

Skelmersdale Rail Link
(PTE/48/12)

Report of the Executive

1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 Merseytravel identified the potential for a rail link into Skelmersdale within the Rail Strategy produced in 2006, which was subsequently incorporated into the second and then third Local Transport Plans.
- 1.2 This report proposes that an infrastructure study be undertaken to more fully understand the scope of this project, in conjunction with Lancashire County Council and West Lancashire Borough Council.

2. **Background**

- 2.1 Skelmersdale lies 12.7 miles north-east of Liverpool and since the closure of Skelmersdale railway station in 1956 has become the second most populous town in the North West Region without a railway station (Leigh being the most populous). The nearest rail station at Upholland has no car park or public transport link to Skelmersdale, and it is too far to access by foot. Moreover, there are no direct services to Liverpool; interchange being required at Kirkby station.
- 2.2 In 2006, as part of the second Local Transport Plan, Merseytravel produced a Rail Strategy which outlined a number of possible projects which could be taken forward which would develop the rail network. The Strategy identified two possible links to Skelmersdale with a new rail line from Ormskirk as one option and a new station on the Kirkby to Wigan Line as a second option. The line from Ormskirk was proposed to follow the old track alignment into Skelmersdale.
- 2.3 Subsequently Merseytravel worked with Network Rail on the development of the Merseyside Route Utilisation Strategy which was published in 2009. The Strategy considered two options for providing services to Skelmersdale:

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Option 1: extension of the existing quarter hourly Liverpool to Kirkby service to terminate at a new station in the centre of Skelmersdale.

Option 2: extension of the existing quarter hourly Liverpool to Kirkby service to terminate at Upholland.

- 2.4 Network Rail assessed the potential demand from Skelmersdale by comparing the rail markets in other towns around Liverpool with similar characteristics and from this estimated the achievable market according to population and journey time into Liverpool. They estimated that the usage of the station would be in the region of 800,000 journeys a year, which is comparable to the better non-Underground Merseyrail stations.
- 2.5 The potential to extend the Kirkby branch of the Merseyrail network is identified on a number of occasions within the third Local Transport Plan. The case for expanding the Merseyrail network in a cost effective way requires that studies are undertaken to assess the financial viability of such proposals.
- 2.6 West Lancashire Borough Council undertook a study which considered the current public transport situation in Skelmersdale and which put forward a case for the creation of new rail links and a new rail station for consideration.
- 2.7 The report highlighted the poor public transport links which exist particularly towards Liverpool. Links between Skelmersdale and Liverpool by public transport involve a bus journey to Ormskirk and then a train to Liverpool. A direct bus service between Skelmersdale and Liverpool does exist but has a journey time in excess of 90 minutes.
- 2.8 The level of service provision within Skelmersdale Town Centre is poor; the town is served by the Concourse Centre, which lacks many of the basic shops and services that you would expect in town the size of Skelmersdale. Similarly educational and employment choices within the town are limited and the lack of transport opportunities means that people are prevented from accessing jobs and education/training elsewhere.
- 2.9 The creation of a new rail link into the town, or at least making rail services more accessible should provide significant benefits to the town. It will address many of the issues of access to key services and opportunities currently not available. It will also provide a significant boost to the existing regeneration plans already in place for Skelmersdale.

- 2.10 In addition to this Merseytravel in conjunction with West Lancashire Borough Council, who provided the funding, undertook a demand study in 2010/11 which considered the possible services which could run into Skelmersdale. The study concluded that there was a reasonable business case. However the lack of detailed costs to implement a rail link meant that a definitive position could not be reached.

3. **Proposals**

- 3.1 It is proposed that Network Rail be approached to undertake a GRIP (Guide to Rail Infrastructure Projects) study into the costs of providing a rail link into or close to Skelmersdale. While it is hoped that the study can be taken to GRIP 3 level the process needs to be worked through with Network Rail.
- 3.2 The third Local Transport Plan identifies the continued expansion of Merseyrail within Goal 5 (Ensure the transport network supports the economic success of the city region by the efficient movement of people and goods). The extension to Skelmersdale through Kirkby would make best use of available capacity on the Merseyrail network as Kirkby trains currently carry fewer passengers than other Northern Line services due to the short distance between Kirkby and Liverpool relative to other branches. The extension to Skelmersdale could therefore improve the financial viability of the Merseyrail network.
- 3.3 The expansion would also potentially include a new station at Headbolt Lane which has also been identified as a possible intervention in the third Local Transport Plan. A station located at Headbolt Lane would provide the population of Tower Hill direct access to the rail network and deliver benefits to an area which currently only has access to the rail network via interchange at Kirkby.
- 3.4 The development of this link would also enhance the rail connectivity within the wider Liverpool City Region.
- 3.5 A number of options have been identified which need to be explored. The basic proposal sees an extension of the Liverpool to Kirkby electric network which terminates at one of four options: The 4 options are:
- (a) A rail link which runs into Skelmersdale town centre.
 - (b) A rail link which terminates just south of the M58.
 - (c) A rail link which runs to White Moss.

(d) A new parkway station between Rainford and Upholland.

- 3.6 This is a reasonably complex piece of work which will cost in excess of £100,000 to complete. Network Rail has provided an initial estimate of £150,000 and will refine this after further discussions. £150,000 is likely to be a realistic estimate for a study which will provide some firm costs which can be used to take the project forward. Borderlands, for instance, cost £75,000 in 2009 and that did not include a new line.
- 3.7 Lancashire County Council has agreed to provide £100,000 towards any study as long as any additional requirement is met by other parties. This funding is only available until March, 2013.
- 3.8 As detailed above the proposed link is included with Merseytravel's current Local Transport Plan and, based on the funding available from Lancashire County Council, this would seem an opportune moment to carry out the necessary infrastructure study.
- 3.9 Discussions have taken place at Member level which support the investigation of this link.
- 3.10 It is proposed, therefore, that Merseytravel provides £50,000 funding towards the study which together with the Lancashire funding will provide the funding to deliver the study.

4. **Financial Implications**

The total cost of the study is expected to be £150,000. Lancashire County Council is able to provide £100,000 funding in this financial year. The cost to Merseytravel will, therefore, be £50,000, which can be financed from the 2012/13 capital programme from the Integrated Transport Studies budget.

5. **Equality Impact Assessment**

There is no requirement at this stage to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment.

6. **Environmental Implications**

The development of this scheme as part of the rail network would provide should be beneficial environmentally. The study in itself provides no specific benefit although it is a necessary step towards delivering the overall project.

7. **Risk Assessment**

The key risk is the potential increase in the cost of the study. At this stage there is a Probable (3) chance of this occurring and the impact would be Moderate (2) resulting in moderate risk. It is intended to mitigate this by discussing in more detail the outputs from the study with Network Rail and also limiting the maximum expenditure to be contributed by Merseytravel which will reduce the likelihood to Very Unlikely (1) with the impact remaining the same, Moderate (2) resulting in a low risk.

8. **Conclusions**

- 8.1 The Skelmersdale Link scheme was identified within Merseytravel's Rail Strategy in 2006 and has been more recently included within the third Merseyside Local Transport Plan.
- 8.2 While work has been undertaken on the demand side little work has been undertaken to assess the cost of the infrastructure required to deliver the project.
- 8.3 The current availability of funding from Lancashire County Council, which will cover most of the cost of the study, suggests that this is an ideal opportunity to undertake this piece of work.

9. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Authority:

- (a) note and approve the Executive allocation of a maximum of £50,000 funding towards the cost of the study which is expected to cost £150,000; and
- (b) note and approve the Executives approach to Network Rail being appointed to undertake the study.

Background Papers

None

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