

Rail Improvements Task Group

The report of the Rail Improvements Task Group was produced in March 2010. The report considered a number of schemes proposed around Lancashire to improve the rail network in a variety of ways.

The task group considered eight major schemes, taking into account a wealth of evidence about the costs and benefits, and receiving presentations from supporters of each scheme. The task group's conclusion was that the schemes should be divided into three categories: those which the County Council should take a lead on; those which the county council should identify as a priority for further development work; and those which the county council should monitor but not actively engage in.

A full list of schemes and categories is as follows:

County Council Lead

- Todmorden Curves

Priority for development

- Burscough Curves
- Skelmersdale Link
- Poulton to Fleetwood
- South Fylde
- Clitheroe / Blackburn to Manchester

Monitor, but not actively engage

- Colne to Skipton
- Rawtenstall to Bury and Manchester

Full details of all of the schemes, and the reasoning for the task group's conclusions, can be found in the original report.

A review and update took place in February 2011. The task group agreed that the categorisation of the schemes should remain the same, but that certain potential developments made a further review necessary. This report takes into account those updates.

Todmorden Curve

Good progress has been made with this scheme, with a successful bid to the Government's Regional Growth Fund made by Burnley Borough Council announced in October 2011, subject to Due Diligence. Network Rail was now progressing with the detailed design work for the scheme, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. At this point final costs will be known.

A key issue remains in relation to revenue funding. The Government has confirmed that the previous arrangements for revenue funding will remain in place, that is that it will be the promoting councils who will have to meet any revenue deficit in the first three years. At that point, the Government will take over that funding, provided the benefit to cost ratio is sufficient high – over 1.5 for full government funding. Work is underway between local authorities to fully understand the likely costs and risks that this will bring.

The target date for the scheme is 2014, which will link the scheme into wider developments around Manchester and the Refranchising of the franchise currently held by Northern Rail. Another factor is that work going on with the electrification of the “Lancashire Triangle” should mean that there are more diesel units available, a significant factor given ongoing shortages or rolling stock.

Skelmersdale Rail Link

Studies have shown that significant benefits would be gained from this scheme. However, the costs of the scheme would also be very high. Work is underway by Merseytravel to compare their findings with those of Network Rail, whose high level study suggested a stronger case. The scheme remains a longer term priority for the council, although the issue of the high cost is crucial.

Work is ongoing with West Lancashire BC to ensure that this is linked in with Skelmersdale Town Centre development, and that the potential for this rail link remains part of the plans. Consideration is also being given to park and ride schemes near the motorways. The task group were keen to ensure that momentum was maintained, and that the wider benefits were fully considered in any analysis.

Poulton to Fleetwood

A Network Rail study is underway, funded jointly by Wyre BC and Lancashire CC, looking at how a heritage service could be accommodated. There are some possible concerns about how such a service could link in with the rest of the network, and whether this might require a third platform at Poulton. The impact of electrification will also need to be considered.

Burscough Curves

A recent study by Merseytravel has found that there is presently no viable business case for restoring either the north or south curves. This conclusion concurs with a number of previous studies, although it is still the intention to review this from time to time should there be a change in circumstances.

Clitheroe / Blackburn to Manchester

This scheme is being taken forward by Blackburn with Darwen, and involves a number of different issues. Platforms have now been lengthened at Clitheroe,

allowing greater capacity, if not greater frequency. Double tracking south of Darwen and upgrading the level crossing at Turton are also part of the scheme.

The business case is being developed, looking especially at the economic benefits to Blackburn itself, and there has been a debate in Parliament on the scheme, which has had some favourable response from the government.

South Fylde Line

Blackpool Council are leading on this work, using European Funding to consider better use of the various transport links in the area. In particular, this means considering train-tram links up through Lytham St Annes to Blackpool and on towards Fleetwood. A report is due in mid-2012, which will give recommendations on where further research could most usefully be done.

Colne to Skipton

Some indications last year suggested that Balfour Beatty were giving serious consideration to this scheme. However, this does not appear to have come to pass, and it remains the case that this scheme, although well publicised and widely supported, is some distance from being a practical possibility. It is understood that SELRAP, the main body supporting this scheme are seeking funding for a business case study, but that even this would represent a significant cost owing to the many difficulties faced by the scheme.

Rawtenstall to Manchester

It is understood that the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE) have completed their study, but it has not yet been released. The County Council will continue to seek a copy of the work in order to inform its work on both rail and bus transport in the area.

Other issues

In considering developments in these particular schemes, a number of core themes were identified by the task group.

1. Electrification. The electrification of the “Lancashire Triangle” may open up significant opportunities for improved rail services in Lancashire, both directly to those areas and stations served and more widely in, for example, the availability of diesel rolling stock.
2. Rolling Stock. The availability of rolling stock will very likely remain an issue. Although some will become available through electrification, there is the likelihood that 2019 will see a number of trains being taken out of service due to the new Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations. It will be essential for Lancashire to continue to ensure its needs are recognised.
3. McNulty report. The Government’s response to the McNulty “Rail Value for Money” Report is due shortly. The report concluded that efficiency savings of

30% could be found in the operation of the rail network. One of the opportunities this could bring may be for more local control of local services, and this is expected to form part of the consultation the government will launch. This presents great opportunities for local government, although the high financial cost of rail means that this would not be without significant risk.

4. Local Enterprise Partnership. The task group is keen to ensure that the schemes it has considered continue to be supported and promoted by the council in accordance with its original priorities. In addition, the link between the economic development of Lancashire and the transport network is recognised as crucial, and the task group is therefore keen to see the rail improvement schemes continue to feature highly in the work of the Lancashire LEP.

Recommendations:

That

- i. the schemes remain in the categories originally agreed and the positive progress to date is noted
- ii. Lancashire County Council continue to play an active role in the development and promotion of rail schemes in the county in accordance with the priorities set by the task group
- iii. the importance of rail improvements continue to be part of the work of the LEP
- iv. Lancashire County Council continues to seek investment in the rail network in Lancashire, including via a response to the forthcoming government consultation based on the McNulty Report and as electrification of the Lancashire Triangle is progressed.
- v. That the task group work is complete and no further meetings are required

February 2012