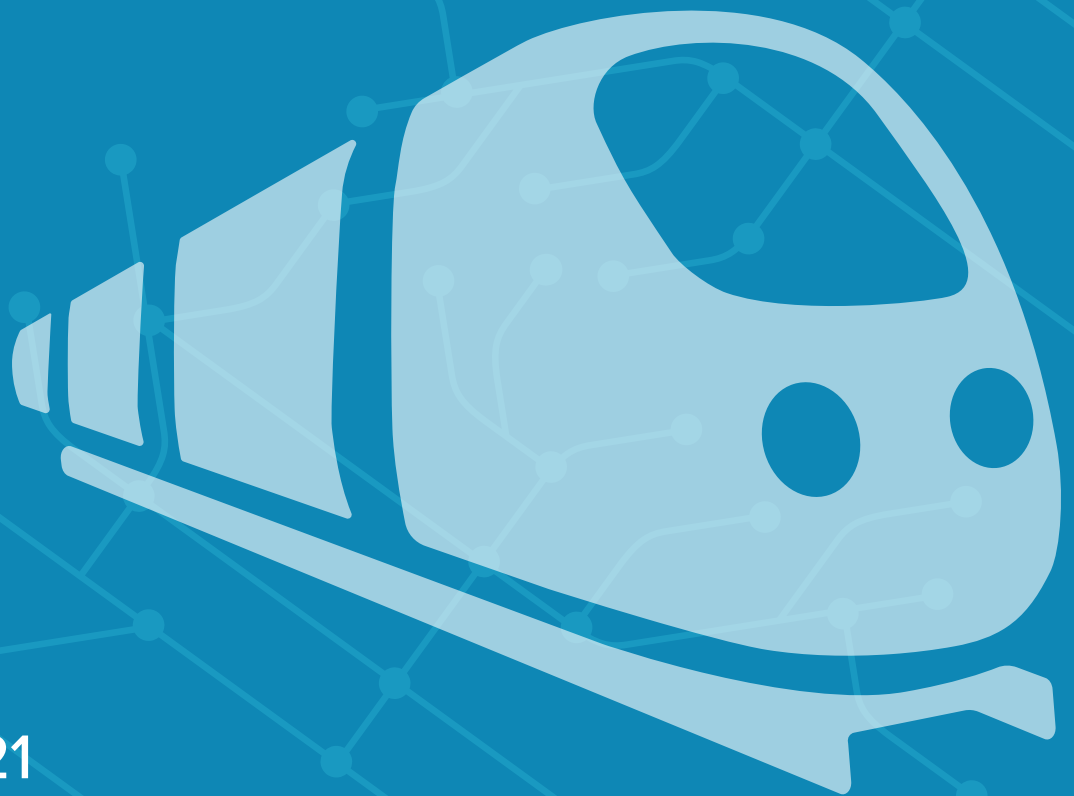


Rossendale
BOROUGH COUNCIL

A BETTER CONNECTED LOCAL ECONOMY

MAKING THE CASE FOR
THE CITY VALLEY
RAIL LINK



SPRING 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are making the case for restoring a commuter and visitor rail link between Rawtenstall in Lancashire and Manchester city centre. This document outlines the strategic rationale for the development of a detailed business case. It outlines the indicative economic impact on business growth and job opportunities, and boost to the Lancashire visitor economy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have spent time exploring the rationale for a new City Valley Link which will operate a combined rail-tram link running the 17 miles through Rossendale – through a Metrolink interchange in Bury - and onwards into Manchester Victoria. **Here we outline the case.**



9000 PEOPLE TRAVEL OUT OF ROSSENDALE INTO MANCHESTER EVERY DAY



14,000 TO REDUCE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF CURRENTLY 14,000 ROSSENDALE COMMUTERS

The purpose of this is to provide an outline concept in relation to this investment proposal.

A brief overview of the concept, an assessment of its viability, and the case for initial feasibility funding to develop the concept into a HM Treasury 'Green Book' compliant business case.

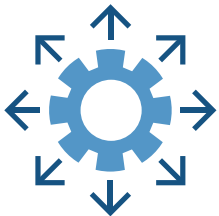
East Lancashire has a thriving economy ripe for further expansion as the local economy changes in the twenty-first century.

Rossendale is a vital commuter base for Manchester, with expanding numbers of residents overloading the M66 as a car and bus route into the city centre.

Currently 9,000 people travel out of Rossendale into Manchester every day and this is growing. In a post Covid world the changing nature of working patterns strengthens the case for shortening commuting times, improving opportunities for Manchester based businesses to relocate to East Lancashire and reduce the carbon footprint of currently 14,000 commuters travelling out of Rossendale every day.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We have done much locally to grow the economy and are seeking a modest level of infrastructure support to make a step change in boosting the economy.



3,100 NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESSES

We estimate we can grow the local economy by at least 3,100 new jobs over the next 25 years by improving the rail infrastructure, opening up new opportunities for businesses in the Rossendale Valley Growth Corridor.

We propose to build on an existing rail infrastructure, lessening the cost and necessity of building a new line.

The visitor economy in Rossendale is currently underdeveloped and improvements in connectivity



VISITOR ECONOMY WITHIN EASY REACH

particularly at weekends will bring the visitor economy within easy reach of 2.8 million people living in Greater Manchester, benefiting the nationally recognised Whitaker Museum, unique East Lancashire heritage railway and enabling people to access world-class outdoor leisure opportunities.



ACCESS TO WORLD OUTDOOR LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES

We are backing this project as a major boost to businesses, commuters and helping to bring this part of Lancashire up to the levels of other faster growing parts of the UK economy.



THE CONCEPT

Our preferred option is for a combined train-tram service using the existing heritage line between Rawtenstall and a Metrolink interchange in Bury, which connects into Manchester Victoria. There are a number of potential solutions and we are keen to use feasibility funding to explore the specific cost benefit of each option.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE CONCEPT ARE:

- An end-to-end journey time of under 1 hour for Rawtenstall – Manchester city centre, significantly outperforming the current peak time bus/car journey of up to 2 hours
- An hourly service during the day and evening with higher frequency at peak times to benefit commuters
- Greater levels of current service at weekends to improve access for day visitors to the Rossendale valley
- Convenient interchange with Metrolink services into Manchester at Bury
- Smart ticketing for a seamless point-to-point journey
- Infrastructure improvements at Rawtenstall and Buckley Wells stations
- Use of high quality Vivarail Class 230 rolling stock for a high quality travelling experience
- An option for a financially more sustainable future for the existing East Lancashire heritage railway



THE CONCEPT

Our preferred option is for a combined train-tram service using the existing heritage line between Rawtenstall and a Metrolink interchange in Bury



THE BENEFITS

We have reviewed the level of commuting pressure along the M66, demand for a new rail service, the current growth of the local economy and future opportunities to tackle regional inequality.

THE KEY BENEFITS OF THE NEW RAIL LINK INCLUDE:



LESS ANNUAL ROAD TRIPS, WITH POTENTIAL FOR MUCH MORE



25-50%

REDUCTION IN CURRENT
CAR/BUS JOURNEY TIMES

- Transforming the local manufacturing and small business economy, providing a step change in growth for the Rossendale Valley Corridor which will deliver 27 hectares of new employment land over the next 15 years
- A major contribution to levelling up the East Lancashire local economy with the rest of the country through better connectivity
- Radically improving commuter journey times – making a 25-50% reduction in current car/bus journey times
- Providing opportunities for Manchester based small businesses to relocate to lower cost business premises
- Growing the visitor economy by at least 10-15% visitors annually – drawing up to a further 215,000 visitors each year
- Expanding opportunities for growing the evening economy in Bury and Rawtenstall
- Reducing road congestion – a modest 10% share of commuter flow into Manchester would create 1 million less annual road trips, with potential for much more
- Significantly reducing carbon emissions by over 1 million road trips annually
- Protecting the heritage character of the existing East Lancashire Railway as a major tourist attraction

OUTLINE CONCEPT

The introduction of a heavy rail shuttle between Rawtenstall and Buckley Wells with interchange at Metrolink in Bury form the core of the proposal. This will provide a rail journey time between Rawtenstall and central Manchester of around 55-60 minutes. To improve the effectiveness of the interchange at Bury, real time information and smart ticketing with connecting tram services will be considered.

OUTLINE CONCEPT

Utilising an existing rail line between Rawtenstall and Bury significantly lessens the cost of the overall project. It requires no significant overhaul or laying of new track and utilises existing train stations at Rawtenstall and Buckley Wells.

TRACK

The proposal will utilise the existing Rawtenstall to Bury heavy rail track infrastructure. There would be operational independence from Metrolink, removing the risk of issues with existing infrastructure or operations transmitting performance problems onto the Metrolink network.

INTERCHANGE WITH METROLINK

A new interchange will be required on the Bury Metrolink line south of Bury Interchange to be constructed. This will provide high quality interchange with Bury – Manchester Metrolink services (and possibly Metrolink services to Heywood, Rochdale and Oldham if the existing tram–train proposal proceeds).

STATION IMPROVEMENTS

The proposal will require some improvements to stations and platforms along the route. This will focus on Rawtenstall, Buckley Wells and the Bury interchange.

There will be no wholesale rebuild, rather focused specific improvements to platforms, signage and ticketing facilities. The exact scale of these will be explored in the feasibility work

ROLLING STOCK

This approach offers attractive rolling stock options that pose fewer infrastructure challenges than a tram- train option. The trains will be designed to fit in with the existing heritage character of the railway, based on the Vivarail Class 230. The customer experience is equivalent to a new train. It has high acceleration (“agile train”) capability that will help minimise the need for infrastructure and signalling upgrades. A compatibility assessment would be undertaken during the feasibility study

TICKETING

We are keen there is a seamless point-to-point journey along the route. This is particularly important with a modal shift at Bury. The feasibility will explore the introduction of a smart ticketing approach.

FIT WITH EAST LANCASHIRE RAILWAY

We value the existing East Lancashire Railway (ELR) heritage line and operation. This is a significant asset for East Lancashire which we wish to retain, see thrive and have a sound financial future. It is an integral part of the local visitor economy and attraction loved by many local people and visitors. The ELR will retain control of all operations on its infrastructure. To have a strong future the ELR will need to evolve. There is an opportunity with this proposal to expand its current role to also become a professional rail infrastructure and operations organisation with a continuing volunteer element to operate the heritage train service. To do this ELR will need financial support and we are keen to explore the details of how this can be achieved, including the possibility to set up a new co-operative model.



ECONOMIC RATIONALE

The Manchester economy continues to grow. Jobs in the city have increased from 381,000 in 2004 to over 435,000 by 2020 – an increase of over 14% - and its growth is projected to continue.

The Northern Gateway will see a £1bn investment over the next 20 years.

The Northern Gateway is of particular significance to Rossendale, bringing an indicative 2.5million m2 of industrial floor space and 9,500 new homes along the M62 corridor at its intersection with the M66 in Rochdale, Oldham and Bury.

Currently nearly 1 in 4 people of working age in Rossendale commute to Manchester each day.

Rossendale is a housing and business growth area. It is a housing destination of choice for thousands of people who work in Manchester.

A 2018 survey showed that currently 79% of these commuters travel by car and 16% use the bus to get into Manchester. The M66, which runs between Ramsbottom and Simister Island, north of Manchester, is particularly congested. This affects road journeys between central Manchester and Rossendale, most of Bury, and Heywood. Outside central Bury with its Metrolink connection there is no choice other than to use road for at least part of these journeys.

The rail link is a key part of the proposal to open up the Rossendale Growth Corridor. This will see the development of 4 key development sites along the Bury- Rawtenstall- Accrington corridor and be a key economic growth area for Lancashire. The rail link would directly serve sites at Ewood Bridge and New Hall Hey; with forward access by bus interchange to North Carr and Hud Hey.

We are gearing up for a post Covid business world. We anticipate that locations such as Rossendale will become more attractive to business professionals, who through home

working will only need to access city centre offices occasionally. This would generate even higher demand levels for the rail link as the number of residents needing to travel could increase.

We have commissioned the respected independent body the Centre for Economics and Business Research to analyse the economic case for opening the new rail link. Their detailed evidence base provides a strong backing for the concept and we are keen to build on this through a detailed feasibility study.

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The final cost of the infrastructure project will depend on the option chosen and the scale of improvement works required. At this point we are providing a realistic tested indicative projected cost, subject to further more detailed feasibility work.

Indicative capital costs for improvements to the line and station improvement will be in the region of £20m to £40m - equivalent to only an annual £9 to £18 per head of population in Rossendale over the next 30 years.

This includes:

- Upgraded Buckley Wells station based on a three platform interchange
- Upgraded Rawtenstall station to allow two trains to use it simultaneously
- Two new Park and Ride stations at Ewood Bridge and Stubbins, including some land acquisition at Stubbins
- Modest works to structures, track, fencing, level crossing upgrades, selective line speed upgrades and additional passing loops

We estimate annual operating costs in the region of £2.5m to £5m - a reasonable proportion of costs will be recovered through fare income.

Revenue costs includes:

- Leasing of rolling stock
- Track and train maintenance costs
- Train fuel and maintenance costs
- Staffing costs based on 25 – 50 FTE staff ground and on-board staff

Viability work has identified that, using an average £5 fare per passenger, we estimate between 0.5m and 1m passengers are needed annually for the service to break even. This is only a modest 5%-10% share of the current commuter market together with a proportionate volume of leisure and business trips. This can be met from current demand and does not account for increased future demand which would further boost income.

Whilst we are providing an outline concept and indicative costing, it is essential that the proposal is based on a sound business case. We are seeking £100,000 of Government funding to develop the concept into a HM Treasury 'Green Book' compliant business case. Any additional costs associated with the feasibility work will be funded by the local authority partners supporting the project.



NEXT STEPS

We have provided the outline concept backed up by strong independent research. We are seeking **£100,000** of Government funding to develop the concept into a HM Treasury ‘Green Book’ compliant business case.

We will continue to explore existing funding streams including the Government’s Restoring Your Railway programme. However, we are keen to press the case for feasibility funding as a key part of East Lancashire’s economic recovery after Covid, as a major part of the areas’ attempts to translate the Government’s levelling up agenda into practical projects which deliver real sustained economic benefits.



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