

Delays in providing new rail halts in the York area

A report of the Transport
Scrutiny Board

February 2003



Delays in providing additional rail halts in the York area

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Executive Summary

Background

City of York Council has been involved in a scheme to open rail halts at Haxby, Strensall and York District Hospital since 1995, but the plans have yet to reach fruition. The development of rail travel through new rail halts is a key theme of our Local Transport Plan. The transport scrutiny board decided to examine why the delays had occurred with the aim of speeding up the completion of the scheme.

Before the scrutiny board were able to conclude the Strategic Rail Authority suspended the funding which we had been preparing to bid for and so the scheme remains on hold.

Conclusions

The scrutiny board have decided to issue an interim report, whilst decisions are taken on possible future options for the scheme.

Recommendations

The scrutiny board wish to place on record our support for rail development work in York and our dismay at the suspension of Rail Passenger Partnership funding. We recommend that the Executive Member for Transport:

- continues to investigate options for progressing the North East York Rail Scheme through other funding mechanisms;
- continues to investigate other rail possibilities for York, including light rail to complement the York Central development; and
- reports back to the scrutiny board on progress with York North East Rail Scheme at 6 monthly intervals.

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Introduction

1. This report details the work of the Transport Scrutiny Board so far in investigating delays in providing additional rail halts in the York area. We include our interim conclusion and recommendations, but plan to retain an active interest in the progress of York rail schemes.

Background

2. The scrutiny topic was raised by Cllr Steve Galloway in July 2002. City of York Council (CYC) has been working since 1995 to open rail halts at several sites, but progress has been continually interrupted. The rail halts are one of the key themes of the Local Transport Plan (LTP), CYC's 5 year plan of integrated transport policies. The plans are supported across the political spectrum and there have been local campaigns since 1989 to try and achieve the stations.
3. The council's objectives for rail travel are set out in the LTP. Included in these is the North East York Rail Scheme, which involves opening stations at Haxby and Strensall to be funded by a bid to the SRA for Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) funding. The bid is for a new shuttle service between Haxby, Strensall and York. York District Hospital was originally included within the bid but will now require a separate bid due to its greater complexity and therefore cost. The initial bid was for a 20 minute peak and 40 minute off-peak clockface service (i.e. departing at regular times past the hour). This has now been scaled down to an hourly, non-clockface service (i.e. irregular departures) on the recommendation of the SRA. Although not an ideal situation, this would significantly reduce the cost of the scheme making the bid more likely to succeed. The LTP also discusses aspirations for a halt at York Business Park and the reopening of Copmanthorpe Station.

Objective

4. The objective of the scrutiny review has been:
to reduce delays in providing additional rail halts in the York area.
The full remit is attached as Annex A to this report.

Information gathered

5. Over the course of 4 public meetings we have heard the history of the scheme since 1995 and have questioned officers about the current situation. We extended invitations to Arriva Trains Northern (ATN), Network Rail (NR – formerly Railtrack) and the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) to attend our meetings to give their views on how local rail halts could be developed. Ray Price, Director of ATN attended the scrutiny board's meeting on 5th December 2002. NW and the SRA declined our invitations and instead gave written

answers to our questions. We have also invited the Secretary of State for Transport, the Rt Hon Alistair Darling, MP to attend a meeting.

6. A list of contributors and members of the board is attached as Annex B.

Findings

7. History

The table below details the history of the York North East Rail Scheme.

Aug 1999	Bid to Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR – now Department for Transport (DfT)) for the construction of Haxby and Strensall rail halts as part of the 1999 Transport Policies and Programme (TPP). Bid unsuccessful and CYC directed to the SRA to apply for RPP funding
Oct 1999	Pre-qualification bid for RPP funding submitted to the SRA and approved.
July 2001	Draft formal bid submitted to SRA. Final bid cannot be submitted as planned because timetabling, station build and safety information outstanding from Railtrack and ATN. SRA strongly recommends the bid is scaled down to an hourly service (to only use 1 train) rather than the intended 20 min peak/40 min off peak service. This means more work and alterations to the bid are required.
Dec 2001	CYC meet with ATN to discuss timetabling issues. Intention is to finalise timetabling work during Jan 2002 but due to difficulties within the company this does not happen.
Mar 2002	CYC appoint consultants to develop a revised timetable to address ATN and Railtrack concerns.
Apr 2002	CYC meeting with SRA to discuss hold ups.
Apr 2002	CYC meeting with ATN to try and get agreement to timetabling issues. CYC have responded to Railtrack's concerns and await reply.
May 2002	CYC meet with SRA to discuss refranchising issue.
June 2002	SRA host round table meeting, Railtrack fail to attend but ATN agree to bid and further obstacles clarified.
June 2002	CYC meet with Railtrack to discuss outstanding issues. Issues clarified and Railtrack are generally supportive of the bid.
July 2002	CYC meet with ATN and agree timetable.
Aug 2002	CYC appoint consultants to undertake 'performance modelling' work at the request of Railtrack.
Jan 2003	Letter from the SRA stating that RPP funding has been suspended.
Jan 2003	Laing Rail have reviewed station building costs and these are now estimated at between £2 million and £3 million per station (which represents an increase of approximately 100% since October 1999).

8. Issues

Many different issues have arisen which have contributed to the delays.

Those the scrutiny board have discussed included:

- Rolling stock shortages – the availability of trains and carriages impacts on timetabling possibilities. Earliest availability of stock was to be summer 2005.
- Scarborough Bridge – Railtrack had wanted the scheme to meet the cost of doubling the track approaching Scarborough Bridge at a cost of £3.5 million at that time. This would have meant the scheme was unlikely to meet the SRA's bidding criteria. However, following further timetabling work Railtrack now do not consider it necessary to double the track.
- Bootham Level Crossing – there are safety concerns surrounding the automatic half barriered crossing on Wigginton Road, as traffic sometimes queues back over the crossing. CYC and Network Rail are examining options to address this.
- Continually escalating costs within the rail industry.
- Problems within the rail industry.

9. Options for reducing the delays

The board considered possible options to overcome some of the difficulties.

These included:

- Using the existing Trans-Pennine service to stop at the Haxby and Strensall halts. This would address rolling stock, staffing, platform space and turnaround problems. However, officers explained that the SRA would not consider this option until the franchise had been re-awarded. ATN have just been granted an 18-month extension to their contract.
- Light rail – this would mean new rolling stock was used. However, in most places light and heavy rail do not use the same tracks (Newcastle to Sunderland is currently the only line in the UK where light and heavy rail are mixed). Light rail is currently being examined as an option for the York Central development to link with the A59 park and ride.

Responses from Rail Industry Partners

10. The board put the same set of questions to ATN, NR, the SRA and the Secretary of State for Transport. These are set out below, along with the written responses from NR and the SRA :

- *How can delays in making rail travel more accessible to new passengers be reduced?*

NR: This is a generic question which should more accurately be posed to the rail industry in general. The development of the SRA over the last 2/3 years has now created a body which should take the lead in addressing such questions. It may be that you would wish to raise this issue with the SRA.

SRA: The SRA has today published our second Strategic Plan. Its focus is on driving down costs, making better use of the railway that we have got and delivering improved performance. Although the challenges of cost and performance are priorities for the SRA, the government's Ten Year Plan, with

objectives to increase passenger numbers and facilitate modal shift continues to be our goals. Since privatisation, rail has been successful in attracting new passengers – passenger journeys have increased by about one third since 1995/6.

Through passenger surveys we know that passengers value reliable, punctual trains. Performance improvement is a primary objective of our Franchising Policy Statement for specification for new franchises. The new Northern franchise will be one of the first to be let under this policy. The SRA's Capacity Utilisation Policy and associated Route Utilisation Strategies would also contribute to improved performance and a more effective use of capacity.

- *What is your organisation doing to increase the number of local rail stations?*

NR: Railtrack's role is to maintain and renew existing rail infrastructure and stations for which it has responsibility under the 1993 Railways Act. The industry structure does not aim at encouraging Railtrack itself to open new stations. This question should more accurately be posed of the SRA in their role of Franchise specifier and potential funding partner.

SRA: The focus of the SRA's work in the coming year, as described in the strategic plan, will be to make a Case for Rail in 2004, part of which is about demonstrating that the industry has a grip on cost escalation in the industry. Until the Value of Rail work has been completed, the SRA is subject to considerable budgetary constraint which means that little or no funding will be available for enhancements such as new rail stations. It is with regret that the SRA has announced that RPP funding would no longer be available for new schemes but we are pleased to be able to safeguard payments to those that have already been contractually committed. As far as recently submitted and future RPP applications are concerned, we will continue to provide an advisory service through our expert teams, although we will be unable to make any commitments as to future SRA funding support. Where local authorities have secured alternative funding for new stations, for instance, the SRA would need to understand the impact on capacity and performance and be satisfied that there would be no detrimental effect on existing services.

- *What more does your organisations feel that City of York Council could do to increase the number and use of local rail halts?*

NR: This is a matter wholly for the city council. The need to have a clear and fixed specification is undoubtedly fundamental to any project together with the detailed involvement of the SRA.

SRA: The council may wish to explore contributions from alternative funding sources such as LTP, development agencies, railway heritage, regeneration and the private sector through developer contributions.

It is the SRA's view that the Council's aspirations for rail are viewed in the context of regional priorities. The Regional Assembly (as the regional planning body), with input from Yorkshire Forward, local authorities, local businesses and government agencies such as the Countryside Agency, are well placed to propose the optimal transportation solution for their

communities. With the rising cost of the railway and the finite financial and technical resources that are available, it becomes even more important for strategies and plans produced through partnership working to confer some priority in rail improvements. In the Strategic Plan, the SRA describes the way in which it intends to augment and develop its relationships on a regional level through the formation of its regional planning team.

11. The board were disappointed that both organisations chose not to attend their meetings. We also felt that the written responses supplied could have been more helpful. Specifically, we would argue that under section 7 the Network Licence agreement, NR are given responsibility to ensure the network is improved, developed and enhanced. The SRA's comments appear often to be generic and not related specifically to York's situation.
12. Ray Price and Paul Bruce from ATN attended our meeting on 5 December 2002, and their input was frank and helpful. In particular, they stressed that many bids like ours were put together, but that regional planning and co-ordination was vital as not all of them could succeed in winning funding. ATN's role was to act as an adviser and a link between organisations such as CYC and the SRA. They concluded that although the Haxby and Strensall bid was well constructed and the scheme was desirable, it was unlikely to succeed in the current climate of tight funding.
13. Copmanthorpe

Funding has been allocated for a feasibility study as part of next years LTP settlement. However, as a station at Copmanthorpe would require realignment of the East Coast Main Line it would cause major disruption. Recent work suggests costs could be around £20 million.
14. York District Hospital

CYC commissioned Railtrack to undertake a feasibility study in 2000 and three possible sites for a station were identified. However, a station here would require the track near Scarborough Bridge to be doubled, which increases cost and complexity. It was agreed with the SRA that the plans for York District Hospital would be submitted as a phase 2 bid, to ensure that it did not cause the Haxby-Strensall scheme to be rejected.
15. Poppleton Park

Railtrack undertook a feasibility study in 2001 which concluded that construction of a station to serve residential and business developments at Poppleton Park would be possible. CYC and North Yorkshire County Council have also undertaken a joint study to examine the feasibility of opening 3 new stations on the York to Harrogate line (including Poppleton Park) using current rolling stock and infrastructure.
16. Suspension of RPP funding

The suspension of RPP funding – which is where the government directed CYC's bid to back in 1999 - means that alternative funding will have to be

sought if any of the above schemes are to go ahead in the medium term. One possibility is to apply for LTP funding from the government, but even if this was successful it would provide only capital costs, and not the revenue costs that the RPP funding would also have contributed. Work on the options available to CYC now is ongoing.

Conclusions

17. Now that the RPP funding is no longer available, the way forward is a complex issue. New rail schemes are clearly not a priority for our rail partners given the current climate of the industry. However, we believe that the York North East Rail scheme would prove a valuable attribute to York and should be pursued as a priority. We also feel that CYC should continue to investigate other rail development options such as the use of light rail. The development of rail stations in York is a key component of the LTP and is critical to the effective development of our future transport strategy.

Recommendations

18. As a result of the investigation detailed above, the Transport Scrutiny Board wish to place on record our support for rail development work in York and our dismay at the suspension of Rail Passenger Partnership funding. We recommend that the Executive Member for Transport:
 - continues to investigate options for progressing the North East York Rail Scheme through other funding mechanisms;
 - continues to investigate other rail possibilities for York, including light rail to complement the York Central development; and
 - reports back to the scrutiny board on progress with York North East Rail Scheme at 6 monthly intervals.

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For more information, please contact Helen Christmas, Senior Scrutiny Officer on 01904 552064 or email helen.christmas@york.gov.uk

Transport Scrutiny Board

Scrutiny remit – delays in the provision of additional rail halts in the York area

Background

- Produce summary of events relevant to this issue over the last 7 years
- Detail barriers which have prevented progress being made and which could hinder future initiatives

Objective

- To reduce delays in providing additional rail halts in the York area

Scope

- Consider options for speeding up the process
- Ensure that timetables, project costs and procedures, including barriers and the opportunities available to the Council, in promoting the provision of additional rail services in the area are understood
- Produce optimised processes dealing with the expansion of rail use in the City of York Council area including actions that can be taken or initiated by the York Council (e.g. procedural, timetabling)
- Consider representations that can be made to government departments and other agencies re policy changes
- Recommend how the issue should be progressed to an early conclusion

Participants and gathering evidence

Consider evidence from all relevant authorities and agencies

- Council officials
- Strategic Rail Authority
- Train Operating Companies
- Railtrack / Network Rail
- Transport organisations (optional if they wish to be involved)
- Travelling public by survey

Timescales

Report within 6 months

Constraints

Financial/staff

Overlaps

None known

Members of the Transport Scrutiny Board:

Cllr Ken King (Chair)
Cllr Richard Watson (Vice chair)
Cllr John Boardman
Cllr Roger Farrington
Cllr Steve Galloway
Cllr Janet Hopton
Cllr Mark Waudby

Participants & officer support

Paul Bruce, Property Manger, Arriva Trains Northern
Stella Bye, Rail Development Manger, Strategic Rail Authority
Helen Christmas, Senior Scrutiny Officer, CYC
Colin Knight, former Principal Transport Planner, CYC
Rosemary Phizackerley, Democracy Officer
Ray Price, Director, Arriva Trains Northern
Matthew Ward, Transport Planner, CYC
Bill Woolley, Assistant Director, City Development and Transport, CYC
Richard Wrightson, Business Manager Arriva Trains Northern, Network Rail

Background sources of information

Franchising Policy Statement, SRA, Nov 2002
Local Transport Plan, CYC, 2001
Local Transport Plan Second Annual Progress Report, CYC, 2002
Strategic Plan, SRA, Jan 2002
Strategic Plan 2003, SRA 2003
Transport 2010, The Ten Year Plan, DETR, July 2000

Key to abbreviations

ATN	Arriva Trains Northern
CYC	City of York Council
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (now DfT)
DfT	Department for Transport
LTP	Local Transport Plan
NR	Network Rail (formerly Railtrack)
RPP	Rail Passenger Partnership
SRA	Strategic Rail Authority
TPP	Transport Policies and Programme