

Report of the Cabinet Member for Infrastructure Development and Waste

1. Introduction

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 20 February 2020:

By Councillor Hannaford on:

- *Railway issues in Devon including:*
 - *How the £500m Beeching Reversal Fund can be invested in Devon.*
 - *The medium to long term vision for our local railway network.*
 - *The Dartmoor Railway Community Interest Company has going into administration.*
 - *Disability access at St Thomas Railway Station.*
 - *The potential nationalisation of South West Railways.*

By Councillor Connett on:

- *the progress of Marsh Barton Rail Station*

1. Railway issues in Devon

Beeching Reversal Fund

There will be a lot of competition for the £500m pot, which is likely to be spread nationally, therefore we will be making the case for the most advanced schemes in Devon. We will reiterate the desire to run regular weekday services between Okehampton and Exeter currently being investigated by GWR and will be applying for funding to progress work with the Tavistock to Bere Alston rail line reopening.

The medium to long term vision for our local railway network

We see rail as having increased value of importance in encouraging mode shift to help meet Devon's carbon reduction targets. In the short term we are keen to get Marsh Barton delivered and adjustments made to the recent timetable changes to improve coordination between local Devon Metro services. In the medium to long term, in addition to the Dawlish mainline resilience works and phased delivery of the 'northern route' (mentioned above), we will be working with Network Rail on their Continuous Modular Strategic Planning (CMSP) process. This is the new approach for securing funding and improvements to the rail network and there are two CMSP corridor studies currently underway affecting Devon: firstly, the West of England corridor study, which is nearing completion and includes plans for a new passing loop west of Whimple which will improve resilience and frequency of services between Exeter and East Devon towns. Secondly, we are about to begin work on an Exeter to Bristol corridor study which is likely to focus on how rail can best support

sustainable economic growth between Bristol and Exeter. There will be subsequent studies looking at the network between Exeter and Plymouth, including Torbay. We will also continue to work with the train operators to secure improved access to stations to maximise the potential of rail in the County.

Dartmoor Railway Community Interest Company

The County Council has a 60 year lease to Dartmoor Railway CIC for the station building, which has limited permitted use including a café, visitors centre, retail unit and a flat. The County Council remains hopeful of seeing regular weekday rail services reintroduced between Okehampton and Exeter and there is nothing from a Devon County Council-owned asset perspective that would prevent this from happening. The lease of the rail line from Aggregate Industries to Dartmoor Railway is a separate matter, which we have no influence over. As the administrators have now been called in a moratorium will be in place which means that no action can be taken against the tenant for the time being and we need to allow the administrator time to decide what steps they need to take to achieve the best outcome for its tenant.

Disability access at St Thomas Railway Station

I will refer this question to partners at GWR. I would however add that designs for the nearby Marsh Barton Station will be inclusive – we have been meeting with disability groups to ensure access for all from the station to jobs in Marsh Barton industrial estate and leisure opportunities at the Riverside Valley Park and Exeter Canal.

The potential nationalisation of South West Railways

There is little for the County Council to say on this as it is a matter for the Train Operator, the Department for Transport and Central Government – South Western Railway have a franchise commitment and we have to allow those organisations to discuss how best they will fulfil the outcomes for its customers. I would suggest it is best addressed by the Rail Minister, Chris Heaton-Harris who I would be happy to share his details with you.

2. Progress of Marsh Barton Rail Station

The ecological surveys and environmental impact assessment has been completed, which will inform the planning submission for the new station, which is expected in late Spring this year. We have had positive meetings with disability and access groups as part of pre-consultation discussions and land agreements have been agreed in principle with Network Rail. Design is progressing well and, subject to planning, we are hopeful of being on site at the start of 2021 with opening towards the end of 2021.

Councillor Andrea Davis

Cabinet Member for Infrastructure Development and Waste