railfuture
EAST ANGLIA

Wisbech Rail Consultative Group:
Now is the time to deliver on Wisbech Rail

Introduction

The Wisbech to March railway reopening campaign has been around ever since the railway passenger service was taken away from Wisbech 50 years ago but the good news is that the latest iteration of that campaign has made considerable progress since its inception in 2013.

In the last 5 years there has been firm support from Steve Barclay MP, Cambridgeshire County Council, Government Ministers Chris Grayling, Greg Clarke, Sajid Javid, the Combined Authority Mayor James Palmer, all political parties across the County, all the stakeholders of Wisbech 20-20.

Wisbech is a vital part of Cambridgeshire with a huge part to play in helping the county grow its economy sustainably.

Cambridgeshire growth and supporting Cambridge by developing Wisbech and Fenland

The Wisbech to March - Cambridge railway will provide a service for all Cambridgeshire that will support growth in March, Chatteris, Ely and the A10 corridor into and through Cambridge.

It will:

• improve transport connectivity by giving Wisbech and Fenland residents access to high quality jobs all along the corridor and especially in Cambridge.

• enhance quality of life by opening up the educational opportunities throughout the county for young people, give safe access for all to the leisure opportunities throughout the Corridor and Cambridge with a service early to late, serving the widest possible community needs.

• improve transport opportunities that will strengthen and expand our local industries by providing easy two-way access from/to every regional and national economic centre; enable and support new housing and development opportunities in Wisbech and Fenland and along

the entire Wisbech-Cambridge corridor; enable the recruitment of professional staff for schools, colleges and businesses.

• improve safety and security by providing choice of modes for all.

• reduce transport's contribution to climate change and improve regional transport resilience.

Planning is well underway to establish the work needed to make the rail junctions at Ely capable of handling a greater throughput of trains including accommodating two services an hour from Wisbech to Cambridge. The Wisbech - March railway must be ready to run trains when the works at Ely are ready, which could be in 2020.

Now is the time to deliver on Wisbechrail. By building on existing railway services and adding onto these services, the Wisbech indicative timetable shows the revolutionary connectivity a train service will bring to Wisbech and Fenland.

Wisbech Rail background

There is a long history of efforts to restore passenger train services to Wisbech since withdrawal of service in 1969. Freight services continued until 2000. The railway from Wisbech to March has never been formally closed. It is officially "mothballed" and is still a part of the national regulated railway network. The original act of Parliament still obtains right up to the town centre site available for a station.

In the meantime, despite a growing population, there has been an increasing sense of isolation within the town, exacerbated by declining social, economic and educational outcomes compared to the south of Cambridgeshire.

The most recent attempt to restore the railway link commenced in early 2013.

Railfuture East Anglia, encouraged by a report issued by the Association of Train Operating Companies, which suggested that the railway could be and should be restored, decided to leaflet every home in the town with information about how restoration could be brought about. Every resident was invited to sign an online petition.

The subsequent history of this campaign is plotted chronologically on the Wisbechrail website.

See link wisbechrail.org.uk

Public support has been clearly demonstrated

1. Early 2013 volunteers delivered 11000 leaflets to every dwelling in Wisbech and 2000 more in March and Manea.

The leaflet pointed out the advantages of a railway restoration from Wisbech and invited the recipient to go online to sign a petition calling the Cambridgeshire County Council to officially start work on a feasibility study leading to the creation of a business case. Very quickly over 5000 people signed mainly from the Wisbech area and from wider Cambridgeshire.

2. Petition accepted as legitimate by Cambridgeshire County Council and presented its full Council meeting on 16th July 2013.

3. The full council voted to accept the petition and authorised several pieces of work which established that the restoration is feasible **and** has a good business case.

4. Subsequent polling in 2017 by Fenland District Council on both of two occasions has shown that 95% and 75% Wisbech residents put the restoration as their priority for improving the prospects for the town.

5. Support for the reconnection has been strong among the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties throughout the County.

6. Successive Secretaries of State both for Transport and of Housing, Communities & Local Government have expressed support on many occasions.

The current Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, has five times said as much. The newly elected Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor, James Palmer has stated on numerous occasions that Wisbechrail is a priority for his administration.

7. There has been huge and unrelenting support from the Wisbech area Member of Parliament, Steve Barclay.

The business and economic case

The County Council has produced a series of studies showing that the reconnection has a good business case especially if a town centre station is provided and a service runs to Cambridge. These studies can all be located on Cambridgeshire County Council ‘s website.

For Wisbech the business case is here:

ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/March_to_Wisbech_Rail_Link___Outline_Business_Case_v1.3.pdf

Look at the start of "The Economic Case" section for the various BCRs and Benefits.

"The option of a direct service between Wisbech and Cambridge, at a frequency of 2 trains per hour (2tph) with the 'Town Centre' site, generates a core Benefit:Cost Ratio of 2.27, improving to 2.87 when Wider Economic Benefits (WEBs) and option/non-use values are considered. The comparative Net Present Values (NPVs) are £107.7M and £158.1M. When additional wider economic impacts are considered, including reductions in spatial inequalities, alleviation of unemployment, house price impacts, and acceleration of local development in the Wisbech area, the BCR increases to 4.41, with an NPV of £288.7M. Based on current assumptions regarding allocation of capital costs, with the 'Town Centre' site carrying the cost for the A47(T) overbridge, the 'Parkway' site carries lower capital costs and therefore a higher BCR of 2.77, improving to 3.20 when Wider Economic Benefits (WEBs) and option/non-use values are considered, and 4.80 with the additional wider economic impacts. The equivalent NPVs are £116.0M, £144.2M and £249.3M respectively. The provision of the desired service pattern is predicated on improvements at Ely North Junction, providing sufficient paths for both passenger and freight services."

For Wisbech station layouts and location look in Sections 6.7 and 6.8 here:

ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/March_to_Wisbech_GRIP_2_Study_Report_B.pdf

For town centre station plan with two bay platforms (copied in Figure 1) look here:

ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/Appendix_E___Wisbech_Station_Town_Centre_vB.pdf

The detail within these studies has reached Network Rail's GRIP2 (GRIP = Guide to Rail Investment Process) level.

It is worth highlighting one point of detail - the GRIP 2 BCR was as higher for the station south of the A47 (not hugely so, but higher) - but the town centre station (not surprisingly) has higher wider economic benefits:

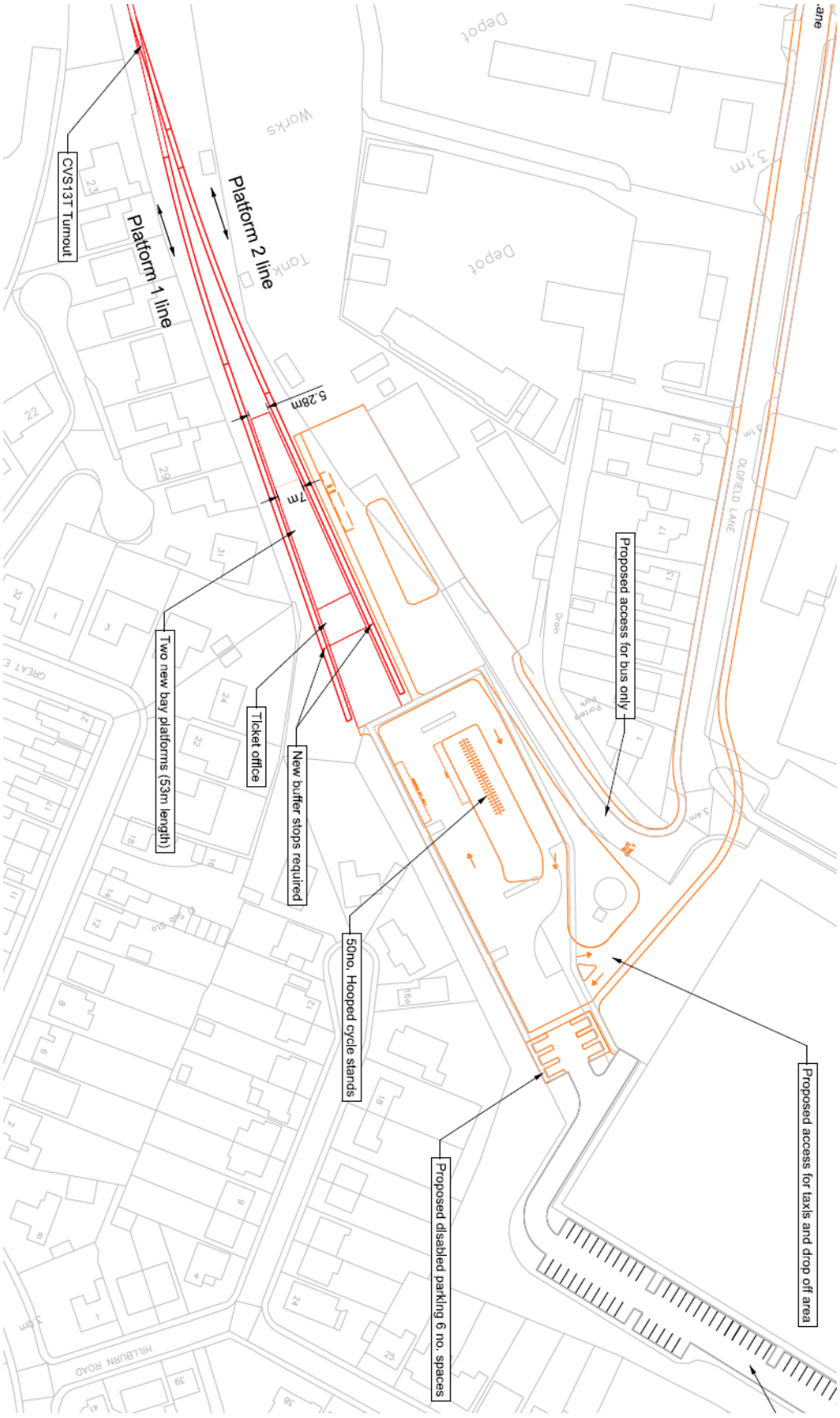
"The figures quoted above assume a Town Centre Station; they increase slightly for a station south of the A47 due to the reduction in costs due to the removal of the cost of providing a bridge for the A47 over the railway. However, a town centre station would provide a greater level of wider economic benefits for Wisbech."

The Wisbech Rail Consultative Group strongly supports the siting of the station for Wisbech in the town centre where there is land available and the rail corridor remains in Network Rail's ownership.

Note. That as a part of the feasibility and business case work all modes including light rail and guided busways are required to be researched.

Heavy rail proved to be clearly the preferred option.

Figure 1: Map showing site of town centre station from the business plan



Case Study

It is worth making a comparative study of the rationale of restoring the railway from Wisbech with that of building a new railway from Barking station to Barking Riverside to enable the construction of a new town at Barking Riverside, projected population 27,000, less than that currently living in Wisbech.

The case study of the Barking Riverside Extension below also refers to the investigation of all modes. This new railway was approved by the Secretary of State in 2017. We suggest reading this by substituting "Wisbech" for "BRE" (Barking Riverside Extension.)

These excerpts are from the Inspectors report (giving approval for the new railway and) for the location of Barking Riverside station as a part of the building of a new railway to the Barking Riverside brownfield site in east London:

1. Network Rail believes that the proposed Barking Riverside Line has a number of benefits, including:

• Providing a new rail link to support development and regeneration of Barking Riverside, and

• Providing new journey and interchange opportunities by extending GOB London Overground services to and from Barking Riverside. (In the case of Wisbech case a new service from Cambridge to March into Wisbech).

2. The BRE would have very few environmental dis-benefits, and any remaining after mitigation would be readily outweighed by the benefits to the greater public good of having the BRE in place.

3. The Inspector noted that the primary aim of the BRE scheme is to support economic development and population growth by unlocking the full residential development potential of the Barking Riverside area through provision of new sustainable transport infrastructure. The Inspector noted that this area is currently very isolated in transport terms and its development is therefore dependent upon provision of new public transport infrastructure, specifically new rail infrastructure, not just to provide sustainable accessibility but to overcome the perception of remoteness.....

.....Currently the area is very isolated in transport terms with in part zero Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTALs). Its development is therefore dependent upon provision of new public transport infrastructure, specifically new railway infrastructure, not just to provide sustainable accessibility but to overcome the perception of remoteness and to 'put it on the map'. The higher densities and reduced car parking necessary to achieve 10,800 homes are dependent on provision of a new fixed public transport link to the centre of the proposed new development.

4. The Secretary of State notes that with the delivery of the BRE scheme, the area is capable of accommodating 10,800 homes, for a population of 27,000 and providing 4,600 jobs but that the draft s106 agreement and the planning permission associated with this

development restricts delivery to 1,500 homes until the Order and planning direction for the BRE scheme has been secured and to 4,000 homes until the BRE scheme is operational. The Secretary of State notes that amongst others, the BRE scheme is specifically supported by the Mayor of London, members of the London Assembly and LBBD. The Secretary of State agrees with the Inspector that the aims and need for the BRE scheme are clearly established and widely supported (IR 8.6).

5. The Secretary of State agrees with the Inspector that the Barking Riverside development requires a major fixed track system to kick start the main development (IR 8.10).

TfL considered six alternatives to the BRE scheme including underground, light rail and bus based options (IR 3.13).

A multi-modal spine road with a new high frequency bus service to the Royal Docks. This was rejected as potentially giving rise to significant adverse environmental effects in relation to biodiversity, flood risk and flood defences. It was also regarded as having insufficient public transport capacity to support the proposed 10,800 homes at Barking Riverside.

• Enhanced Bus services. Again this was rejected as not providing sufficient assured and sustainable public transport capacity to serve 10,800 homes. The number of buses that would be required would be likely to cause and be involved in road congestion adding to dwell times and journey times.

6. The primary aim of the BRE is to support economic development and population growth by unlocking the full residential development of the Barking Riverside area through provision of new sustainable transport infrastructure12. The further aims of the BRE are derived from the Mayor's Transport Strategy 2010, namely to:

• improve transport connectivity;

• enhance quality of life;

• improve safety and security;

• improve transport opportunities;

• reduce transport's contribution to climate change and improve resilience;

7. The development of Barking Riverside to its full potential forms a crucial component of the London Plan as elaborated in the London Riverside Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF) for the LROA. It is capable of accommodating 10,800 homes for a population of 27,000 and providing 4,600 jobs. It is a critical component of LBBD's spatial strategy as embodied in both its core strategy and its site-specific allocation for 10,800 homes.

Network Rail's GRIP divides a project into eight distinct stages. The overall approach is product rather than process driven, and within each stage an agreed set of products are delivered.

1. *Output definition*
2. *Feasibility*
3. *Option selection*
4. *Single option development*
5. *Detailed design*
6. *Construction test and commission*
7. *Scheme hand back*
8. *Project close out*

Cambridgeshire growth: supporting Cambridge by developing Fenland

Housing: new dwellings along the Wisbech to Waterbeach/Cambridge railway line

The figure below shows the current population of the major settlements along the railway line from Wisbech to Waterbeach. The population of Greater Cambridge other than that of Waterbeach is not included. Note that historically Wisbech's population has been consistently under estimated owing to its position on the border between Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

The table includes the figure of new dwellings approved for each settlement in the Local Plans of Fenland DC, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, East Cambridgeshire DC, South Cambridgeshire DC.

A reference has been made to the number of dwellings that may be authorised should it be possible relocate the Anglia Water sewage works by Cambridge North station.

Cambridge North station serves roundly 15000 existing jobs in the immediate area with many more to come as the immediate station area is transformed into a new city quarter as Cambridge becomes increasingly polycentric based on its railway stations.

Many thousands of Cambridge population will be within a 10 minute cycle ride of Cambridge North when all the network of cycleways is centred on it are completed.

The developers of Waterbeach have stated that their vision for the 12000 new homes is one of few cars stored within them. To achieve this vision they require a 15 minute interval train service in each direction serving Cambridge North, Central and South.

As well as the aspiration of the Combined Authority for 7000 dwellings at Cambridge Homes there is an aspiration by Fenland DC for 12000 dwellings to be built in an exciting Wisbech Garden Town.

Figure 2 below shows the current population of the major settlements along the railway line from Wisbech to Waterbeach.

	Dwellings	Population			Notes
	Local Plan	2018	Local Plan	Total	
Wisbech	2600	35000	7800	42000	Fenland DC and KLWNBC
March	3100	25000	9000	34000	
Chatteris	1250	10500	3750	14250	via Travel Hub at Manea
Manea				3000	
Ely	3480	21000	10440	31440	
Waterbeach	12000	5000	36000	41000	
TOTAL Wisbech-Waterbeach corridor				**165690**	
Wisbech Garden Town Aspiration	12000	-	-	35000	Aspiration (not in LP)
TOTAL Including Aspiration				**200690**	
Cambridge North redevelopment	7000				Sewage works redevelopment further aspiration

Note: Wisbech current population based on continuously built up area of Wisbech, Leverington, Emneth, Elm and Friday Bridge and Wisbech in Norfolk. LP assumes average of 3 persons per dwelling.

Trans Cambridgeshire Rail Link

The train service from Wisbech to Cambridge will bring huge benefits right across County.

The best BCR for the restoration of the railway from Wisbech is a 2tph service through to Cambridge. This must be the focus of efforts to restore services.

The full range of benefits of the Wisbechrail restoration can only be captured by taking into account the current population and the large number of dwellings approved in outline along the whole route from Wisbech to south of Cambridge.

The current train service at March and Ely:

March: (current and future timetable)

- 1tph Birmingham-Peterborough-Ely-Cambridge-Stansted Airport and return.
  This is a long distance limited stop service that serves Cambridgeshire by enabling users to move long distances relatively quickly. **This should be developed in this role and not be modified to do local work. It must be emphasised that this train service is currently heavily overloaded in the peak hours at Cambridge in both directions and often at other times.**
- 1tph (Colchester)-Ipswich-Bury St Edmunds-Whittlesey -Peterborough.
  This is also a long distance limited stop service. **This should be developed in this role and not be modified for local work.** Its current Manea stop should be transferred to the 2tph Wisbech-Cambridge service.

Ely: (current and future timetable)

- 1tph Norwich-Ely-Cambridge-Stansted Airport
- 1tph Birmingham-Ely-Cambridge-Stansted Airport.
- 1tph Norwich-Ely-Peterborough-Nottingham-Liverpool.
- 1tph Colchester-Ely-March-Peterborough.
- 2tph King's Lynn-All stations-Cambridge South

We would recommend that the existing 2tph ex Kings Lynn stopping service be planned so that with the proposed 2tph ex Wisbech stopping service Ely to Cambridge Central has all stations service every 15 minutes.

This metro like service plus the two non-stop services would enable a huge modal shift off the A10 road to be worked towards.

The indicative timetable below shows how a 15 minute interval between Ely and Cambridge could be achieved. (Indicative only but based on current King's Lynn - Cambridge services). Note: The current frequent short workings between Ely and Cambridge in the afternoon peak would probably be unnecessary and can be removed.

We have called the service "TransCambs". We do this to emphasise that the Wisbech Railway restoration should be seen as bringing connectivity benefit to much of the County. The name may not be the best but we feel all local services whether rail, bus, should be operated under one banner and we welcome suggestions.

Figure 3: Map showing TransCambs Rail Link

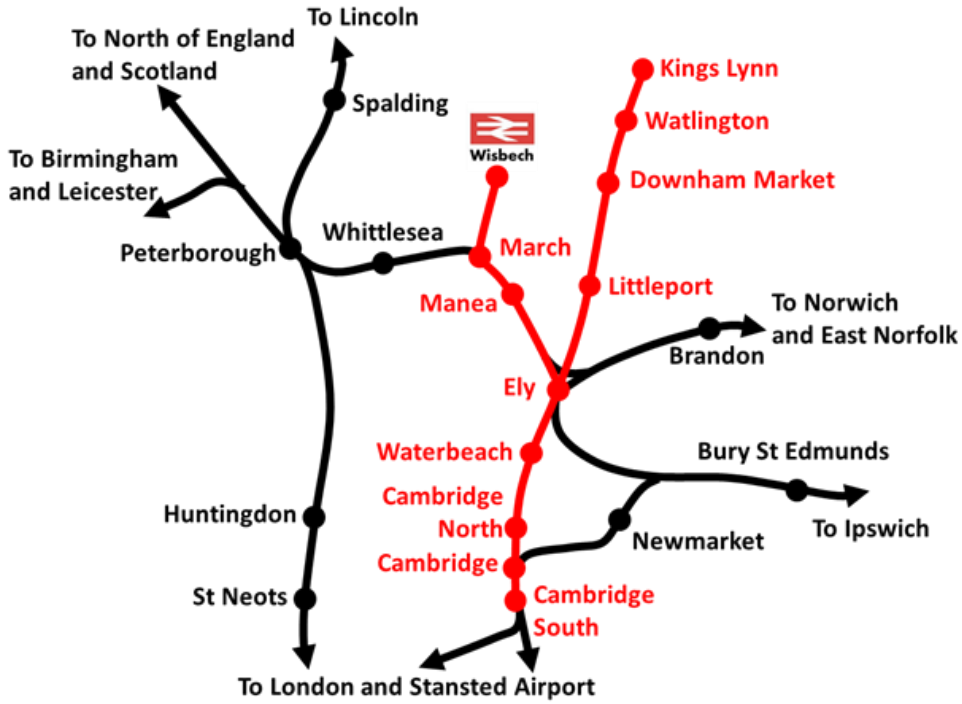


Figure 4: Indicative timetable TransCambs Rail Link

King's Lynn		xx:54		xx:24
Watlington		xx:01		xx:31
Downham Market		xx:08		xx:38
Littleport		xx:17		xx:47
Wisbech	xx:43		xx:13	
March	xx:55		xx:25	
Manea	xx:00		xx:30	
Ely	xx:10	xx:25	xx:40	xx:55
Waterbeach	xx:20	xx:35	xx:50	xx:05
Cambridge North	xx:25	xx:41	xx:55	xx:10
Cambridge Central	xx:29	xx:45	xx:59	xx:14
Cambridge South	xx:33	xx:49	xx:03	xx:18
	+	***	+	***

xx indicates the same minutes past each hour

*** then non-stop to Kings Cross

+ The most efficient way of working through Cambridge station and in rolling stock use, would be to combine the Wisbech to Cambridge service with the Cambridge to London Liverpool Street service. The new bi-mode trains on order are compatible for working with the new outer suburban electric-only trains on order.

Current and future commuting from Wisbech and March stations to Cambridge

Why are numbers commuting currently so low?

- Wisbech is 37 miles from Cambridge by rail (the 2nd biggest town in Cambridgeshire)
- March is 30 miles from Cambridge by rail
- The annual footfall at Wisbech mothballed Rail terminus is 0
- The annual footfall at March station is 395,950
- Ely is 15 miles from Cambridge by rail
- The annual footfall at Ely station is 2,209,350

However:

- There is no commuting from Wisbech to Cambridge by rail
- There is little commuting from March to Cambridge by rail

The reason is simple, there is no train service from Wisbech and a poor train service from March to tap into the latent demand:

- The number of trains arriving at Cambridge before 09.05 from March (via Ely) is 1
- The number of trains arriving at Cambridge before 09.05 from Ely is 16

Even more starkly:

- The number of trains arriving at Cambridge before 09.05 from the four 'Fen Line' stations of King's Lynn, Watlington, Downham Market and Littleport (north of Ely and via Ely) is 10
- The combined annual footfall figure for the 4 Fen Line stations is 1,908,418

Put another way:

- 2 train coaches arrive from March into Cambridge before 09.05
- 40 train coaches arrive from the King's Lynn stations into Cambridge before 09.05
- 60 train coaches arrive from Ely into Cambridge before 09.05

Future Plans?

- 2 train coaches from March into Cambridge before 09.05
- 80 train coaches from the King's Lynn stations before 09.05
- 115 train coaches from Ely before 09.05
- 0 train coaches from Wisbech, a town of 35,000 people, closer to Cambridge by rail than King's Lynn

Regional and National Connectivity

A Trans Cambs Link service outlined above will have huge connectivity benefits at local, regional and nation levels:

- At March for and via Peterborough to the West Midlands; East Midlands; Yorkshire; NorthEast; Manchester; Scotland.
- At Ely for Norwich; Yarmouth;
- At Cambridge for Stansted Airport; London; Stevenage; Heathrow Airport; East Croydon; Gatwick Airport; Brighton and soon Milton Keynes; Oxford; Swindon; Bristol.

Trans Cambs will be a game changer for a North Cambridgeshire and East Cambridgeshire in terms of connectivity.

Trans Cambs stations:

- All stations must be very user friendly. They should all have large, warm and welcoming waiting areasToilets
- Covered platform area with adequate heating.
- All must have user friendly and adequate ticket vending machines with staff available to help at Wisbech, March, Ely.
- A multimodal Smart card must be developed for all services within Cambridgeshire and neighbouring areas especially within the Cambridge travel to work area.
- All stations must have high quality cycle parking facilities.
- A network of quality cycle ways must be developed centred on the stations.
- Larger than needed car parks must be available at each station to ensure no potential user is turned away.

At Manea:

- A quality rural travel hub must be developed to enable a user-friendly transfer from car, cycle and bus to train.
- **Chatteris** must be the focus with a quality cycle path being developed as well as a dedicated bus link.

At Wisbech:

- The station must be in the town centre and it must be a quality building that enhances its already quality built environment.
- The station should become a rural travel hub for the surrounding district up to and including the A17 corridor. (Sutton Bridge, Long Sutton, Holbeach).
- A network of cycleways should be planned to the station.
- The land around the station should be developed as a hi tech startup area of workshops/ laboratories - a rail-based enterprise zone.

Fares between the two prongs of TransCambs must be synchronised and both incorporated into the Network Card Area.

Special attention must be put into developing a fare structure that enables tertiary education to be easily accessed across Cambridgeshire to:

- Wisbech College of West Anglia
- Cambridge Regional College via Cambridge North
- Sixth-form Colleges and private schools.

Access to all these institutions must become rail based not least to cut down a large volume of current road-based travel.

The station at Wisbech should become central to the life of the town

The location of the site of a new Wisbech railway station is a key component of making a success of the re-established railway service into Wisbech.

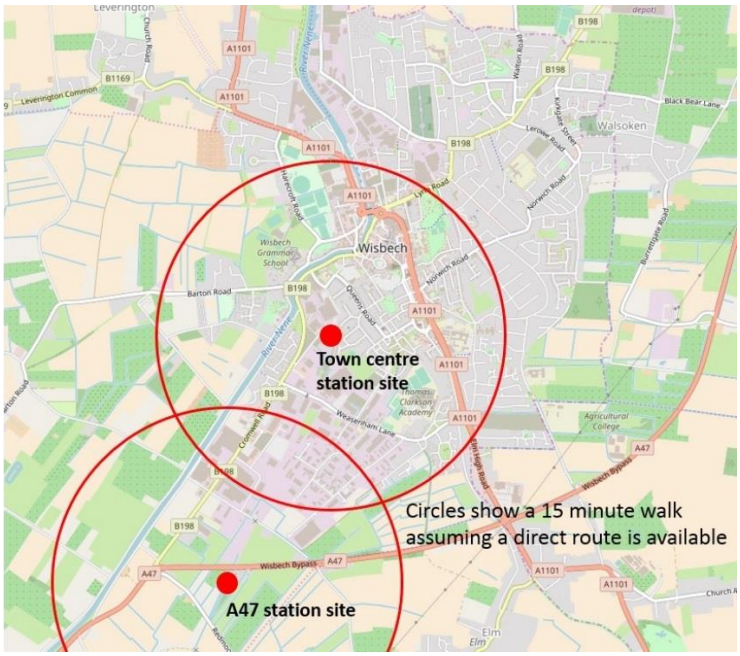
The Wisbech southern access study published in 2017 showed a fundamental lack of insight into the importance of carefully planning the site of a station.

The Wisbechrail Consultative Group asked through a press release that the local population should not be "short changed" on the location of the site of a new Wisbech railway station as railway stations are the beating heart of urban regeneration.

The best business case recommends a town centre site but the Fenland District Council consultation held in autumn 2017 suggested a site south of the A47 bypass where the railway crosses the road. This is 2 miles from the town centre. The inferred reason was to allow the construction of a series of new roads crossing the rail line to the north of the level crossing to a development site.

We say this site would not achieve most of the benefits of a town centre station that the railway will bring to the Wisbech.

Figure 5: A station at the A47 would be roundly 2 miles from the town centre. This map clearly shows how far most people would walk within 15 minutes



What are the benefits of a town centre station?

The map says it all.

- Many residents could walk to the station within 15 minutes.
- All residents could cycle to it if they so wished well within 15 minutes.
- Car owners could leave their cars at home. Everybody in the town would benefit. Social inclusion benefits would be widespread.
- Visitors to the town would be within 5 minutes' walk of the iconic Georgian centre with its retail, businesses.

An out of town station simply will not provide a full range of benefits to the town's people and their built environment.

The business case of the railway restoration shows a high benefit cost ratio (BCR) of 4.41.

- It says unemployment will be alleviated, house prices will be positively impacted, local development will be improved.
- The area around the town centre station site would enable housing, workshops for business and the general regeneration of the town centre.
- Startups more than likely linked to IT industries along the rail corridor to Cambridge.

Paul Webster, operations manager for the Association of Community Rail Partnerships summarises it thus*: 'Every railway station has a unique role to play and not just at the point passengers access the railway network. Many ... have also become places where the local community has reconnected to its railway station developing cafes including for people with learning difficulties, art venues and shared meeting spaces.*

These hubs provide a vital space for the local community and enhance the travelling experience for passengers.'

Stephen Joseph of the Campaign for Better Transport adds *"Well-run rail services help cut carbon, improve air quality, support local economies and can make stations a hub for the community. While franchise competitions are rightly judged primarily on timetabling, fleet and performance, the wider benefits from rail are significant and need to be given proper consideration. We need to move to how franchising can actively support objectives like a low carbon economy, integrated public transport, air quality targets and sustainable housing growth."*

Stations: a sense of place and a place to be

Wisbech station siting presents a blank piece of paper onto which to establish a whole new "station quarter" which will clearly show the benefits the railway has brought.

The importance of stations has been recognised in the government's housing white paper which cites railway stations as key anchors for the next generation of urban housing developments.

As the UK's population grows and urbanisation continues at a pace, they are at the epicentre of growth and regeneration and destinations in their own for shopping, working and socialising.

The latest National Rail passenger satisfaction scores reinforces how station regeneration quickly translates into not just improved passenger experience but improved communities.

So a gateway to Wisbech that us leads quickly to the wonderful historic townscape or a dreary 2 miles out of town?

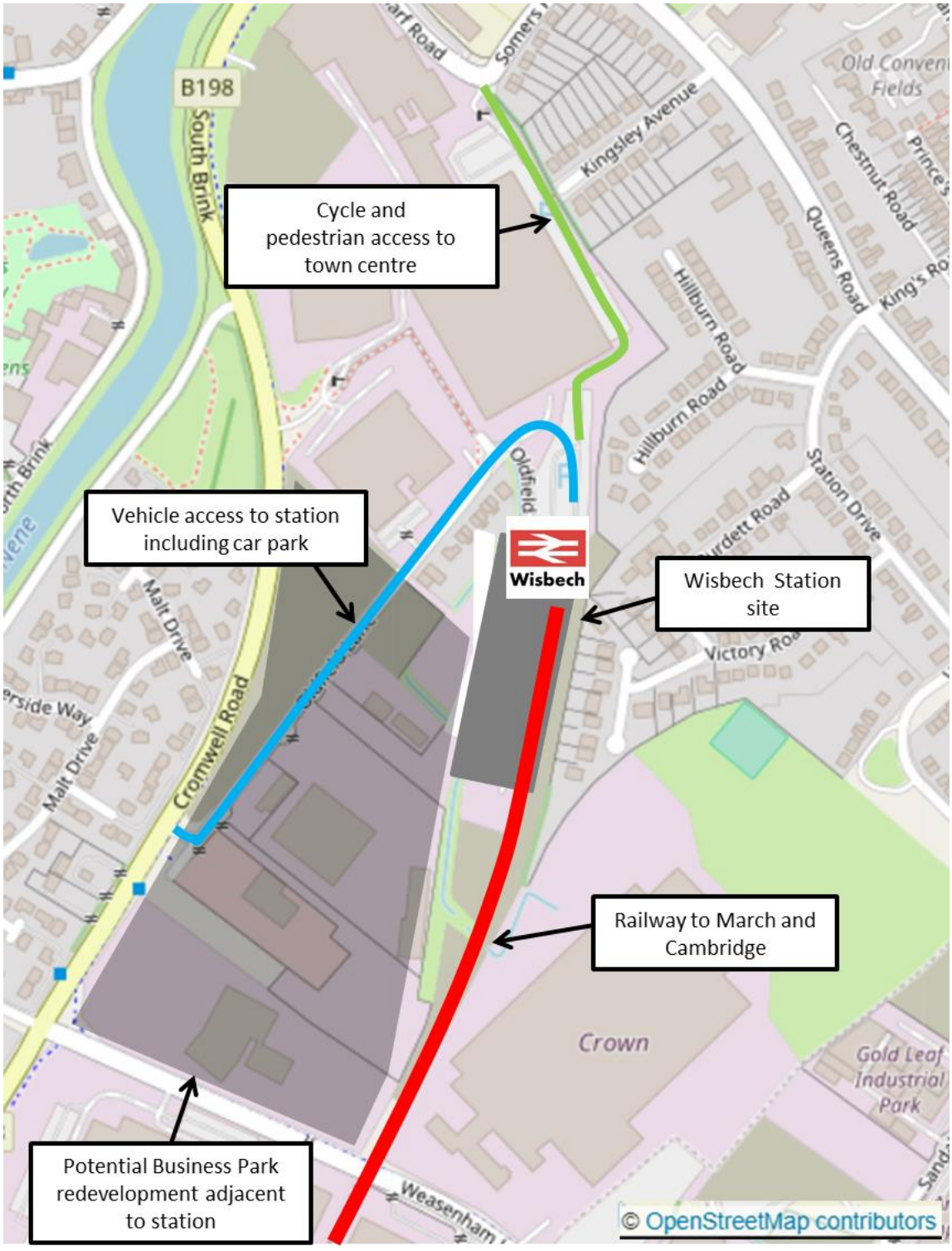
We say:

- It must be sited where we can all walk to and from, cycle to and from as well as drive if we wish.
- It must be accessible to all and be totally socially inclusive.

Stations drive job creation and the innovative use of existing space can unlock land previously thought to be inaccessible.

Today, the impact of stations goes far beyond architecture and aesthetics – stations can genuinely transform local economies and communities.

Figure 6: Potential site for a Wisbech town centre station



(Rail line shown is all on land in Network Rail ownership)

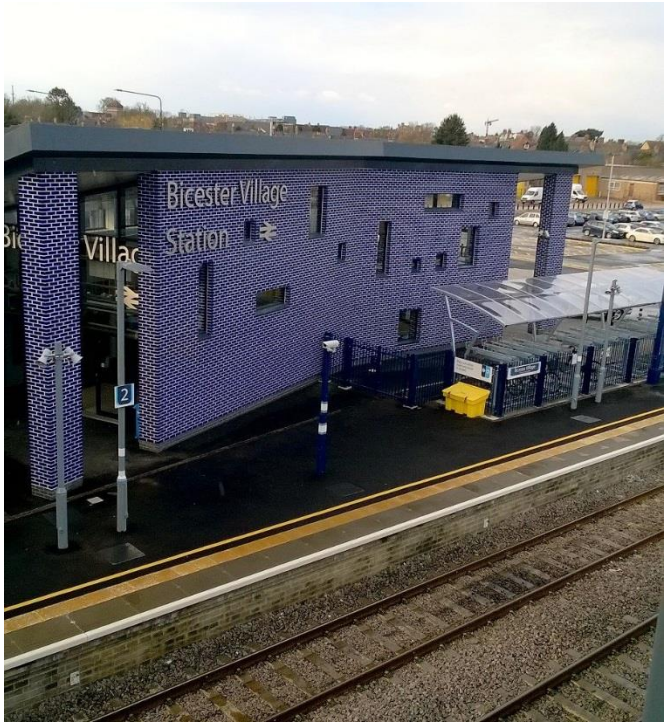
This area of the town lies within a few minutes' walk of the town centre and the icon is South Brink. The adjacent station could be the catalyst for a high quality mixed redevelopment that could include new housing, a science park linked back to that in Cambridge as well other land uses.

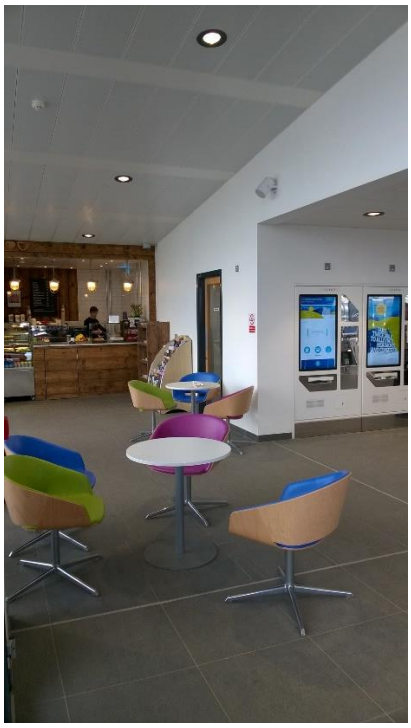
Figure 7: Dorchester in Dorset, is smaller than Wisbech in that it has a population of about 19,000 people. The main railway station is a short walk to the historic town centre. The former large industrial site between the two has been redeveloped centring on the station that complements and provides a link to the thriving main shopping street

Photo: CZWG Architects, London – Dorchester Brewery Masterplan

Photo: Philip Bisatt

Figures 8a and 8b. A recent small station development e.g. Bicester Village. Bicester is a successful fast-growing town between Oxford and Milton Keynes and Banbury and London. It has two stations one of which is a recent reopening. Bicester "Village" Station. ("Village" after a nearby shopping complex.) A new station need not necessarily be grand but can be a building that reflects well on its surroundings.





Photos: Peter Wakefield

Wisbechrail will be an enabler to

- Improve transport connectivity for Wisbech and Cambridgeshire
- Enhance the quality of life of Wisbech and Cambridgeshire
- Improve local, regional and national transport opportunities
- Bring about sustainable large housing developments
- Enable the development of a mixed economy for Wisbech and help Cambridgeshire and Peterborough meet the challenge from the Government to grow the economy in general.
- Improve safety and security that includes a green wheel of safe cycleways and pathways to all parts of Wisbech to the station/ local transport hub.
- A reduction of transport's contribution to climate change and improve resilience.

These can only be optimised by building the railway back to a town centre station.

After 50 years the town must not be short changed on the location of the site of a new Wisbech railway station.

Freight

The current agricultural processing industries of Wisbech are international in scale. As well as huge quantities of locally and regionally grown produce there is a large amount of raw material imported. All is carried to and from the factories by road vehicle. Much of the finished product goes to the multi-company rail served warehousing complexes in the West Midlands from the well-established large warehousing and logistics industry in and around Wisbech.

Informal studies conducted through Wisbech 2020 have indicated that major companies would transfer train-loads amount of freight to rail if the railway is restored to Wisbech. One large company says it has 600 tonnes of goods a day that could use rail and another it has enough imported fruit via a major port in the south of England on a weekly basis that could fill a weekly intermodal freight train.

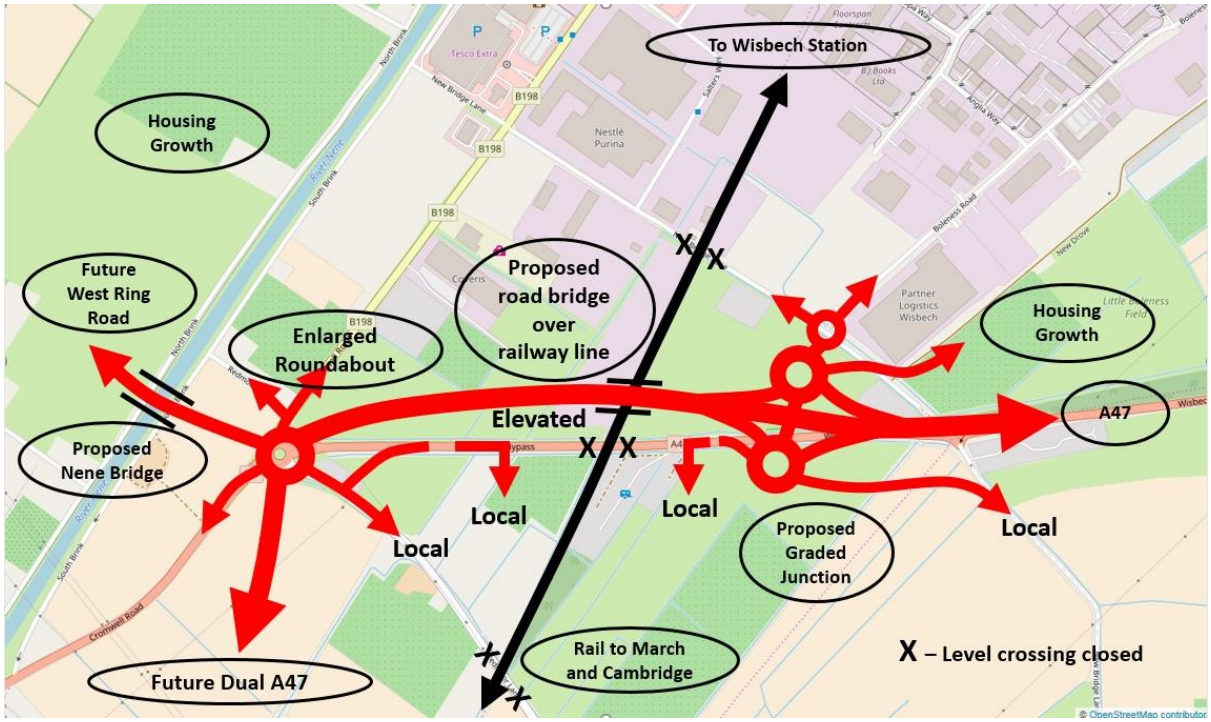
A Wisbech freight terminal site should be identified. From a railfreight point of view it will need to be able to accommodate siding(s) that could take a standard 700m intermodal train or allow one train to be split into two 350m sections alongside hard standing for reach stackers, container storage and HGVs. The siding should be developed as open access and be the centre of a new warehousing distribution zone. This could eventually provide much new wealth and employment opportunity.

A47 bypass crossing

The A47 Wisbech bypass is a standard two-lane highway. Currently it forms a southern boundary to much of Wisbech. It was opened in 1986 and crosses the 1847 Wisbech-March railway at grade. This was an “open” level crossing protected by flashing lights operated by the passage of the trains. Although the crossing has “grandfather” rights in that train operated stop lights with barriers could be installed it is reasonable to assume that the crossing will have to be replaced by an over bridge in the medium to longer term. Normally such a crossing by bridge is provided by the newcomer, that is by the road operator in this case.

The diagram below shows how a bridge over the railway could be extended to provide a grade separated entry to the lands proposed for new housing and industrial development proposed in the Local Plan to the south of Wisbech. The route is indicative as the final route if the A47 improvements from Guyhirn and the Wisbech Bypass have not been finally agreed.

Figure 9: – An Integrated Rail and Road Infrastructure Gateway proposal for Wisbech



The sketch diagram has been drawn to illustrate the following key points and to highlight an opportunity for further consideration:

1. Whether drawn to the north or south of the existing A47 a integrated rail/road/bridge infrastructure proposal could provide an ambitious 'gateway' and open up both land in the current Local Plan and potential new major growth areas.
2. It offers significantly improved access to the existing industrial estate (via Boleness Rd and a grade-separated A47 junction). This would provide direct access for HGV's onto the A47 and graded to reduce the impact of slow moving vehicles.
3. It enables the proposed Wisbech railway station to be located as close as possible to the town centre.
4. Three existing level crossings can be closed.
5. A separate Southern Access Road is not required.
6. It opens up land for housing, commercial and industrial purposes in one single integrated scheme thereby minimising timescales for growth delivery.
7. The offline design enables rapid construction and minimises temporary works while providing for significant contract efficiencies.
8. Garden town growth aspirations to the West of the town (via a new bridge over the Nene) can commence.
9. The proposal fits with wider plan to dual the A47 and provide much improved access to the town.
10. It demonstrates our level of ambition for regeneration and economic transformation, transport connectivity and all in the shortest timeframe.

How to achieve Wisbech Rail in an affordable way

The Network Rail Anglia Route Sectional Appendix (dated 3rd March 2018) describes the line as '*Line out of use (temporarily) from 86m 18ch to Wisbech*' in 'railway speak it is 'mothballed'. For reference, 86.m 18ch is where the line into Whitemoor Yard diverges from the Wisbech branch; the 'End of Line' is shown at 96m 60ch – in the area where the proposed station is to be sited. The line is part of Network Rail's 'Regulated Asset Base' and they are paid an annual sum for the line's maintenance through the Freight Network Fixed Charge in order that it could be brought back into use as it was when the last freight train ran. That is, as a 25mph maximum speed, un-signalled (beyond the entry/exit point at March) line capable of handling heavy freight trains and locomotives.

The line is not unique in respect of being mothballed and, in reality, no one expects Network Rail to waste money on unnecessary maintenance of unused facilities, except where safety is an issue. However, because the line has, nominally, been in receipt of a maintenance budget there is an associated liability/obligation on Network Rail for its refurbishment prior to being brought back into use.

The Wisbechrail proposal is for a passenger railway using modern multiple units with a much lighter axle loading than heavy freight trains. Network Rail may argue that this is outside their obligation to the line but this is not the case on several aspects of the work associated with refurbishment of the line.

1. **Natural vegetation growth** – Network Rail has an obligation to clear back to operational standards
2. **Fencing** – Network Rail to ensure this is to the standard required for a 25mph freight railway. If there is a higher standard for a 55mph/60mph passenger railway (unlikely) only the difference in cost between the freight and passenger standards falls to the Wisbechrail scheme.
3. **Drainage** – Network Rail to ensure that it is to operational standards. What is suitable for a heavy freight train at 25mph should be adequate for a lighter axle load passenger train.
4. **Bridges** – Network Rail to ensure they are to operational standards. If there is a structural difference between slow moving heavy freight and a fast passenger multiple unit, only the difference in cost falls to Wisbechrail.
5. **Track** – on visual inspection the sleepers and rails are life-expired. Complete relaying is required. The ballast, steel sleepers and rail for heavy freight will suffice for a multiple unit, 55mph/60mph passenger service. If Network Rail choose to use surplus/reclaimed materials stored in Whitemoor Yard that would be a reasonable decision if an agreed asset life can be reached. No cost for the relaying should fall to Wisbechrail unless a new piece of infrastructure was proposed – e.g a passing loop between March and Wisbech. The line was originally double track and may, one day, revert to that state. Track replacement should be done in such a way as not to inhibit future double tracking and/or electrification.

6. **Signalling** – will need to be upgraded from freight standards to those for passenger trains on the branch's entry/exit point at March. This should not involve any new cabling but the cost will fall to Wisbechrail. For a frequency of one train per hour (1tph) no signalling will be needed elsewhere on the branch and it may be possible to accommodate 2tph without signalling. NR cannot impose a full re-signalling scheme on Wisbechrail.
7. **Level Crossings** – Consistent with most of Fenland, all the rail/road crossings between March (Whitemoor Junction) and Wisbech are by level crossings. They remain broadly as they were when the last freight train ran. The road traffic control measures range from simply flashing lights (A47) through Automatic Half Barrier crossings to old style wooden gates which, in the latter days, were worked by the train driver and guard. There are seven public crossings and four 'accommodation' (farm) crossings. There is nothing illegal about reinstating level crossings but it is important that the safest, practical type of crossing is used – safe for the rail user and safe for the road user. Cost is important but not the key driver of what is to be used. In each instance between March and Wisbech sight lines are good – a straight, level railway line with straight, level road approaches – and therefore the case for like-for-like replacement seems strong. However, that would ignore the advances which have been made in automated level crossing technology. Thus, the practical mix of crossing types for the line is likely to be an Automatic Open Crossing Locally Monitored + Barriers (AOCL+B) at locations where there is a low pedestrian involvement. These are proven technology and a type widely recognised by road users. The maximum rail speed across this type of crossing is 55mph which will be adequate for up to two trains per hour. For locations where it was considered that there was a need for greater protection between rail and road (Coldham and Weasenham Lane) the more recent, proven Automatic Full Barrier Crossing Locally Monitored (AFBCL) would be the most suitable replacement for a fully gated crossing. This type would also be introduced on the A47 Wisbech by-pass crossing where just having flashing lights is wholly unacceptable. Both types of proposed crossing are the modern equivalents of what was in use when the final freight service ran and are therefore, arguably, the responsibility of network rail to fund. The existing arrangements would remain at the farm crossings. Whilst, Network Rail's objective is to eliminate level crossings wherever it is reasonably practical to do so, this should not be a constraint on the Wisbechrail scheme. The long-term future for all the level crossings will be driven by packages of developments (e.g. A47 dualling) as and when they arise.

   In terms of Wisbechrail project costs, the attributable sums will be derived from bringing all the crossings up to current, allowable passenger standard from what exists (in theory) now. Any risk assessment process should involve Wisbechrail and recognise that level crossings are a common feature in Fenland and widely recognised by road users.

8. **A47 Crossing** – we do need to find and see a copy of the wayleave which British Rail will have granted to the Highways Agency (HA) when the line was built. The obligation for a road bridge over the railway probably lies with the HA and, as a result, they may accept an appropriate barriered level crossing as a reasonable alternative until plans for upgrading the A47 are more clear. If the alignment of the A47 is to change as a part of the dualling proposals, spending £5m+ on a short-lived road bridge would be a costly error.

Refurbishing the Line – Process and Management

Rail engineering contractors, generally, have the difficult task of fitting their activities around the operational railway. This often necessitates short hours of access at night or restrictive working in 'safe zones' adjacent to the running lines. The exceptions are the 'big bang' events when the area for reconstruction is closed for a period of weeks and the engineers given total occupation, as happened at London Waterloo in the summer of 2017.

Refurbishing March – Wisbech actually falls into the 'big bang category inasmuch that the contractor will have uninterrupted access to the railway and be able to plan the work around other, time-sensitive contracts. These two factors should result in competitively priced tenders. Indeed, what is required fits perfectly with the proposals made in the Hansford Report whereby schemes of this nature are progressed locally (to Network Rail standards, of course) by the contractor on a design, build, snag and handover basis. However, neither a maintenance obligation nor an Asset Protection Agreement should not be a part of the 'package' handed to Network Rail. No contractor will take on the such a project with a long-term maintenance obligation hanging over them. Thus, the completion process has to be snagging in conjunction with Network Rail and then hand over. This is very much a case of value engineering.

In the section relating to Network Rail's obligations with regard to the line's refurbishment, there are arguments for which costs fall to them. If the refurbishment is carried out through a design and build contract each aspect would be priced separately so that Network Rail could see that it was not being charged for works which are not its responsibility. Network Rail must not be given the opportunity the cherry pick parts of the work. Commissioning the work could be the responsibility of Network Rail, the Combined Authority or Cambridgeshire CC but the schedule for the commissioning the contract will be led by the Wisbech Rail Consultative Group working with key partners.

However, and this is important, the work to bring the signalling up to passenger standards at the March end of the line may need to be undertaken by Network Rail because of the interface with the operational railway. This might include restoring track through platform 3 at March.

In summary we recognise that the route has to be upgraded to modern standards. The track will need replacing, the level crossings modernised or suppressed. However, the project must be affordable and thus costs must be minimised in some areas by undertaking to phase NR Group standards at times when finance is available. A common-sense approach will allow early opening of the route. The mantra must be the greater good (for Wisbech and Cambridgeshire) rather than the application of standards that do not apply to the operating railway elsewhere even on railways nearby that will always be vastly busier.

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