

**PLANNING, REGENERATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE PORTFOLIO HOLDER
DECISION – 2 SEPTEMBER 2022**

RESPONSE TO WATERSIDE RAIL CONSULTATION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to agree a Council response to Networks Rail's consultation on '[Reintroducing passenger services on the Waterside Line](#)', closing on 9 September 2022.
- 1.2 The NFDC response needs to take into account that this public consultation is taking place at a relatively early stage in the process with much of the important technical detail still to follow. The Council, in its role as planning authority, has been and will continue to play a role within the stakeholder advisory group and in parallel provide advice on the Environmental Impact Assessment and the need for planning permission.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Waterside Line is located on the western banks of Southampton Water and once connected Totton and the settlements of Marchwood, Dibden and Hythe.
- 2.2 The line opened for passenger services in 1925 but these were relatively short-lived. One of the line's four stations closed in 1965, followed by the other three in February 1966, as part of the 'Beeching cuts' which saw many of Britain's railways close to reduce operating costs.
- 2.3 While passenger services ended after just 40 years, transport of crude oil to Fawley oil refinery ceased in 2016, freight services still use the line.
- 2.4 In February 2020, the government launched the 'Restoring Your Railway' initiative, a £500 million programme to enable opportunities to reopen former passenger railway lines and add new stations to the railway. Following an initial exploration of opportunities by Hampshire County Council, further funding was given by the Department of Transport to developing proposals and preparing a Full Business Case to fully understand the environmental impact of reopening the passenger line on local communities and the physical and natural environment and any mitigation to address both construction and operational effects of re-opening the passenger line.
- 2.5 The technical detail to follow will inform the preparation of the Full Business Case by early 2023. The project has passed through the preliminary stages of the government 'Green Book' process for project appraisal. The Green Book process seeks to ensure the project fits with government objectives, provides value for money and optimal public benefit, and to confirm that it is affordable, commercially viable and can be funded and delivered. The Business Case is the culmination of a Green Book process, but not a full technical design of the project and all its details.
- 2.6 It is indicated that the Department for Transport would review the business case and make a funding decision by mid-2023. If funding is agreed, the next stage would be to secure the various consents and any land powers needed to deliver the project.
- 2.7 The primary consultation aim appears to be informing and seeking views from local communities, supported by nine community consultation events in the Waterside area.

The consultation survey asks the following high-level questions:

- Do you agree that the proposals will provide an improved transport offering for the Waterside area?
- Would you use a train service which operated between Hythe, Marchwood, Totton and Southampton?
- Which Hythe station location do you prefer?
- Do you have any other comments or concerns on the proposals?

3. CONSULTATION PROPOSALS

3.1 The proposal is to re-open the Waterside rail line to passenger services between Southampton Central and Marchwood and Hythe via Totton. Two rail passenger services per hour would operate on the line in each direction (potentially fewer off-peak). Line and signal upgrades would support a 60mph service providing a 20-minute journey time from Hythe to Southampton Central using a 2 or 3 car diesel train.

3.2 The consultation focuses on selected physical/construction elements. The main proposals are

Reopening of Marchwood station

- Lengthening the station's platform and potentially adding a second platform
- Refurbishing the station and upgrading station facilities for safe operation
- The provision of a new station forecourt, cycle parking facilities and connections for onward travel

A new Hythe Station

- Constructing a new railway station in Hythe town with associated facilities
- The provision of a new station forecourt, cycle parking facilities and connections for onward travel

Level crossing upgrades

- Upgrade of several level crossings
- Exploring the potential closure of level crossings on private land, subject to further landowner discussions

Hythe Station

Two locations for the Hythe Station are under consideration:

- Between Jones Lane and School Road (no changes to School Road level crossing as it would be after the terminus with no new rail traffic); or
- Behind New Road car park, upgrading School Road level crossing to a full barrier.

3.3 The eight other level crossings on the route will undergo a risk assessment. The Consultation FAQs state as follows: "We believe the most effective way of reducing level crossing risk is to eliminate the crossing completely by closing it. Where we cannot do this, we will look at options to make the crossing safer." Private landowner crossings appear to be at higher risk of closure, to be discussed with landowners.

3.4 The service frequency proposed means that crossing barriers could be down for up to four times per hour, and that this would mean that the roads near the level crossings would be busier. The project Environmental Impact Assessment work will include a transport assessment which would explore potential mitigation measures where

needed, in consultation with Hampshire County Council and NFDC as planning authority and the NPA.

4. FINANCIAL AND CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 At this stage the project is not at an advanced enough stage to understand whether there are any financial implications. Careful consideration will need to be given to how crime is designed out in a new station at Hythe.

5. CONCLUSIONS INCLUDING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS, EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Taking a strategic view a new rail service could offer very significant public, economic, environmental and climate change benefits. It would offer a more sustainable alternative to car transport for Waterside communities, helping to 'level up' a relatively deprived part of the district by providing improved access to facilities, services and employment opportunities in the wider Solent area. It would also benefit local employers by improving labour market access in a period of growth following Solent Freeport designation. However, this needs to be considered in a context of other sustainable transport across the Waterside including buses, the Hythe ferry and cycling and walking networks. The benefits identified would not be released if the project would impact of the viability of other sustainable transport. It will be demonstrated through the more detailed work whether the Passenger line can re-open without a negative impact on the environment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Council is recommended to:
- a) Express support in principle for Waterside Rail re-opening subject to the technical work that will inform the Business Case demonstrating the impact on the environment and communities together with how any negative impact can be mitigated;
 - b) Encourage Network Rail to explore all reasonable scheme design refinements and mitigation mechanisms to minimise community severance, local traffic congestion, amenity disturbance to residents and businesses and any environmental impacts; and
 - c) Welcome this opportunity for the wider community to comment on the proposals at a relatively early stage, and to encourage residents and businesses to express their views.

7. PORTFOLIO HOLDER ENDORSEMENT

I have agreed to the recommendation of this report.

Sign: Cllr Diane Andrews

Date: 2 September 2022

For further information contact:

Mark Williams
Local Plan Lead
023 8028 5475
mark.williams@nfdc.gov.uk

Claire Upton-Brown
Executive Head Planning, Regeneration and
Economy
claire.upton-brown@NFDC.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Consultation - [Seeking your views about Reintroducing passenger services on the Waterside Line - Network Rail - Citizen Space](#)

Date on which notice given of this Decision – 2 September 2022
Last date for call in – 9 September 2022