

Environment Development and Transport Committee

Item No.

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| Report title: | Update on Strategic rail issues |
| Date of meeting: | 19 January 2018 |
| Responsible Chief Officer: | Tom McCabe - Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services |
| Strategic impact <p>This report updates Members on strategic rail issues for the county. These are important because they affect the longer term provision of rail services that benefit business, residents and visitors. Good rail services encourage businesses to invest in the county, facilitate business to business interaction and provide services enabling people to get into work. They are also important for leisure trips, boosting tourism by allowing people to get to Norfolk, or for Norfolk residents to get elsewhere; as well as to bring forward sustainable growth and easing road congestion.</p> | |

Executive summary

The first part of this report examines how the county council deals with strategic rail issues. The purpose of the review was to examine the range and scale of the county council's activities, and to understand how the county council might be able to become more efficient and effective in its business. The review does not recommend any major changes to the way in which this work is dealt with, but suggests that the Norfolk Rail Group be charged to consider how it could improve its effectiveness. We should seek to strengthen our advocacy role to wield more influence over decisions to benefit the county, and how we could better ensure that the rail industry performance is accountable.

The second part of the report updates Committee on a number of strategic issues. The main points are government's recent *Strategic Vision for Rail*, proposed amendments to timetables affecting King's Lynn services, national spending programmes and consultation on community rail. Committee is asked to consider whether it wishes to nominate a Member for the board of Community Rail Norfolk. On Network Rail's spending, Members should be aware of changes to the way in which the infrastructure improvement programme is devised and agreed, which will be on a scheme-by-scheme basis in the future rather than a five year programme of schemes.

Recommendations:

Members are recommended to:

- 1. Agree findings of the review into how the county council deals with strategic rail issues, and task Norfolk Rail Group with reviewing how it operates with a view to making it a stronger, more effective group**
- 2. Nominate a Member representative for Community Rail Norfolk**
- 3. Agree the county council responds to the Future of Community Rail Strategy, and that this be delegated to the Executive Director in consultation with the Chairman/Vice Chairman of EDT.**
- 4. Note progress on strategic rail issues.**

1. Proposal (or options)

- 1.1. A review of how the county council deals with strategic rail issues has been completed. The review concluded that:
- The activities that the county council gets involved in are broadly the correct ones and should continue
 - There should be further work and dialogue with members of the Norfolk Rail Group to further improve the effectiveness of this group
 - EDT should be asked to nominate a Member representative for Community Rail Norfolk.
- 1.2. This report also updates Committee on strategic rail issues affecting the county. Members are asked to note progress on issues including new train fleet across most services, progression of work at Ely (a key junction for rail services from Norfolk), timetable changes on services from King's Lynn, forthcoming franchise renewal of Norwich to Liverpool services, which might affect the direct through service, and the recent government publication *A Strategic Vision for Rail*.

2. Review into how the county council deals with strategic rail issues

- 2.1. Because of the importance of good rail services to the county – for businesses, residents and visitors – Members and officers are involved in a number of workstreams to try to secure maximum benefits to the county. Officers have conducted a review into the activities to ensure that the work is undertaken efficiently and effectively, and represents value for money.
- Our activity can be broadly broken down into the following areas:
- Representation on various groups and areas of work to ensure that the needs of Norfolk are taken into account
 - Funding or staff resource contribution to projects and schemes
 - Norfolk Rail Group
 - Community Rail Norfolk.
- The following sections give more detail on each of these. The review is summarised in Appendix A.
- 2.2. **Representation**
- The county council is represented on a number of forums and working groups including ones established by the train operators and Network Rail, Task Forces established by MPs, local authorities or LEPs to influence and steer work to secure investment into rail (Norwich to London line and Ely area). The main ones are summarised below.
- 2.3. Greater Anglia has set up a number of forums including:
- Stakeholder Advisory Board: bringing together senior managers and representatives of the train company, local authorities and other representative interests to discuss high level objectives and progress
 - Integrated Transport Forum: bringing together the train company, local authorities cycling interests and bus companies.
- These forums are held generally around two to three times a year and attended by officers from CES. Attendance at all except the Stakeholder Advisory Board is generally limited to when there is something relevant and specific to Norfolk on the agenda.
- 2.4. Two Task Forces have been set up:
- GEML (Great Eastern Main Line: Norwich to London) Task Force: This was set up by MPs and New Anglia LEP to secure commitment to and delivery of

Norwich in 90. Local authorities have recently started to be invited to the forum and it is generally attended by the ETD Committee chairman

- Ely Task Force: This has been set up to secure delivery of improvements at Ely: see below. It is chaired by the Chief Executive of the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk and attended by LEPs, local authorities, Network Rail and the Department for Transport. It is normally attended by officers from CES.

2.5. The county council is also a member of the East-West Rail Consortium; see below. There is an annual subscription of £3k to be a member of the consortium. The county council has also contributed towards the cost of technical work to make the case for East West Rail; in particular to support the case for rail services extending east of Cambridge to Norwich and Ipswich. There are a number of meetings and workstreams associated with this project, most of which are attended by officers. The East West Central Section Project Board, which meets once a year, has member representation. Norfolk County Council's nominated Member is Councillor White.

2.6. The review of the county council's activities has generally concluded that our representation is proportionate and at the correct level, and represents value for money. It allows us to influence some of the major projects for the benefit of Norfolk.

2.7. **Funding or staff resource contribution towards projects and schemes**

The county council makes a direct funding contribution towards some projects; or has officers providing resource to take forward specific projects. We make a direct contribution towards projects including working with train operators on station travel plans, contribution to improvement schemes (focussed around improvements to the transport network linking to the station) and developing business cases for rail improvement schemes. The county council's contribution in these areas is generally not significant, reflecting the financial resources available to us.

2.8. The main areas of our involvement are on:

- Integrated transport schemes: the county council has put funding towards improvements at rail stations such as walking or cycling routes to stations; public transport interchange improvements; or improvements to information. These have been funded on a case-by-case basis from Local Transport Plan monies but given that funding has reduced over the last decade, the level of spending is not high. The county council is also managing delivery of the transport improvements funded from New Anglia LEP's Growth Deal. A significant improvement, linking Great Yarmouth Rail Station to the market place, has commenced
- Station travel plans, for which a budget of £10k has been allocated. We would expect to leverage – on a 1:4 ratio – funding from partners
- Evidence to support the business cases for rail projects. We have put funding towards projects such as the case for improved Norwich to Cambridge and King's Lynn to Cambridge services (amongst others). Funding for such projects has been found from existing budgets. This work was co-funded by other authorities including Cambridgeshire and Suffolk County Councils.

2.9. The conclusion of the review is that it is right that the county council puts money towards projects where: funding can be secured; there is a good business case for the project; and completion of the work is likely to result in tangible benefits for the county.

2.10. **Norfolk Rail Group**

This group brings together stakeholders including train operating companies,

Network Rail, local authorities and rail interest groups. It is organised and arranged by the county council, and held usually twice a year. As well as bringing together rail stakeholders it includes elected members from the Norfolk County Council (four) and from other local authorities (one per authority). It does not however have any decision-making powers. Its Terms of Reference were last updated in January 2015 and provide that the chairperson be the chairperson from the county council's now superseded Economic Development Sub Committee.

- 2.11. The group provides a really useful forum for providing a steer about the county's position on strategic rail issues, for example in refranchising exercises, government consultations, or timetable proposals. However, because meetings are usually twice a year, not all meetings coincide with a matter for when this type of steer is required. On these occasions, the agendas might largely comprise updates on issues. The group has the potential to provide a stronger advocacy role to influence decisions, but this could be strengthened.
- 2.12. Given these factors, it is suggested that the Norfolk Rail Group continues, but is tasked with reviewing how it operates with a view to making it a stronger, more effective group. The review in particular could look at the timings and frequencies of its meetings (a possible option could be to meet on *as and when* basis to coincide with key events or issues), how it could strengthen its advocacy role to wield more influence over decisions to benefit the county, and how it could better be used to make sure that the rail industry performance is accountable.
- 2.13. **Community Rail Norfolk**

Community Rail Norfolk is a not for profit company. It was set up to coordinate and deliver activities to promote the community rail lines: Norwich to Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft; and Norwich to Cromer. There is a Board made up of local authority Member representatives and a representative from the train operator (Greater Anglia). Norfolk County Council does not have a place on the Board since, when it was set up, only those authorities who contributed core-funding to community rail were invited to participate. Most of the funding is now put in by the train operator, Greater Anglia. An officer attends Board meetings to provide advice and support, and coordinate the council's activities. The county council has also continued to contribute towards individual projects where there is a value-for-money case.
- 2.14. Recently, the county council was invited to take up a place on the Board in recognition of the council's continued input into funding projects, and its stature as the local transport authority.
- 2.15. It is right that the county council's contribution to the project is recognised, and having a place on the Board will allow the council to have a greater say in the operations of Community rail. This is especially important since Greater Anglia's franchise commitment is to increase the activity, and we anticipate that proposals for how this might be achieved come forward in early 2018. Members are therefore recommended to agree to taking up a position on the Board of Community Rail Norfolk and if acceptable suggest a suitable representative.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. There are no financial implications. All projects are funded from existing budgets and using existing staff resources.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. No implications.

5. Background

- 5.1. This section summarises the most significant issues of interest to Norfolk.

5.2. **Connecting People: A Strategic Vision for Rail**

Government published this document, intended to set out how it will “*address the historic structural issues which have prevented the railway from offering outstanding customer service, efficiency and value for money,*” in November 2017.

- 5.3. In summary, it proposes:

- Joint Network Rail and train operating company teams to run day to day track and train operations
- An increase in asset renewals to improve reliability, and more digital technology for managing the railway
- An expansion of the network including Crossrail and Thameslink, new trains, East-West Rail (see below: *East West Rail* and *GEML*)
- A new approach to investment decisions (see below: *Network Rail Spending Programmes*)
- Increasing the use of smart ticketing, and improving compensation arrangements for passengers
- Modernising the workforce and encouraging innovation.

5.4. **Network Rail Spending Programmes**

Government is making changes to the way in which Network Rail spending programmes are devised, agreed and delivered. Previously, government would agree five-year, costed spending programmes that Network Rail would be charged to deliver. However, as projects were included in the programme at very early stages of their development, it has proved very difficult for them to be developed and delivered to a timescale and cost that was identified at very early stages of scheme development. Therefore, government is proposing that Network Rail do some development work on projects, to enable a more robust cost estimate, programme and business case to be developed, prior to government giving commitment for scheme delivery.

Government is also looking to attract local contributions to part-fund this early development work.

- 5.5. Some issues arise from these changes. Notably, these are less certainty about improvements schemes that will be delivered and the expectation that local contributions are provided to kick-start development work. Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough and New Anglia LEPs have contributed funding towards Ely, see below. When this was agreed it was however not understood that this model would become the norm, and government had given strong indications that they would subsequently fund delivery of the project. If there is no certainty about subsequent delivery, there is a stronger risk that the local contribution – which might be large, due to the cost of rail projects – does not lead to an improvement on-the-ground and does not therefore lead to any improvements.

5.6. **East West Rail**

This project would see rail services restored between Cambridge and Oxford, including around 30 miles of new track from Cambridge to Bedford. Norfolk County Council is working with partners to ensure that the project includes rail services extended to Norwich on existing track, allowing direct east-west services from Norwich to Cambridge and onwards to, amongst other places, Bedford, Milton Keynes, Oxford and the south west of England.

By 2024 the western section of East West Rail will be complete, allowing services between Oxford and Bedford, and Aylesbury and Milton Keynes. Government is also establishing a new East West Rail company to accelerate delivery of the central section between Bedford and Cambridge, aiming for completion by the mid-2020s.

5.7. **East Midlands Franchise**

In autumn government consulted on the East Midlands franchise. This franchise covers a wide area of, largely, The Midlands and northern England including the direct Norwich-Peterborough-Liverpool hourly service. The main issues in the consultation were:

- Whether the Norwich to Liverpool service should continue as a direct, through service or whether it would be better to split the service, so that it runs only from Liverpool to Sheffield or Nottingham where passengers would need to change for onward services to East Anglia. From the consultation it was not clear how many services would operate from Sheffield or Nottingham to Norwich, or which franchise might operate these
- Moving the Birmingham to Stansted services from the Cross Country franchise to the East Midlands franchise. (This existing service allows passengers from Norfolk to get to Stansted via a change onto the train from Birmingham to Stansted at Ely. Greater Anglia will operate some Norwich-Ely-Cambridge trains to Stansted from 2019 enhancing our links to the airport.) The consultation suggested that this could allow direct Norwich to Birmingham trains, but did not suggest that government would require this as part of any franchise agreement. It appears that this would be a decision for the operator, who could choose to run Birmingham trains to Cambridge – or elsewhere – instead.

5.8. **Norfolk County Council responded to the consultation, including setting out that:**

- We are completely opposed to any proposals to end the direct rail service between Norwich and Liverpool Lime Street which would be a loss to passengers and the economy in East Anglia and other cities along the line and we would strongly urge government to re-think any future plans to do so.
- We can see merits of a direct train from Birmingham to Norwich. Whilst it is suggested in the consultation, it is not clear whether it would be part of the specification of any franchise, or be down to the operator of the franchise. We consider that if the suggestion in the consultation is pursued, it should become part of the required specification of any new franchise to ensure that it is delivered. A direct train will allow for faster, more reliable and more convenient journeys. Current journey times of around 3¾ hours (cross country via Ely) or 4 hours (via London) are not attractive and make business to business trips by train difficult as journeys cannot easily be made there-and-back in a day.

5.9. **Ely Area Enhancements**

Ely is at the convergence of passenger lines linking Norwich and Cambridge, Norwich and Peterborough, Ipswich and Peterborough, Birmingham and Stansted, and King's Lynn and Cambridge as well as on the freight route from the Port of Felixstowe to the Midlands. The rail infrastructure is at capacity and is the reason why the train operator is unable to fulfil the franchise requirement to

run half hourly services throughout the day from King's Lynn to Cambridge; as well as being a blockage to any increase in frequency of the services listed above.

The Ely Task Force, chaired by the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk, brings together DfT, Network Rail, local authorities and the two local enterprise partnerships (New Anglia and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough). It has successfully overseen project work, funded by GCGP and New Anglia LEPs and the Strategic Freight Network (part of Network Rail), to identify a scheme option to unlock additional train paths through the Ely area. It is due to complete in spring 2019.

At this point there should be selection of a preferred option, and it will be for DfT to decide whether to fund its design, development and delivery. If a solution can be found and government decide to fund it, it could be delivered before the mid-2020s. A solution might require measures at level crossings in Queen Adelaide, a village just north east of Ely and at the centre of the Ely area rail infrastructure, where there are three level crossings on the B1382 within ½km. Therefore, in tandem with the rail work, Cambridgeshire County Council is undertaking a roads-based study to look at the level crossings. This study will report early in the New Year.

5.10. Norwich to London: Great Eastern Main Line

The Great Eastern Main Line Task Force, chaired by Chloe Smith MP, regularly meets to ensure delivery of the package of measures required to deliver *Norwich in 90*. The train operator, Greater Anglia, is committed to delivering new trains across the entirety of its franchise area, and new Inter City trains should start to be rolled out from 2019. In addition services will operate every twenty minutes between Norwich and London and two services per day will run to 90 minutes journey time.

To enable full delivery of *Norwich in 90* it is likely that the following infrastructure projects will be required: Trowse Bridge track doubling; Haughley Junction (just north of Stowmarket where the Cambridge and Peterborough to Ipswich routes meet the Great Eastern Main Line); additional track infrastructure (long loops) between Colchester and Witham to allow fast trains to overtake slower ones; and digital re-signalling Colchester to London.

5.11. Timetable: King's Lynn to London King's Cross

The train operating company has recently consulted on revised timetable options during the week. The county council responded, outlining that we opposed the proposals, which would see journeys take longer. The train operator followed this up with consultation on weekend timetable proposals (closing date 20 December 2017). Again, these proposals would see longer journey times, with Saturday journeys becoming much longer, many taking an extra 12 or 14 minutes.

The county council responded to this consultation, again expressing our opposition to longer journey times. These make train journeys less attractive, but also make King's Lynn less attractive for business investment, or as a visitor destination.

5.12. Crossrail (The Elizabeth Line)

The Elizabeth Line will link Reading and Heathrow in the west with Shenfield on the GEML. This will enable passengers from Norfolk to be able to cross London without the need to use the Underground. The line will be fully open by 2019.

5.13. Cambridge North Station

This new station, serving Cambridge Science Park, opened in May.

5.14. Community Rail

Government launched its *Future of Community Rail Strategy* in November, with a

closing consultation date of 28 January 2018. At the time of writing, a response is being drafted. Members are asked to agree that the response be agreed with and sent by the Chair of EDT.

- 5.15. The consultation sets out that community rail is “*all about connecting communities and their railways through community-based partnerships, groups, organisations, social enterprises and volunteers....In England and Wales, a community rail line is a railway supported by a local partnership organisation with an aim to engage local people in the development and promotion of the routes, services and stations.*”

In Norfolk, this is Community Rail Norfolk, see Section 2.13.

- 5.16. The consultation contains a number of relatively detailed questions around – amongst other things – how community rail can increase patronage, improve the railway and help the railway achieve wider ambitions, for example improve the economy of the area. There are no major issues arising from the consultation. Instead it provides the county council an opportunity to feed into government’s future thinking and suggest ways of improving the way in which community rail operates.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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Appendix A

Rail Activities – Summary of Review

| Activity | How it fits with NCC priorities | Proposal | Days per year |
|---|--|--|--------------------|
| Norfolk Rail Prospectus – policy document 2013 | Sets our rail objectives. | Consider a review or refresh prior to CP6 2019-24. Ensure current priorities align with/influence LEP rail aspirations | TBD |
| Attend various Greater Anglia Forums <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cycle • Integrated Transport • Stakeholder Equality Group | Supports promoting non car modes | Attend selected forums only (NB Integrated Transport Forum has superseded the Cycle Forum) | 2 |
| Community Rail Norfolk (CRN) | Supports and encourages sustainable transport | Accept offer of a place on CRN Board for an NCC member. Support appropriate policies and fund initiatives where possible. Can our passenger transport colleagues lead on this? | 2 |
| East West Rail (EWR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AGM • Central Section Project Board • Central Section Regional Working Group Consortium subscription | Important in terms of accessibility for business and personal travel and showing political support. Need to ensure services provide strategic routes not just local commuting e.g. Norwich to Milton Keynes in a day | Continue to participate and pay subscription. Work jointly with Suffolk to harmonise views and opinions for greater impact. | 5 £3k per annum |
| Ely Task Force | Enables us to steer DfT and Network Rail to ensure the measures (a series of capacity improvements) facilitate King Lynn to Cambridge ½ hourly etc., | Continue to participate | 5 |
| Great Eastern Main Line Task Force | Enables us to keep pressure on Norwich to London line improvements as set out in “Norwich in 90” campaign | Continue to participate | 1 |
| Norfolk Rail Group | Enables us to get wider buy in and support for rail | Only meet as required to deal with issues rather than 2+ times a year | 3 days per meeting |

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| | objectives. Provides a handy ready made working group. | | |
| Correspondence from Members, the public, interest groups | It is a requirement of NCC standards to deal with such enquiries | Review who should be responsible. David Cumming is currently the de facto gatekeeper | 1 |
| Feeding into Network Rail (NR) spending programmes | Commenting on and lobbying for Network Rail improvements is vital | Engage with NR on next control period (CP6 2019- 24) during 2018. Possible pre-emptive meetings now? – Suffolk arrange quarterly meetings with NR | 1+ |
| Feeding into rail franchise consultations | Commenting on and lobbying for franchise enhancements is vital | Engage with operators at next round | 1+ |
| Studies and evidence gathering | Development of, and support for, locally important projects | Determine on a case by case basis | |