



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No: 6
28 September 2020	PUBLIC REPORT

WISBECH RAIL

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on progress made in the development of Wisbech Rail.

<u>DECISION REQUIRED</u>

FROM:

Lead Officer: Paul Raynes, Director of Delivery and Strategy and Anna Graham, Transport Programme Manager
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The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the progress of Wisbech Rail.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on 28 November 2018 the Combined Authority Board commissioned a Full Business Case (FBC) and Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) 3b Study for Wisbech to March rail and potential onward connections to Cambridge and Peterborough.
- 2.2 Wisbech, which lost its passenger rail network as part of the Beeching cuts, is widely recognised as the one of the largest towns within England without a rail link to the main rail network. This negatively impacts the potential economic and housing growth of the town. 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.

- 2.3 The FBC builds on an Outline Business Case (OBC) completed in 2015, by further developing options and recommending a preferred single option. The FBC reflects the outcomes of the rail scheme feasibility and design which is commensurate with Network Rail's GRIP 3b. Further GRIP stages would need to be undertaken to fully develop elements of the business case.

3.0 CURRENT PROGRESS

- 3.1 The key outcomes of the draft FBC were presented to the Combined Authority Board on 3 June 2020. The complete FBC and GRIP 3b were presented at the Transport and Infrastructure Committee on 8 July.
- 3.2 The FBC concludes that the most commercially viable solution is a heavy rail service serving a station centrally located within Wisbech. A two trains per hour service should run between Wisbech and Cambridge to reach the highest Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR). (See Appendix 4.1)
- 3.2 The Board agreed to continued engagement with the Department for Transport, and other central government departments to explore the future funding of this project through the Restoring Railways Fund.
- 3.3 In June the Mayor met with Chris Heaton – Harris, Minister of State for Transport, to highlight the importance of both Wisbech Rail and Ely Area Capacity Enhancements for the County. The Mayor and Minister are expected to meet again following engagement between the Combined Authority and the Department for Transport (DfT)
- 3.4 The completed FBC and GRIP 3b has been presented to representatives of the Restoring Railways Fund from DfT, Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Network Rail with follow up meetings to discuss key areas. These include crossing design considerations and design efficiencies.
- 3.5 These meetings have highlighted further the challenges around the capacity at the Ely North Junction. Wisbech Rail is interdependent upon the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements to achieve the 2 trains per hour, direct services to Cambridge. However, officers continue to liaise with DfT, ORR and Network Rail to progress the scheme.
- 3.6 In the meantime, the government launched the Comprehensive Spending Review 2020 and the Combined Authority has made representation to them. It included a case for funding Wisbech Rail infrastructure costs.

4.0 APPENDICES

- 4.1 Transport and Infrastructure Committee Paper 8 July
- 4.2 Wisbech Rail Full Business Case (link provided separately, 200+ pages) and available to press and public on request
- 4.3 Wisbech Rail GRIP 3 Report (link provided separately, 900+ pages) and available to press and public on request

<u>Source Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>