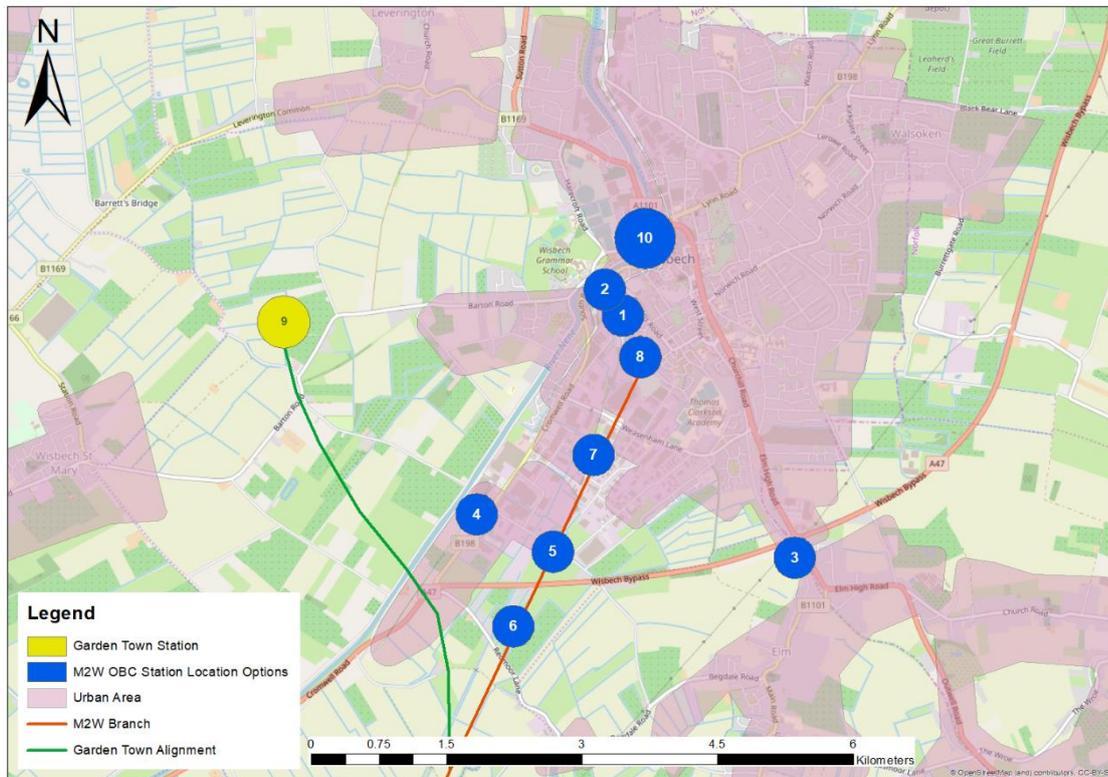
The key finding from this analysis was the importance of offering direct passenger transport services between Wisbech and Cambridge. A direct service could offer journeys of around 45 minutes between Wisbech and Cambridge. In contrast, the guided busway “shuttle” (DS3) between Wisbech and March represents poor value for money, despite its relatively low cost because the interchange penalty at March station would leave Wisbech beyond viable commuting times to Cambridge. This means that only rail-based services (DS1 - tram-train and DS2 - National Rail) are viable for delivering the desired outcomes for the March to Wisbech corridor.

This key finding also means that scheme is closely interdependent with the outcome of the proposed Ely North Junction works and the ability to operate the desired frequency between Wisbech and Cambridge. If sufficient train paths are unavailable, a rail-based shuttle service would also be poor value for money. Positively, however, the OAR shows that in a scenario where direct Wisbech to Cambridge services do not become possible for a decade after the March to Wisbech scheme opening, the project retains a positive benefit cost ratio of 1.5-2.0.

Related to this, the analysis showed that the location of the new station in Wisbech should be as close to the established town centre as possible to maximise the service’s potential catchment area. The range of station locations considered in Wisbech is shown in **Figure 3.1**,

with location 10 (“Wisbech Town”) being the indicative preferred location for more detailed design assessment.

Figure 3.1: Station Options Considered for in Wisbech



Source: Mott MacDonald analysis

One other finding of the OAR was that a tram-train-based option could potentially be more cost effective than a similar National Rail option as it may be able to be built to a lower design standard, however, the National Rail option has a much more certain and lower risk delivery path as the “tram train” concept is relatively novel in the UK. Based on this analysis, Mott MacDonald recommend in the OAR that National Rail option ‘DS2’ should be the focus of further scheme development.

3.4 Progressing the March to Wisbech transport corridor full business case

The OAR forms the first part of developing the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor Full Business Case. Mott MacDonald is preparing designs and cost estimates of the preferred option to a broadly GRIP 3 level of detail, supported by wider technical work including refined passenger demand analysis (incorporating a sensitivity that includes Wisbech Garden Town levels of population growth in the study area).

4 Key findings: GRIP 2 Heavy Rail Feasibility Report

The primary objectives of the GRIP 2 Heavy Rail Feasibility Report are to investigate the feasibility and cost of re-opening the railway line between March Station and Wisbech to heavy rail (National Rail) services. The report focuses on the design and technical feasibility of the scheme development, broadly following a framework prescribed by Network Rail.

4.1 Scope

This report was originally developed by Mott McDonald in 2015 as part of a wider CCC commissioned study and has been updated as part of the 2019/20 FBC commission.

Updates to the GRIP 2 report include:

- A review of assumptions, risks and cost exclusions to address developments since 2015, most notably:
 - A review of level crossing provision and associated closure schemes following a 2016 Network Rail level crossing closure study².
 - Incorporation of costs for re-signalling the March East Control Area.
- A review of the costings associated with this study to reflect the above and also to bring the costing in line with the Rail Method of Measurement (RMM1) process.
- Light Rapid Transit feasibility is considered separately under a stand-alone report. Previous references to a light rail shuttle service have therefore been removed from this report.

A breakdown of the cost estimate for the preferred option (DS2) is shown in the table below. Note that these figures differ from those in the OAR as these exclude risk allowances and optimism bias.

Table 4.1: Service option estimates (excluding risk, optimism bias and opportunity)

Option Ref.	Service Pattern	Wisbech Station	March Station	Existing rail corridor	Extension to Wisbech Centre	Total
DS2	2tph Wisbech to Cambridge	£5,240,870	£18,154,615	£117,440,013	£26,140,499	£166,975,997

Source: Mott MacDonald

From the perspective of design and technical feasibility, the GRIP 2 Heavy Rail Feasibility Report considers potential service patterns and station locations, supporting the development of the options assessment process set out in the OAR. The report describes the existing conditions, the infrastructure works required to implement the various service options and outlines the likely costs of each of the shortlisted options.

4.2 Conclusions

The GRIP 2 design development work confirmed that there are a number of viable engineering and timetable options for the re-instatement of a passenger service to Wisbech. However, as noted above, Network Rail have previously stated that the timetable alterations for a service

² March to Wisbech Line Reopening – GRIP 2 Level Crossing Closure Feasibility Report (NR, April 2016)

from Wisbech to Cambridge are not deemed possible at this time as this is not seen as best use of current infrastructure on what is an already-constrained network. The capacity upgrade proposals for the Ely to Ely North Junction area are therefore a key dependency for any proposed Wisbech to Cambridge rail service.

The study also concluded that the 22 existing level crossings between March to Wisbech will need to be closed, consistent with Network Rail's findings. Development of design for the level crossing schemes will be undertaken during the GRIP 3 stage of the project.

Key items identified for further development at the GRIP 3 stage of the project were:

- Coordination of development proposals with the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement scheme;
- Determination of whether any other project is likely to contribute to signalling upgrade costs at March East, reducing or removing the £16m to £20m cost of doing so from the project cost estimate;
- Investigation of opportunities generated by the overlap with proposals for dualling the A47, currently under development by the CPCA;
- The infrastructure layout at March station; and
- The risk to the scheme associated with changes to level crossing risk profiles between March and Cambridge/Peterborough Stations as a result of increased service frequency resulting from the March to Wisbech scheme.

5 Key findings: Railway Operations Report

The Railway Operations Report describes the railway operational analysis that has been undertaken to examine possible timetable patterns, service constraints and capacity for introducing a two train per hour (2tph) heavy rail (National Rail) service between Wisbech and March, and ideally running through to Cambridge. This analysis was taken into consideration in developing the preferred scheme option in the OAR, and is inputting into the GRIP 3 design and feasibility work and detailed scheme costings being developed in the FBC.

5.1 Context

The principal operational factors analysed under this commission are:

- The current passenger and freight services at March and any pathing opportunities for additional services from Wisbech to operate through to Cambridge;
- The challenge of Ely North Junction prior to the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement programme (EACE) proposals;
- The development of an optimal infrastructure between March and Wisbech to enable robust and reliable operation of services from Cambridge to Wisbech, including consideration of:
 - Track layout and platform configurations at March Station;
 - What track and signalling alterations will be required at Whitemoor Junction. At present the yard layout ignores the existence of the Wisbech Line;
 - The development of an optimal passing loop design and location between March and Wisbech;
 - Wisbech Station track layout and platform configurations.

In assessing the potential operation of a train service from Wisbech to Cambridge, the following factors also need to be considered:

- Network Rail may require evidence that the addition of two trains per hour (2tph) between Wisbech and Cambridge to the existing and future timetable(s) will not have an adverse effect on performance and reliability.
- Post EACE, the aspiration is to significantly increase in the number of services stopping at and passing through March (e.g. additional Ipswich - Peterborough and freight services). It is necessary to consider the infrastructure demands at March imposed by other future services in conjunction with Wisbech to Cambridge services.
- There are 39 level crossings of various types between March and Cambridge. Each one of these will require risk assessments associated with the introduction of additional rail services. Any additional services running through the existing level crossings between March and Cambridge would increase level crossing risk and could trigger a requirement to upgrade these level crossings (e.g. replace with bridges).

5.2 Conclusions

The current restricted track layout and resultant pathing constraints at Ely North Junction mean that only one Wisbech – March – Cambridge service is currently possible per hour. This would require certain other services in the area are retimed. However, if the EACE project is implemented to provide adequate additional paths through Ely North Junction, in the future it

should be possible to operate 2tph between Wisbech and Cambridge as part of the available additional paths through Ely post EACE.

To deliver an interim solution, based on initial 2tph service between Wisbech and March, with one service operating through to Cambridge and one reversing at March, the following infrastructure is required:

1. At March Station a reinstated Platform 3 is needed. A new operational platform at the West End of the old platform 3 should be re-instated, with an available capacity for a 2-Car Class 170 train and passive provision for a four car train over the longer term once demand suffices.
2. A revised track layout at March is required to serve a reinstated platform 3. The preferred option from an operational perspective is to re-open a bi-directional platform 3 with the track diverging from the Up Main at the approximate location of the existing March East Level Crossing. The final selection of a preferred track layout will be via a multi-criteria analysis as part of the GRIP 3 design process.
3. To accommodate a resilient 2tph operation on the single line between Whitemoor Jn and Wisbech, a passing loop will be required at Coldham.
4. A single platform is required at the new Wisbech Station. The new platform should be designed to accommodate a 2-car Class 170 train, with passive provision for future extension to accommodate a 4-car train.

Post EACE, the aspiration is to significantly increase the number of services stopping at and passing through March. This will significantly increase the utilisation of the existing infrastructure at March. Analysis has shown that accommodating these services is theoretically possible but will produce some performance/resilience challenges in the March area. A detailed risk assessment of the operational reliability at March considering the post-EACE train plan is not possible at this time but will be required at later stages of the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor project's development.

The 39 existing level crossings between March and Cambridge require risk assessment and could require upgrades to accommodate a post EACE train plan. Increased levels crossing risk is still an issue (although to a lesser extent) for any pre-EACE service pattern that runs 1tph March-Cambridge and 1 March-Wisbech shuttle. These costs would not necessarily be borne by the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme, but DfT and Network Rail will need to consider how to manage this issue before approvals can be given for the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme.

6 Key findings: Delivery Strategy

The purpose of the Delivery Strategy is to identify and assess potential approaches to deliver the preferred March to Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme option (DS2) that was identified in the OAR.

6.1 Introduction

The draft Delivery Strategy sets out potential options for funding the scheme, the contractual and commercial arrangements that will need to be put in place, and the roles and responsibilities of the organisations that will deliver the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme. Outputs from the Delivery Strategy are expected to be excerpted into the Financial Case and the Commercial Case of the scheme FBC.

Mott MacDonald was briefed by CPCA and CCC to consider so-called “third-party” (i.e. non-Network Rail) options for funding, delivering and operating the scheme. This reflects the combined authority’s desire to progress the scheme rapidly and cost effectively, and also takes account of moves over recent years by the UK Government to encourage greater investment and contestability in the National Rail network.

6.2 Funding and financing³

Mott MacDonald has developed a cash flow financial model to assess the affordability of the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme. Two scenarios have been modelled:

1. *Core Scenario*: only committed development is included in the modelling of the scale of potential funding options. This is consistent with the assessment undertaken of the preferred option DS2 in the OAR and reflects the fact that other development proposals (such as Wisbech Garden Town) are not at a sufficient level of commitment.
2. *Wisbech Garden Town Scenario*: development associated with the proposed major Wisbech Garden Town (WGT) urban extension was included in the modelling of the scale of potential funding options.

The following potential funding streams were identified and modelled: passenger farebox (surplus from operating services); commercial income, station rental income and parking; business rates retention; and developer contributions.

Analysis of the identified funding streams showed that these sources could make a substantial contribution to funding the proposed scheme. However, on balance, it does not appear to be possible for the March to Wisbech Transport Corridor to be progressed solely as a third-party funded scheme. No credible proposition has been identified for a private investor in the scheme. In addition, the likely residual funding requirement for the CPCA is likely to be too high to be met by the combined authority from its existing funds.

The funding structure for the scheme is likely to include a combination of grant funding from one or more national government bodies and co-funding grants from local bodies, potentially with the latter contingent on future development and passenger revenues resulting from the project. This is similar to the funding structure used on other schemes being progressed by sub-national

³ For the purposes of this study, **funding** is defined as the source(s) of income or revenue needed to meet both capital and lifecycle costs of delivering the infrastructure elements of the scheme. **Financing** is how the upfront (primarily capital) costs of a project are met as they are incurred.

authorities around the UK, such as the Metrowest scheme under development by the West of England Combined Authority and North Somerset council.

For this transport corridor, a key next step will be starting to progress it through the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline process. This is the process that rail projects need to follow to get access to DfT grant funding. Initial meetings with DfT officials have been arranged by CPCA officers to begin this dialogue, given the positive findings of the OAR and related studies.

A critical decision for Cambridgeshire authorities will be how far they wish to make a contribution to the scheme on the expectation that future rail-user and local taxation (from development in WGT) revenues will occur. These revenues only arise meaningfully in the WGT Scenario and are as yet uncertain. They may require borrowing to be undertaken by one or more local authority and agreement would also be needed with HM Treasury to ensure Cambridgeshire authorities were fully able to access the identified funding sources.

6.3 Structuring and delivering the scheme

Options for delivering passenger services on the new rail line and on existing infrastructure between March and Cambridge have been considered.

Current status

The existing assets within the scope of the scheme have a variety of owners:

- March Station is in freehold possession of NR. The current holder of the Station Lease is Greater Anglia train operating company.
- The operational rail line between Whitemoor Junction and March Station is in freehold possession of NR.
- The disused rail line between Whitemoor Junction and Weasenham Lane in Wisbech is in freehold possession of NR.
- Lands to the north of Weasenham Lane in Wisbech identified for the scheme, including the site of the proposed station, are in a variety of private sector ownerships.

Infrastructure delivery structures

The most viable delivery structure appears to be a one that is more at arms-length from Network Rail than under traditional rail project delivery. This will help allow the scheme to get the focus required by CPCA for rapid, efficient delivery. This approach is consistent with work undertaken by CPCA and CCC to date in developing the scheme (such as through this study), as well as comparator schemes to open rail lines being led by other sub-national authorities.

Under this approach, CPCA will continue to lead the development of the scheme through the GRIP process, and help to identify and coordinate the funding package required for the scheme. How far CPCA leads detailed development, procurement and contract management of the infrastructure, using a third-party supply chain for delivery, as opposed to Network Rail using its established processes, is a decision that can be taken once the funding solution for the scheme has been confirmed.

Under either approach, it is likely that Network Rail would be best placed to operate the infrastructure once built in order to minimise interface risk.

Passenger service delivery

As well as building the required rail and related infrastructure, a decision will also be needed on how best to operate the new passenger services enabled by the line.

As a result of lower barriers to entry, operation as part of a rail franchise (or successor approach, following the ongoing Williams Rail Review) is recommended as the preferred option for passenger service delivery for the March Wisbech Transport Corridor scheme. The alternative approach (an “open access” service) would likely be time consuming and expensive to set up, and the market appetite for this is unclear in this area.

6.4 Programme and next steps

As with any infrastructure project, detailed consideration is needed of the approach that will be taken to:

- Obtaining the required statutory and regulatory consents;
- How the scheme will be packaged and procured;
- Securing acceptance and commissioning of the project once built; and
- Post-construction, how the scheme will be operated and maintained.

The Delivery Strategy considers these issues in context of the recommended delivery structure for the project.

An indicative programme for delivering the scheme has been developed by Mott MacDonald, set out in **Table 6.1**. This implies the earliest time for completing the scheme, assuming funding can be secured, would be around 4.5 years from completion of the current study. In practice, given interfaces with other transport projects and uncertainty around funding options, sponsor approvals and the timetable for receipt of the required statutory consents, the project is likely to take longer to deliver than this.

Table 6.1: Indicate Programme for March to Wisbech Transport Corridor Scheme

Stage	Design and construction - Indicative duration	Statutory Process – Indicative duration
GRIP 3 - Option Selection & Full Business Case	12-15 months	
GRIP 4 – Single Option Development	6 months + 4 weeks NR approval	Prepare order documents and submit at end of Grip 4
GRIP 5 study – Detailed Design	9 months + 4 weeks NR approval	6-9 months Objection management and prep for Public Inquiry
Land Acquisition	-	9-12 months Public Inquiry and decision
GRIP 6 – Construction, Test and Commissioning	15 months construction 3 months route learning, rolling stock introduction, test & commission	

Source: Mott MacDonald

7 Summary of conclusions and next steps

7.1 Initial conclusions

The OAR identified a number of options for the scheme. Consistent with DfT's TAG framework, these options were assessed against their ability to support the achievement of the scheme's objectives, an appraisal of the scheme's economic impacts and a high-level assessment of the deliverability of each option.

The OAR concluded that the preferred option (DS2) should be a National Rail-based option, with a new station in Wisbech in a central location which offers regular, direct services (2 trains per hour) between Wisbech and Cambridge. This option offers high value for money under DfT's TAG framework, with a benefit cost ratio of 2.5 – 3.0.

Following the GRIP 2 design development work, there appear to be viable engineering and timetable options for the re-instatement of a passenger service to Wisbech, consistent with the OAR's findings, however the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements are a key dependency for any proposed Wisbech to Cambridge rail service.

The current restricted track layout and resultant pathing constraints at Ely North Junction mean that only one Wisbech – March – Cambridge service is possible per hour, if certain other services in the area are retimed. However, if the EACE project is implemented to provide adequate additional paths through Ely North Junction, in the future it should be possible to operate 2 trains per hour between Wisbech and Cambridge.

The most efficient way to progress the scheme appears to be for CPCA to continue to progress it through its development phase, acting as the project's sponsor and delivery client. In addition to overseeing this critical feasibility work, CPCA will need to develop a funding solution for the scheme, which is likely, based on precedent schemes, to incorporate a variety of national grant sources combined with local contributions.

7.2 Next steps

The key next step in the project development includes drawing together the findings and conclusions to date, including cost estimates and technical analysis, into a Full Business Case. This report, supported by more detailed feasibility analysis, is due to be submitted for review at the July CPCA Board meeting once line surveys and further Network Rail engagement have been completed.

CPCA have also indicated a desire to further engage DfT, ORR, DfT and TOC representatives in relation to the business case, particularly with a view to the project gaining programme entry for potential DfT funding via the RNEP process. These meetings are anticipated to take place during March and April 2020.

