

## RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item No. 8

meeting date: 1 FEBRUARY 2018  
title: RAIL SERVICES IN RIBBLE VALLEY  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
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### 1. PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the Council's response to the proposed closure by Lancashire County Council (LCC) of the Clitheroe Rail Interchange and also to set out possible next steps in investigating developing rail services to Yorkshire and enhancing current services to Blackburn and Manchester.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's priorities:

- The matters covered in this report will contribute to sustaining a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley through the improvement of its infrastructure and to protecting and enhancing the area's environmental quality.
- Corporate Priorities – The document that is the subject of this report relates to
- Council Priority 2 to seek to improve the transport network.

1.2 This report deals with two related issues, firstly the Council's position regarding the recently announced LCC cabinet report recommending its withdrawal of financial support for the Clitheroe Interchange facility based at the railway station. Secondly it outlines the possible issues involved, and potential next steps towards, developing rail services towards Hellifield and then on to Leeds and Lancaster and also the further enhancement of existing services to Blackburn and Manchester.

### 2 BACKGROUND TO CLITHEROE INTERCHANGE

2.1 Lancashire County Council (LCC) currently supports the provision of travel information and train tickets through its Interchange facility based at Clitheroe rail station. It considers that, due to wider budgetary issues, it can no longer support this facility and the staff who provide the service. A report was recently taken to LCC cabinet proposing its closure and announcing a public consultation be held on the proposal before any final decision. No dates for this consultation have yet been set.

2.2 Officers are currently investigating with LCC, Northern Rail, (who are the local Train Operating Company (TOC)), Ribble Valley Rail and other bodies, who are all members of the Community Rail Partnership, possible ways to retain this service. Initial discussions have led to the on-going collection of available evidence from a variety of sources to better understand the overall value of the Interchange preparatory to a detailed consultation response. In addition to this evidence gathering RVBC could then explore the various interested parties' future positions on the Interchange's future and any potential support that they could offer to its retention. A meeting to discuss the

evidence and discuss future possible positions will be held towards the end of January. It is hoped that both these will then feed into a detailed consultation response. An update on the outcome of the meeting will be given to members at committee.

- 2.3 Given that the formal LCC public consultation has yet to begin officers have been advised by contacts at LCC to send a preliminary holding response to LCC to indicate the Council's concerns on this matter. Consequently, a holding response advising that the Council has some concerns regarding the proposed closure and will be reviewing the matter in more detail will be sent to LCC by the 19<sup>th</sup> January deadline. Members will be able to consider the formal response in the forthcoming consultation process, details of which are awaited.

#### NEW SERVICES TOWARDS HELLIFIELD

- 2.4 RVBC officers have held initial discussions with rail specialist based at LCC to better understand the issues involved in developing future rail services from Clitheroe towards Hellifield and thence to Leeds and Lancaster, including building new rail stations at Chatburn, Gisburn and elsewhere and some associated parking.
- 2.5 The economics of developing services along this section of line were investigated in some detail within research associated with the new rail franchise let to Northern Rail and our advice is that this research found such services would not be economic and therefore such provision was not included within the franchise. Should it be decided to investigate further providing a service this would have to be as a separate contract with Northern Rail outside the current franchise, at least until a new franchise is let in 2023-4. Current budgetary constraints at LCC make it extremely unlikely that they would be able to offer any financial support to such a stand-alone project. It is also unclear which other bodies would consider funding and it may be that RVBC would be required to sponsor any additional services for a minimum of three years. This sponsorship could, given recent examples of such arrangements in the wider locality, require significant financial outlay.
- 2.6 Before any approaches to Northern Rail and any other bodies could be made an initial business case, examining such matters as detailed demand, likely rolling stock provision and other matters would need to be put together and this would require specialist consultancy input. It is also likely that any initial studies may require further subsequent detailed studies before any final case could be made. This process is also likely, we are advised, to take a significant amount of time.
- 2.7 In addition to the development of new services on the existing line officers also explored the provision of new stations at both Chatburn and Gisburn, the sites of which are currently protected through the Core Strategy, and Newsholme and Rimington. Initial views were that any new station provision, which would be through Network Rail and to their standards, would not happen without the realistic commitment to significant housing and economic growth in any particular area and would require significant funding (initial indications are of over £2 to £3 million per station) and again, such a process would be over a significant period of time. Specialist consultancy work would again be required to investigate any likely advantages of park and ride facilities associated with such stations, potentially drawing patronage from wider catchments.

### 3. ENHANCED SERVICES TO BLACKBURN AND MANCHESTER

- 3.1 Rail traffic towards Blackburn and wider areas from and to Clitheroe is healthy (284,000 passengers in 2016 –17) and has recovered from delays in recent years associated with improvement works on the line between Blackburn and Bolton which has enabled regular half hourly services from Blackburn to Manchester to be established after several years of detailed work. It should also be borne in mind that numbers are likely to grow further as new committed housing development in the Clitheroe and wider area is built out.
- 3.2 Initial discussions indicate that there may be more support for an extension of the current half hourly Blackburn to Manchester service through to Clitheroe, with possible additions of late services to allow Ribble Valley users to use public transport to access late night events in Manchester, than for services towards Hellifield. This would build on current services and evidence that already exists, and was recognised within, the current franchise, such as likely increased patronage, unlike the Hellifield issue discussed above. In addition the new Northern Rail franchise will bring with it an enhanced timetable and newer rolling stock in longer train combinations. This also offers some relief as some local services suffer from overcrowding and acknowledges to a degree the likely increases in patronage mentioned above. To pursue such an idea would still require RVBC to fund initial specialist research to establish a business case.
- 3.3 The issue of ticketless travel on Ribble Valley trains leading to revenue losses and an under-reporting of actual patronage figures was also discussed. This matter has also been raised at Community Rail Partnership level with Northern Rail. Our advice is that, with the new franchise will come new technology, including Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) and online and mobile phone apps which will make it more difficult to avoid payment, in addition to the current guard staff and regular revenue protection blockades and automated gates at many stations. It is considered that this will become a diminishing issue, especially when it is considered by rail specialists that the vast majority of current passengers do buy tickets.

### 4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 In relation to the Interchange issue, following the despatch of the holding response on 19 January and the late January meeting between officers and other parties mentioned in 2.1 and 2.2 it is suggested that the outcomes be reported to members in preparation for a more detailed and evidenced RVBC consultation response to LCC when the actual consultation dates become clearer.
- 4.2 With regard to the proposals more enhanced services towards Hellifield and Blackburn/ Manchester mentioned in 2.4 to 2.7 and 3.1 to 3.3 it is suggested that a useful way forward would be through a more detailed member briefing by LCC rail specialists and representatives of Northern Rail. We have been advised that this can be put in place quickly if members wish.

### 5 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – No direct in house staff and other in house resources will be required at this stage.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None
- Political – No direct political implications
- Reputation – It is important that the Council
- Equality & Diversity – No implications identified

## 6 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

6.1 Approve officers to take forward the suggestions laid out in section 4 of this report. .

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