

ANNEX C

LIGHT-RAIL OPTIONS FOR THE YORK-SCARBOROUGH LINE

Council officers have been asked to investigate the feasibility of introducing light rail options onto the York-Scarborough line, serving new destinations including York Hospital, Haxby and Strensall.

Existing examples

One company, Parry People Movers, has been at the forefront of developing light rail vehicles for use on existing heavy rail in the United Kingdom. Although there have been many trials carried out on rural lines and those with existing low frequency services, there are no systems in regular use carrying significant numbers of passengers.

There is only one location on the UK heavy rail network where it is planned to bring in the system – Stourbridge branch, operated by London Midland. This branch is self-contained and does not appear to impact on other heavy rail operations. Operation was planned to start in January 2009 but has been delayed because training and testing has yet to be completed.

The tram-train concept could bring significant benefits for York but will be many years away. The national trial announced for the Penistone line between Huddersfield, Barnsley and Sheffield will begin in 2010 and run for two years. During this time, the trial will assess the reduced costs of such a system and other benefits. Until this trial is complete, it is unlikely that any further tram train services will be considered.

Implications

One of the major barriers to bringing light rail to York will be approval by the Department for Transport. Initial comments from Network Rail officers indicate that the proposal might be prohibitively expensive given the development costs. It is likely that train operating companies – notably franchise-holders - may raise objections via the Office of Rail Regulation based on its impact on their existing operations.

Given the initial response from Network Rail, further development of the concept is probably inappropriate without strong member and external stakeholder support. Whilst light rail options do offer considerable potential benefits for York, the Council needs to be clear what its aims are for this corridor so that a full comparison can be made with other transport options (such as, but not limited to, local buses). Some of the areas that will need further investigation are as follows:

- Demand for transport along the route and likely patronage.

Population that would be served by stations at Haxby and Strensall may be sufficient to justify light rail services but analysis would be needed to identify journey destinations. Analysis would also be needed on the spread of journeys. Highest demand would obviously be during peak hours, when a single light rail vehicle may not have sufficient capacity at 170 spaces (seated and standing).

- Actual time savings in comparison to alternative modes.

Frequent light rail could feasibly offer time-savings against local bus services and, more significantly, would have better journey reliability, given that all local buses that serve the area are already affected by congestion on Clarence Street and Gillygate. Future developments, such as the Wigginton Road Park & Ride service, are likely to make congestion worse in this area. However, service frequency on light rail may be more important to consider: Depending on the number of vehicles available, people may have to wait significant periods if vehicles are full. Being rail-based and sharing space with heavy rail services, services would be subject to Network Rail's Rules of the Plan and the finite number of paths on the line, i.e. there would be no scope to enhance capacity when required during peak hours. The current journey times on local buses are as follows:

Origin	Approximate distance by rail to York Station	Local bus route number	Approximate off-peak local bus journey time to York Station
Strensall	9.5 km	5	30 minutes
Wigginton	N/a	1	40 minutes
Haxby	6.6 km	12	35 minutes

- Additional rail infrastructure required and likely capital cost

Work will be needed to establish costs of any additional permanent way and signalling and telecommunications. At present, Network Rail officers report that light rail vehicles do not interact well with normal signalling systems and need further modification. Most trials have taken place on branch lines without access to mainline routes and where light rail vehicles completely replace all other services.

- Trackside infrastructure and car parking needed.

All locations will require work to enable passengers to board and alight and other facilities as required.

- Track capacity

Further work will be necessary to investigate how light rail services will fit with the existing TransPennine timetable and the timetable after any alterations that are needed to incorporate Haxby station. Because light rail vehicles are limited to a speed of 40mph (64 km/h), this will reduce the line capacity anyway.

- Access to York Station

National Express East Coast, the station operator, will be another stakeholder that needs to be involved with the project and its plans for future development of the

station will need to be taken into account. Anecdotally, there appears to be space at platform 2 but this may be allocated to temporary storage or seasonal services. However, space may be needed for additional services, such as ticket sales.

- Passenger abstraction from local bus services

Any new service will have an adverse impact on local bus services (notably services 1 and 5), which would reduce their viability and not serve intermediate stops. First York has recently reduced the frequency of service 5, suggesting that patronage may already be falling on the service.

- Impact on local road traffic, including local buses

The York-Scarborough line still has five level crossings within the city boundary and additional rail services will increase delays on several through routes, notably on Wigginton Road and Station Road at Haxby, which are principle routes for local buses (services 1, 20 and 40) and already subject to queueing when barriers are down. At Haxby Road, traffic can already queue back to the outer ring road at peak times when the crossing is down. Level crossings are at the following locations:

- B1363 Wigginton Road
- Haxby Road (Haxby)
- Station Road (Haxby)
- York Road (Strensall)
- Princess Road (Strensall)