

Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny	
Date:	11 November 2019	
Report Title:	Update on Wisbech Rail Project	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- To provide an update on progress of the Wisbech Rail project, and the reinstatement of services between Wisbech and March.

2 Key issues

- Wisbech suffers from an infrastructure deficit due to poor road and rail links to the regional and national transport network.
- A key objective included in the Wisbech 2020 Vision is to reduce the journey times between Wisbech - Cambridge and Wisbech - Peterborough. This includes the potential reinstatement of the Wisbech to March rail link.
- The Wisbech Garden Town proposal includes key infrastructure proposals, such as an A47 upgrade and the reinstatement of the rail link between Wisbech and March.

3 Recommendations

- The Overview & Scrutiny Committee are recommended to note the progress to date and deadlines for completion of this work.

Wards Affected	All Wisbech wards
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Boden - Leader of the Council Cllr Chris Seaton - Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility & Heritage
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Background Paper(s)	Wisbech 2020 Vision public document

4 Background / introduction

- 4.1 Wisbech suffers from an infrastructure deficit due to poor road and rail links to the regional and national transport network.
- 4.2 The current public transport services available are often expensive, poorly coordinated and irregular.
- 4.3 The effects of this infrastructure deficit include (but are not limited to):
- Reduced access to the East of England's primary employment centres - Peterborough, Cambridge and Norwich
 - Limited access to Higher Education facilities for those young adults not yet able to drive or who do not have access to a car.
 - Young professionals, who are increasingly unlikely to drive, will be more likely to move to towns or cities with better public transport links.
 - Long journeys to access specialised medical care at Huntingdon, Peterborough and Cambridge hospitals.
- 4.4 A key objective included in the Wisbech 2020 Vision is to reduce the journey times between Wisbech - Cambridge and Wisbech - Peterborough. This includes the potential reinstatement of the Wisbech to March rail link.
- 4.5 The Wisbech Garden Town proposal includes key infrastructure proposals, such as an A47 upgrade and the reinstatement of the rail link between Wisbech and March.
- 4.6 By reinstating the transport connection between Wisbech and March, onward regional and national connections can be made by National Rail. Positive outcomes would include:
- Improved access to additional employment opportunities for residents.
 - Improved access to Higher Education facilities, such as the new University planned for Peterborough.
 - Access to more reasonably priced housing in Fenland which could help to take the heat out of the Cambridge housing market.
 - Increase in visitor numbers to access the many tourist attractions in and around Wisbech.
- 4.7 The Combined Authority are currently working with colleagues at Cambridgeshire County Council and consultants Mott MacDonald to progress the Grip2 work that was completed in 2015.
- 4.8 The current stage of work includes an assessment of viable transport modes, station location(s) and service patterns and will go on to consider how the scheme might best be funded for delivery and ongoing operation.
- 4.9 Deliverables will be a full business case and detailed design of the preferred option, as well as consideration of a low-cost alternative, in line with DfT requirements.

5 Considerations

- 5.1 Transport modes under consideration include National Rail, a tram-train hybrid and a busway, all along the existing out of use line.
- 5.2 A number of station locations both within and outside the town centre have been proposed and are being considered, including a 'parkway' station south of the A47.

- 5.3 Potential service patterns between Wisbech and March are being assessed, including onward connections to Cambridge, Ely and Peterborough.
- 5.4 Capacity in the Ely area is an obvious interdependency for the project as it affects availability of train paths.

6 Effect on corporate objectives

- 6.1 Providing improved public transport options will have a positive effect on the following corporate objectives:
- Communities - supporting vulnerable members of our community
 - Communities - working with partners to promote Fenland through culture and heritage
 - Economy - attracting new business, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses in Fenland
 - Economy - promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland
 - Economy - promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

7 Community impact

- 7.1 Positive community impacts have been outlined in section 4.6 above.

8 Conclusions

- 8.1 Work is progressing well on the design and business case elements and is expected to complete at the end of March 2021.
- 8.2 Next steps will be the development of the funding and delivery strategies for the project, stakeholder engagement and consultation on the preferred options arising from the current phase of the work.