

Notices of Motion: Guaranteeing our Rail Future: Honouring the promise to Devon

Briefing Paper by the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

1. Summary

The County Council at its meeting held on 18 February 2016 considered a Notice of Motion on Guaranteeing our Rail Future, from Councillor Connett, as follows:

'Great Western Railway (GWR) be congratulated on stepping forward with funding for essential Reports on the resilience of our rail networks after the Government failed to deliver on the Prime Minister's promises;

Devon County Council continues to make campaigning for rail resilience a priority'

In accordance with Standing Order 6(6) the Notice of Motion was referred, without discussion, to the Cabinet for consideration (County Council Minute 173 refers).

This paper provides information to assist Members in responding to the Notice of Motion.

2. Background

The County Council continues to work closely with Somerset County Council, Torbay Council, Plymouth City Council, Cornwall Council and the Heart of the South West and Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly LEPs as the Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF).

PRTF was formed in the aftermath of the Cowley Bridge rail disruption in the winter of 2012/13. Events at Dawlish and the Somerset Levels during the following winter further increased the common interests and increased strength that PRTF provides. The key PRTF aims are to achieve a step change in improving:

- resilience (the number one ask is resilience of the current railway),
- connectivity,
- quality/capacity,

- across the South West Peninsula railway. Resilience includes resilience against weather-related and other breaches; rapid recovery after disruption; and network resilience through diversion routes or additional routes.

In 2014 PRTF was asked by government to report back with a coherent and compelling 20 year investment plan for the South West peninsula railway by June 2016.

Following the Cowley Bridge flooding and events across the Network during the following winter, government commissioned Network Rail to undertake a West of Exeter Route Resilience Study, and several works strands:

- A £31.3m ten location plan has been funded to improve resilience including at Cowley Bridge, Bradninch Crossing, and locations across the Somerset Levels (expected completion December 2017).
- A study into the work required to improve resilience along the Coastal Section between Exeter and Newton Abbot including the Dawlish/ Teignmouth coastal section (reporting to the Secretary of State in April 2016).

- A “GRIP 2” study to identify the improvements required to enable Paddington Trains to have adequate paths when diverted between Exeter and Castle Cary via Yeovil Junction, and to enable two trains an hour between Exeter and Axminster (due to be completed in Spring 2016).

The County Council and PRTF will continue to make the strongest case for the completion of these workstreams and for further improvements to the peninsula rail network in line with its key aims (outlined above).

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