



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE
& PETERBOROUGH**
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Wisbech Rail Update

To: Fenland District Council Overview and Scrutiny Meeting

Meeting Date: 7 February 2022

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing is to provide Fenland District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the progress of the Wisbech Rail Project.

2. Background

- 2.1 Wisbech is widely recognised as the one of the largest towns within England without a rail link to the main rail network. 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.
- 2.2 The draft GRIP 3b study for the Wisbech Rail project was considered by the Combined Authority Board on 3 June 2020 and was later approved on 8 July 2020 by the Transport and Infrastructure Committee. The Board and Committee agreed to continued engagement with the Department for Transport (DfT) and other central government departments to explore next steps for the project.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 9 November 2020, Fenland District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the Wisbech Rail project. This last report outlines the outcome of the Wisbech Rail Business Case which concluded that a heavy rail service, serving a station centrally located within Wisbech with a two trains per hour service running between Wisbech and Cambridge would reach a high Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR). The Business Case also suggested a good case for a service between March and Wisbech only.
- 2.4 Additionally, the 9 November 2020 Overview and Scrutiny Committee report highlighted the engagement between the Combined Authority and the Department for Transport in the Combined Authority's drive to seek funding for the project.

3. Wisbech Rail Update

- 3.1 Engagement with DfT, Office of Rail and Road (ORR) and Network Rail identified

opportunities where greater flexibility about national constraints could save infrastructure costs. Notably, by reviewing the level crossing strategy to include barrier crossings. Discussions also explored how best to ensure the link between Wisbech Rail and the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements which is needed to achieve a 2 trains per hour direct services to Cambridge.

The Minister of State for Transport, Chris Heaton-Harris confirmed that the Wisbech Rail project would be considered for funding alongside the outputs from the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements Outline Business Case as that is completed.

To prepare for that decision point, the Combined Authority, commissioned Network Rail to review and refine the existing work as well as assessing options for the Wisbech to March line, and developing significant cost savings.

A paper summarising the outcome of Network Rail's work is expected at the Transport and Infrastructure Committee and the Combined Authority Board in March which will also outline next steps.