

Tavistock to Bere Alston Railway and Pedestrian/Cycle Route

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: It is recommended that:

- (a) the progress on the Tavistock to Bere Alston railway project be noted;**
- (b) the continued development of the Tavistock to Bere Alston railway project up to, and through the process for, securing the necessary Powers to deliver the railway, including land acquisition where necessary, be approved;**
- (c) the County Council's status as lead Authority in delivering the project be approved and the previous approval for a joint venture partnership with Kilbride Properties Ltd be rescinded; and**
- (d) the route for a pedestrian and cycle trail between Tavistock and the Tamar Valley Trails, in place of the route along the former railway, be approved in principle and be subject to further design and negotiation with land owners.**

1. Summary

As identified in the 2004 Devon Structure Plan, the 2011 West Devon Core Strategy and the Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan the County Council has an aspiration to reopen the disused railway between Tavistock and Bere Alston. The project has progressed significantly in 2012/13 and 2013/14. Approval is required to continue the progress with the project up to the securing of necessary Powers to deliver the railway (including negotiation with land owners and land acquisition where necessary), to amend the formal resolution regarding the way in which the County Council will deliver the project and to revise the approach for pedestrian and cycle provision between Tavistock and the Tamar Valley Trails.

2. Introduction

The County Council has had an ambitious aspiration to reopen the railway between Tavistock and Bere Alston since the project was included in the 1999 and 2004 Devon Structure Plans. Through the development of the West Devon Core Strategy which was adopted in 2011, the railway project was identified as critical infrastructure required to support strategic development at a site allocated for development in Tavistock. The site to the southwest of the town off Callington Road is allocated to accommodate 750 dwellings, a primary school site and other community facilities. A planning application has been submitted for this site. The railway will provide a direct link between Tavistock and Plymouth which will minimise additional traffic on the A386, particularly that resulting from commuter trips. It will also connect Tavistock to the national rail network and provide an attractive leisure and tourist link from Plymouth to the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. Transportation policy support for the railway is provided through the 2011 Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan. The Implementation Plan identifies the Tavistock to Bere Alston Railway as one of the Targeted Capital Investments in the Market and Coastal Town and Rural Devon Programme for specific investment. The scheme is ranked highly by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and is in the list for a major scheme funding contribution.

The former Executive considered a report covering the potential reinstatement of the railway to Tavistock on 23 April 2009 (report EEC/09/114/HQ). It was resolved, at Minute *1076:

- "(a) that the Executive endorses the principle of the County Council entering a joint venture partnership with Kilbride Properties Ltd. to secure the reopening of the railway between Bere Alston and Tavistock;*
- (b) that the County Solicitor be authorised to prepare the necessary documentation for the partnership, in liaison with the Leader and Executive Member for Environment."*

The County Council also has an approved position of creating a recreational walking and cycling route along the former track bed to link Tavistock to the Bere Peninsula, as approved in October 2006 (Executive Report EEC/06/167/HQ). It was resolved, at Minute *381:

- "(d) that the acquisition of the former railway track bed between Bere Alston and Tavistock and its use as a walking/cycling route be supported whilst safeguarding its potential for future rail re-opening."*

Over a period of approximately ten years, the County Council has been involved in the Tamar Valley Mining Heritage Project. As part of this project it had been anticipated that improved access to the heritage area would be delivered through the provision of a route between Tavistock and Bere Alston along the rail corridor and therefore approximately £300,000 was provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund for investments in mine capping, provision of access and maintenance activities. Due to various essential alterations to the HLF funded project the focus of the trails network is now based at the new Trails Centre at Bedford Sawmills. In addition, detailed investigation that has taken place in the last two years recommended that the co-location of the cycleway and rail line on the same corridor should not be pursued. Therefore an alternative is recommended. A revised strategy of delivering the access improvements to the mining heritage area and the World Heritage Site through a link to the Trails Centre from Tavistock meets the objectives and criteria of the HLF funding in significantly improving sustainable access. This should prevent any risk of the HLF seeking reimbursement of the original funding.

3. Proposals

The need for further study work

The Tavistock to Bere Alston railway and pedestrian/cycle route project currently includes the following elements:

- A single track railway line between Tavistock and Bere Alston;
- A new station in the development area of Tavistock;
- Improvements to Bere Alston Station and the rail line there;
- A regular service between Tavistock and Plymouth with services during the peak hours; and
- The provision of a pedestrian/cycle trail.

The first, preparatory phase of the railway element of the project is to develop a scheme option for the railway. The consent for this would then be secured through a Development Consent Order or a Transport and Works Act Order. These consents' processes require the compilation of significant supporting evidence including a business case, consultation with public and rail industry stakeholders, and a Public Examination or Public Inquiry. In order to develop a robust assessment of the scheme, the County Council has undertaken significant technical work to date. This includes:

- Topographical surveys;
- Structural surveys of cuttings, embankments, bridges, Shillamill Viaduct and Shillamill Tunnel;
- Mine surveys;
- Feasibility design work;
- Initial environmental surveys;
- Patronage forecasting; and
- Public consultation.

This package of work has allowed the project to progress towards the third stage in the Network Rail project development process, Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP). GRIP stage 3 incorporates option selection and early steps towards the development of a single scheme option. This is programmed for completion by the end of 2014.

In order to progress the scheme to a stage at which powers to deliver the railway can be sought, significant additional work will be required. This would take the project up to the end of the GRIP stage 4 process which finalises the development of a single scheme option. This is programmed for completion in 2016. The future work which is required will include:

- The development of the funding package;
- Detailed design;
- More robust patronage forecasting;
- The development of an Environmental Statement;
- The development of a robust business case; and
- Land negotiations, acquisitions and requirement for land access.

It is anticipated that the land will be acquired once all the elements of the project are in place. However there may be a requirement, through blight, or opportunity to purchase some land early. There may also be a need to access third party land to undertake survey, design or other preparatory work in the development of the project. Approval is sought for such negotiations, acquisitions and access arrangements in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Growth and Cabinet Liaison for Exeter.

Approval is sought to continue progressing the scheme up to, and through, the process for securing the consents to deliver the railway, either through a Development Consent Order or through a Transport and Works Act Order. Consents would be sought in 2016/17, potentially allowing commencement of railway delivery in 2019/20.

The County Council has considered the current rail franchise situation in developing the Tavistock to Bere Alston Railway project and regards the future service as being operated by the future franchisee for the area. While there are currently uncertainties regarding the length of the next franchise period, through its input into future franchising arrangements the County Council will advocate that the train operating company will have a general obligation to work in partnership with the Authority. This will cover the development and reinstatement of the line between Bere Alston and a new Tavistock station, securing rolling stock for this purpose, and working together to fast-track infrastructure and new services.

Role of the County Council in leading on the rail project

Since the adoption of the West Devon Core Strategy in 2011 the County Council has moved forward with developing the railway and pedestrian/cycle route project. The County Council is now leading on the project and the involvement of Kilbride Group (referred to in the previous Executive Minutes as Kilbride Properties Ltd) has been diluted following the sale of their interest in the allocated site off Callington Road in Tavistock to Bovis Homes. As such, a joint venture partnership is no longer required. Approval is therefore sought to rescind the previous endorsement of the County Council to enter a joint venture partnership with Kilbride Properties Ltd.

Alternative pedestrian and cycle route between Tavistock and Tamar Valley Trails

Although there is an approved County Council position to provide a pedestrian/cycle route alongside the railway, the further work which has been undertaken on the feasibility of the railway project has shown that this is not possible for the following reasons:

- The restricted widths of the railway corridor;
- The implications and risk in future maintenance and handover to a national rail operator; and
- The provision of a pedestrian and cycle route will require significant additional engineering as it will mean that the rail infrastructure may not be able to be accommodated along the most appropriate alignment. Additional strengthening would be a particular requirement. These additional works will increase costs and reduce the viability and deliverability of the rail element of the project.

For these reasons, approval is sought to explore in detail an alternative option for providing improved pedestrian and cycle access between Tavistock and the Bere Peninsula via the new Tamar Trails Centre (at Bedford Sawmills near Gulworthy) as opposed to via the entire length of the disused railway and Bere Alston. This work will need to include discussion and negotiation with appropriate landowners. Such provision will need to be undertaken in the context of ensuring that the original objectives of the HLF grant continue to be met. This strategy is considered to be appropriate for the following reasons:

- The Tamar Trails Centre (at Bedford Sawmills) is the hub of the trails network in the Tamar Valley and one of the key focal points for public access to the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site;
- The Centre has been delivered through a long term partnership project and has received public funding from Devon County Council, West Devon Borough Council, Tamar Valley AONB and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Improving access to the Centre aims to increase visitor numbers and improve its viability;
- The revised status and ownership of Morwellham Quay make it impossible to maintain this as the focus for the Tamar Valley Mining Heritage Project. As such, improved access to the northern part of the Tamar Trails network has become far more critical;
- The only currently available route between Tavistock and the Trails Centre would be via the busy and suboptimal A390. This is considered undesirable as the principal sustainable link between the Trails and the largest town in West Devon;
- An alternative northern route to the Trails Centre would improve accessibility to a longer section of the Tavistock Canal (preliminary discussions with South West Water have been held), existing interpretation installations and amenities along the way. This would augment previous access improvements alongside the Canal which have been delivered in the context of the Tamar Valley Mining Heritage Project;
- A northern route would provide additional access to the heritage area of Devon Consuls; and

- Although providing a direct pedestrian and cycle link between Tavistock and Bere Alston would provide some accessibility benefits to both settlements, such a link would be unlikely to attract significant usage for journeys to school or work as it would be a significant distance, would not be lit and would be located in an area which is not overlooked.

Further work is required to explore the feasibility of potential pedestrian and cycle route options between Tavistock and the Trails Centre, define a preferred route option and, in due course, explore the delivery of the links with the relevant land owners. Potential indicative route options for the links are shown on the attached plan in Appendix I.

Potential alternatives schemes to the rail project

The County Council is committed to delivering the railway between Tavistock and Bere Alston as the principal way of minimising traffic on the A386, improving access to the World Heritage Site, improving access options to the Bere Alston area and Tavistock and connect the area to the national rail network.

The County Council has prepared an Option Assessment Report which considers a series of public transport and highway interventions for improving conditions on the A386. This assessment considers the effectiveness of the options in achieving strategic objectives, economic impacts, deliverability and environmental impact amongst other criteria. The Report clearly concludes that the railway option is the most appropriate scheme to take forward.

4. Consultations

In developing the project, liaison is ongoing between various parties including Local Authorities, Network Rail, the Train Operating Company, the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership and the Local Enterprise Partnership through the Local Transport Board. These parties support the scheme in principle and have been helping with scheme development. This has ensured that synergies and linkages have been explored in terms of local planning proposals, train franchise arrangements and community rail aspirations. Discussions have also been held with the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership, the Cornwall and the West Devon Mining Landscape Mining Landscape World Heritage Site Team and South West Water.

In addition to these ongoing discussions, a public consultation on the railway and pedestrian/cycle route proposals was held between 25 January 2013 and 22 February 2013. The consultation presented information on the railway project and pedestrian/cycle route on the assumption that the two may be able to be delivered in parallel. In order to publicise the proposals and understand the views of the public, consultation exhibitions were held in Tavistock and Bere Alston. Officers also attended meetings of Tavistock Town Council, Bere Ferrers Parish Council and Gulworthy Parish Council. Finally, officers presented and answered questions at a Public Meeting arranged by Calstock Parish Council. More than 1200 people and organisations were contacted regarding the consultation. There was also significant media interest in the consultation with articles in local papers and coverage on local radio.

A simple questionnaire was prepared to allow respondents to quickly identify their level of support or opposition for the railway and pedestrian/cycleway elements of the project. A total of 465 responses were received to the consultation. Analysis of the consultation responses has been undertaken.

Approximately 62% of respondents supported the railway whilst approximately 30% opposed it. In terms of the pedestrian/cycleway element of the project, approximately 68% of those responding supported it with 16% opposing. Although the reasons for the support for the rail element of the project varied, commonly cited reasons included that the scheme would improve traffic conditions on the A386, link Tavistock to the rail network, improve transport options and access and help to bring additional business to Tavistock. There was also some opposition to the project. In terms of the railway, some of the reasons related to concerns regarding the provision of housing in Tavistock, costs of delivering the scheme, costs of travelling by rail, the number who would be likely to use the train and suggestions that it would be more appropriate to reinstate the railway to Exeter via Okehampton rather than to Plymouth via Bere Alston.

In terms of the pedestrian/cycle route, support related to its potential benefits for tourism and leisure, cycling safety and health, amongst other issues. Concerns related to tranquility impacts, cost and questions regarding the lack of provision for horse riders in the project. Further consultation will be required on the railway project and emerging pedestrian/cycle route options as these are developed in future.

Consideration has also been given to the rail project in the context of engagement regarding future franchise arrangements. Discussions with the current Train Operating Company, Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT) show positive support for the future services and bids relating to previous franchise processes have included details on how services to Tavistock would be operated. In response to previous consultations regarding future franchises for the Great Western area, the County Council has identified the need for Tavistock services to be included in future franchise specifications.

5. Financial Considerations

Survey and feasibility design work has identified that the baseline capital cost for constructing the rail element of the project is likely to be approximately £18m. According to DfT guidelines, this cost needs to be inflated by a specific percentage to include risk and optimism bias (contingency). This increases the estimated construction cost to approximately £25m. The estimated cost of developing the scheme as a whole including design and fees is approximately £4m, which includes costs already incurred to date.

The cost of the cycle/pedestrian trail is likely to be approximately £2m.

In addition there should be an allowance for revenue pump priming of the rail service of approximately £2m. This is an operating subsidy required whilst passenger numbers become established. Future revenue support for the provision of the railway service is currently uncertain but will emerge as the scheme develops. It is essential that medium and long term financial support for the services is borne by the rail industry. This consideration will be taken forward in the County Council's input into future arrangements for the Great Western Franchise.

Taking all these costs into consideration, the total project cost (including the revenue element) is estimated to be approximately £33m.

It is anticipated that funding for the project will be secured from a range of sources including:

- Contributions from developments in Tavistock - circa £14m;
- Bid to the Local Transport Board - £9m; and
- Local Transport Plan funding - £3m.

Whilst this initially identifies a shortfall in funding of £7m, as progress is made, the level of optimism bias applied will reduce significantly (in line with DfT guidelines) and give greater certainty to the scheme costs.

The County Council will also seek additional funding from a number of sources including further developers contributions, increased funding from the Local Transport Board and additional Government funding streams similar to programmes such as the New Stations Fund and the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. Such streams could cover both the rail and the trail elements of the project. The County Council has a good record in leveraging in such funding. Plymouth City Council has also previously made a financial contribution of £10,000 towards scheme preparation costs.

One of the principal aims of considering an alternative pedestrian and cycle link to the Tamar Trails Centre is to increase the number of visitors to the area. This is important to improve the viability of the Trails Centre itself, but is also vital as part of the wider income generation strategy required to cover the maintenance costs for the Tamar Trail network. If sufficient income is not generated, it is likely that the County Council may need to contribute financially to these ongoing maintenance costs.

The County Council owns various parts of the former railway corridor, in particular the section from Callington Road in Tavistock to Shillamill Viaduct to the south, which bisects a major development site. Access rights for this section are covered by a clawback arrangement with British Railways Board (Residuary) (now London and Continental Railways). The financial liability for this clawback is being passed away from the County Council. In addition, a capital receipt is expected to be secured in the region of £0.5m. Such access will not affect the potential to reopen the railway line in future.

It should be noted that whilst construction may not commence before 2019/20, developer contributions will be provided over a number of years and therefore forward funding of the capital programme will be required by the County Council.

6. Sustainability Considerations

Tavistock is not currently served by the rail network. Although the town is connected to Plymouth by bus, the journey time is long, particularly in the peak hours, and it is anticipated that journey times by bus will become longer and more unreliable in future as traffic is expected to increase on the A386. Providing a rail alternative is an appropriate way of improving sustainable access to the town. A rail service will also improve sustainable access options for journeys to Tavistock for people wishing to travel there from Plymouth and the Bere Peninsula. Access via walking and cycling routes to the Tamar Trails is currently limited. The provision of a new route to the trails from Tavistock would significantly increase sustainable transport access to a site of important heritage status. Additional visitors may also improve the viability of the Tamar Trails Centre.

7. Carbon Impact Considerations

The provision of additional sustainable transport options to and from Tavistock and, to a lesser extent, Bere Alston, will have significant positive carbon impacts. This will be most significant as a result of the minimisation of traffic on the A386 from the rail element of the scheme. Relief to the A386 will also potentially allow more consistent, free-flow conditions on the corridor for the remaining highway trips. This will further minimise carbon emissions from these trips.

8. Equality Considerations

Where relevant to the decision, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

Taking account of age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), gender and gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women/ new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage/civil partnership status in coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

This may be achieved, for example, through completing a full Equality Impact Needs Assessment/Impact Assessment or other form of options/project management appraisal that achieves the same objective.

The project will promote equality of opportunity for the wider-community. Tavistock is not currently served by the rail network. This project will provide access to the national rail network to improve the accessibility of the town. The rail elements of the project will also improve accessibility by sustainable modes for travel to and from the Bere Peninsula whilst also providing a further alternative option for travel from Plymouth to the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. The station in Tavistock will be served by a bus service and pedestrian and cycle routes from within the town to ensure maximum accessibility. Disabled parking will be included at the station which will be Disability Discrimination Act compliant. Any impacts at Bere Alston Station will also comply with Disability Discrimination Act requirements.

The pedestrian/cycle route element of the project between Tavistock and the Tamar Trails would be free to use, helping to open up larger sections of trail to a wider section of the community.

An initial Impact Assessment has been completed for the railway and pedestrian/cycle route project; it has been circulated to Cabinet Members, and is available alongside this report on the Council's website at:

http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/councildemocracy/decision_making/cma/index_exc.htm

As the project develops it will be subject to further, more detailed assessments through an Environmental Impact Assessment. This will meet the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 which apply the EU Environmental Impact Assessment Directive.

9. Legal Considerations

The lawful implications of the recommendations have been considered and taken into account in the preparation of this report.

10. Risk Management Considerations

There is a risk with all significant infrastructure schemes. Potential risks particularly relate to the rail element of the project and include escalating costs, access to funding and securing the powers to deliver the railway. Risks from escalating project costs have already been considered and mitigated through considering alternative route options for the pedestrian and cycle route element of the project, together with value engineering. The County Council has a good record in securing funding from external sources including developer contributions and through bidding processes. Risks associated with securing the powers to deliver the railway will be mitigated through proficient project management and the seeking of legal advice.

11. Public Health Impact

The key objective of the rail element of the project is to ease traffic on the A386 and therefore assist in the management of air quality standards. The encouragement of regular cycling and walking has major health benefits which outweigh the potential risk of having an accident whilst cycling. In particular the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits is one solution to the serious problem of obesity.

12. Options

Various options for providing relief to the A386 have been considered through an option assessment process. This has considered highway and public transport options on the A386 and along the former rail corridor. Due to the characteristics of the area through which the A386 passes it would be very challenging to provide improvements to the highway. The corridor is windy, narrow and goes through Dartmoor National Park and a number of villages. Alternatives to the provision of the railway along the former railway alignment, such as a bus service, guided bus or light rail system have been considered, however these do not show the same level of benefits as the rail option relative to the potential costs incurred. An Option Assessment Report has been produced to document this analysis in more detail.

The potential options for the management of the rail project have been considered. The option of a joint venture with Kilbride Properties (now Kilbride Community Rail) which currently has Cabinet approval is no longer appropriate as the group has now disposed of its interest in land at Callington Road and has no powers to deliver the railway. As Local Transport Authority with significant professional links to Network Rail, First Great Western and the wider rail industry, it is appropriate that the County Council assumes the lead role in the project.

The continued pursuance of the policy to provide a pedestrian and cycle route in parallel to the railway is not possible due to restricted widths and safety issues. It would also significantly increase the costs of delivering the railway and have significant maintenance and liability implications. These concerns mean that the provision of the pedestrian/cycle route on the former rail corridor would be likely to preclude the delivery of the railway.

13. Conclusion

Significant work by both the County and Borough Councils has underlined the importance of delivering the rail element of the project to minimise traffic on the A386, improve connectivity and access by sustainable modes for Tavistock and the Bere Peninsula and support development in Tavistock. This work has resulted in increased certainty that this ambitious project will be successful in negotiating its way through a complex delivery and procurement process. The report recommends that the scheme is progressed by the Council through to finalising the total cost of the project.

Much thought has been given to considering the cycle and pedestrian trail options for linking Tavistock to the Tamar Trails network in order to ensure the delivery of improved access to this heritage area. The recommended northern option linking Tavistock to the trails centre at the Sawmills is the scheme that will be further developed. This will enable the rail project to continue to be developed by Devon County Council in its role as Local Transport Authority.

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Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Ref
1. Analysis of A386 Road and Proposed Rail Scheme	September 2010	http://www.westdevon.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=2200&p=0
2. Tavistock to Bere Alston railway and trail project: Consultation outcomes report	July 2013	http://www.devon.gov.uk/tavistock-to-bere-alston-railway-trail-consultation-report.pdf
3. Cabinet report EEC/09/114/HQ	April 2009	
4. Executive Report EEC/06/167HQ	October 2006	
5. Connections from Tavistock to Plymouth – Draft Option Assessment Report	June 2014	

Appendix I
To PTE/14/49

Plan showing potential indicative options for routes between Tavistock and the Tamar Trails Centre

