

**Subject:** Rawtenstall to Manchester  
Commuter Link

**Status:** For Publication

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**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2009

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**Report of:** Chief Executive

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**Portfolio Holder:** Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

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**Key Decision:** Yes / No

Forward Plan  General Exception  Special Urgency

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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To update Cabinet on proposals to upgrade the East Lancashire Railway for commuter use.

**2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:-

- Delivering quality Services to our customers
- Delivering regeneration across the Borough
- Encouraging healthy and respectful communities
- Keeping our Borough clean, green and safe
- Promoting the Borough
- Providing value for money services

**3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

## 4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

### *Tourist Operation*

- 4.1 The East Lancashire Railway from Rawtenstall to Bury closed to passengers in 1972 and freight at the end of 1980. It was re-opened as a tourist attraction from Bury to Ramsbottom in 1987 with Rawtenstall reached in 1991 and an extension to Heywood near Rochdale opened in 2003.
- 4.2 Rossendale Borough Council owns the land upon which the railway operates. The Council is a member of the East Lancashire Railway Trust, represented by Councillors Peter Steen, Darryl Smith and Trevor Unsworth supported by officers David Presto and Fraser Nash. The Trust consists of the three local authorities (Bury, Rochdale and Rossendale) together with the East Lancashire Light Railway Trust Ltd. Together they decide the strategic direction the operation should take.
- 4.3 A Ten year Development Strategy prepared by Locum Consulting was published by the East Lancashire Railway Trust in June 2009. This confirmed that the railway currently attracts over 100,000 visitors a year, generates £3.85 million gross expenditure and supports 70 jobs.
- 4.4 The Development Strategy aims to increase the total number of visitors to 200,000 by 2020. Seven key actions were identified. One of these directly relates to Rawtenstall station and the perception that it provides a poor visitor experience. Short and long term actions are identified to address this including improved signage to the town centre (short term) and developing town centre improvements and relationships with traders (longer term). Rossendale Borough Council has overall responsibility for leading on this item.
- 4.5 Another action of relevance to Rossendale is an action that proposes extending the railway to Castleton where a public transport interchange would be established on the Manchester-Todmorden-Leeds line.

### *A Broader Role*

- 4.6 The potential of the East Lancashire Railway to perform a broader transport role for Rossendale has been recognized for a number of years. There are a substantial number of commuters from the Borough traveling daily to Bury, Rochdale and Manchester City Centre. The M66 is growing increasingly congested affecting journey times for both car and bus users. The railway line could perform an important role in providing for peak hour journeys into Manchester.
- 4.7 A number of studies have been undertaken in previous years with the aim of identifying a robust business case for re-connecting Rawtenstall to the national rail network. The County Council has consistently expressed a preference for improving the X43 corridor. However the development of the Greater Manchester Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) bid in 2007/08 resulted in two further studies being funded by the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport

Executive. These examined options for a diesel train option via Heywood to Manchester Victoria, a diesel train shuttle to Buckley Wells south of Bury with a cross-platform link to the Metrolink or electrification through to Rawtenstall. Each was based on the assumption of a year round peak hour only operation and the continued running of the heritage railway at other times. Park and Ride facilities in the Rawtenstall area would be an important part of any successful scheme with Ewood Bridge identified as the most suitable site.

- 4.8 The infrastructure study produced by Faber Maunsell demonstrated that a heavy rail option via Heywood would achieve a 34 minute journey time from Rawtenstall to Manchester Victoria and would cost approximately £25 million. The demand study led by Halcrow concluded that it was not possible to produce a positive Cost Benefit ratio. However some of the assumptions used by the consultants are considered highly questionable by the Steering Group who commissioned the work. As a result of the questions raised the consultants are reviewing their findings.
- 4.9 The TIF bid by the Greater Manchester authorities was rejected by the public in the December 2008 referendum. Funding has however since been found to take forward a number of key initiatives. Public transport improvements within the Manchester to Rawtenstall rail corridor are expected to benefit from this. A further study costing £60,000 is to be commissioned by Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority in the near future which is expected to report by the end of the financial year. This will examine all public transport options. Rossendale will be represented on the steering group.
- 4.10 A final important document was published in June 2009 by the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC). This examined twenty disused rail corridors in England and concluded that re-opening the Rawtenstall line would deliver a cost: benefit ratio of 1:1.8. This was the fourth best of all schemes examined. The study was produced without contact with either the rail company or local authorities and officers are seeking to establish links with the organization.

*Taking the process forward*

- 4.11 The East Lancashire Railway has been identified in the Pennine Lancashire Multi Area Agreement (MAA) as a sub-regional priority. This only occurred because of intensive lobbying. Officers are actively seeking to ensure that the East Lancashire Railway is given a high profile status alongside other similar schemes in Lancashire. This will occur through PLACE and the Spatial Guide Working Group.
- 4.12 Lancashire County Council as mentioned earlier has historically given priority to enhancing the X43 corridor rather than supporting a rail alternative. However, the Chief Executive has been in correspondence with the Environment Director about this issue. The support of the County Council as Local Transport Authority is very important to taking this proposal forward. It is hoped that a more flexible and positive approach will be taken in the future.

- 4.13 As part of the consultation process on the Core Strategy Network Rail have indicated a willingness to meet with officers of the Council to discuss links to the national rail network.

**COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:**

**5. SECTION 151 OFFICER**

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the report, for Council. However, this does not mean that there may not be future financial implications arising, depending upon the developments of the project.

**6. MONITORING OFFICER**

- 6.1 No comments.

**7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)**

- 7.1 No Human Resource implications.

**8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The re-opening of a link to the national rail network would increase the profile and accessibility of the Borough both for residents and visitors. Combining this with retention and enhancement of the heritage status can only be of benefit. It is important therefore that all opportunities to promote the case for the rail link as a gateway to Rossendale are grasped.

**9. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 9.1 That this Report is noted.
- 9.2 That Cabinet confirms the Rawtenstall to Manchester commuter link is a strategic priority for the Council and requests the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to facilitate meetings with Network Rail, the County Council and partner Greater Manchester Authorities in order to progress the business case.

**10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT**

- 10.1 None specifically for this Report.

**11. COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Is a Community Impact Assessment required Yes / No

Is a Community Impact Assessment attached Yes / No

**12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required ~~Yes~~/ No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached Yes / No

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
“TIF Feasibility Study: Improvement to public transport services from Bury, Ramsbottom, Heywood and surrounding areas: Final Report on capital and revenue costs for rail based schemes”, Faber Maunsell Ltd (July 2008)	One Stop Shop
“GMPTE: TIF Bury-Rawtenstall Option Appraisal Final Report”, Halcrow Group Ltd (March 2009)	
“ELR 2020:East Lancashire Railway Trust Development Strategy”, Locum Consulting (June 2009)	
“Connecting Communities-expanding access to the rail network”, Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) (June 2009)	