PENINSULA TRANSPORT UPDATE

WP8 – Rail Strategy

2 March 2023

> *Please note that the following recommendation/s is/are subject to consideration and determination by the Board before taking effect.*

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

(a) The Board notes the Executive Summary document produced to reflect the recommendations of the Peninsula Transport Rail Strategy;

(b) The Board approve the recommendations for the strategy set out in Executive Summary; and

(c) The Board delegate authority to the Chair of Peninsula Transport and the lead Board member for Peninsula Rail Task Force (PRTF) to make any further changes following the next meeting of the PRTF and these be reported for information at the next Full Board meeting.

1. Background

The Peninsula Transport Sub-national Transport Body (STB) has been working to update its Rail Strategy since 2021. This report and the accompanying Executive Summary provide an overview of the final Rail Strategy, reflecting the current network conditions as well as the aspirations for the rail network across the region in the medium to long term. This Strategy and Executive Summary articulates the key requirements needed from the rail industry to meet the needs of the Peninsula Transport vision and goals. Although this strategy places a particular emphasis on rail, it has been developed with consideration of the other Peninsula Transport strategies. In particular, rail has the potential to assist with delivering the key priorities sought within the freight, rural mobility and carbon transition strategies.

The strategy builds upon the success of *Closing the Gap,* which was published in 2016 outlining the plan for developing the peninsula's rail network. It also recognises that the rail industry is within a period of significant change. The COVID-19 pandemic has created large change to demand patterns, placing larger emphasis on leisure travel than weekday commuting. This has enabled rail to make a strong recovery within the peninsula due the growth in the leisure market. Ongoing industrial action has placed further uncertainty on travellers, especially those commuting. The cost-of-living crisis has placed further challenges on both customers and operators. Finally, the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail is in the process of being implemented with the creation of Great British Railways and decarbonising the industry by 2040. These ongoing large-scale changes facing the industry means that Peninsula Transport must provide a clear, collective voice for the region during a time where key decisions are being made regarding the future of the industry.

This strategy complements the infrastructure and service aspirations identified within *Closing the Gap* by providing shorter-term initiatives and structural changes.

2. Rail Strategy Executive Summary

Rail is key to connecting the peninsula to rest of the UK. The Great Western and West of England Main lines connect Exeter St David's with Somerset and the rest of the UK, including Wiltshire, London and Dorset. The Cornish Main Line provides a single strategic spine through Devon and Cornwall to Penzance. A series of nine branch lines tie into this spine providing connectivity for communities across Devon and Cornwall. However, there is a still a challenge in increasing access to rail with 30% of the region's population being within walking and cycling distance of a station. The key coverage gaps are North Cornwall, North Devon, North Somerset, Wellington, Cullompton,

Langport and Somerton. However, 70% of the population live within 10km of a railway station, highlighting the need for a strong integration between bus and road networks.

The regions network is characterised by low services frequencies and long journey times. This is largely due the infrastructure characteristics, noting that many branch lines are single track with limited passing and the mainline has multiple areas that are also single track where there are bridges and viaducts. The topography, although a key feature of the region, also poses challenges in creating long signalling headways due to navigating through steep and meandering alignments.

With regards to transport emissions, rail provides a sustainable alternative means of travel to the private car. However, emissions from rail are higher in the peninsula than the rest of the UK due to railway being entirely non-electrified. All services are currently either diesel only or bi-mode rolling stock which is still a low carbon alternative to the private car. However, greater consideration is needed regarding how rail can further be improved to meet national decarbonisation targets.

Five Key Themes of the Strategy:

Five key themes have been identified for the regions rail network; these are:

- **Improving Choice** – encouraging the development of rail to make it a natural choice for the movement of people and goods. This is through creating an integrated transport system where journeys are quicker, simpler and more affordable.

- **Reducing Emissions** – Rail is already a clean mode of transport, migrating passenger and freight journeys onto rail is key to delivering the national governments net zero economy and addressing the climate emergency declared within the Local Authority members.

- **A Resilient Network** – The railway must be resilient to change in demand patterns, extreme weather events and fluctuating costs.

- **Supporting Demographic Change** – The population in the peninsula is growing and ageing and therefore the railway is key to enabling communities to stay connected and active through enhancing the reach of rail to reduce social isolation. People are also working and shopping differently, so passengers need to be offered flexible services that provide value.

- **Underpinning Growth** – Providing the peninsula with a sustainable alternative to the car for leisure, tourism and commuter trips. It is key that this is considered within all phases of planning to enable sustainable growth throughout the region.

Key Priorities of the Strategy:

The key priorities for each theme are shown below.

THEME	Priorities		
Improving Choice	**C1:** Improve the frequency and/or speed of services to provide more flexibility in travel options.	**C2:** Improve access to the network through joined-up mobility solutions	**C3:** Deliver a virtually integrated network, with a one-stop-shop for information and the best fare from door to door.
Reducing Emissions	**E1:** Optimise the network to capture passenger and freight journeys from the highway – particularly our strategic spine roads.	**E2:** Decarbonise the network by removing diesel-only trains	

A Resilient Network	**R1:** Future-proof the network to protect against the impacts of climate change.	**R2:** Ensure train services operate when customers need and expect them to, and better manage things when they go wrong.	**R3:** Ensure that there is resilience to the key strategic spine of our network.
Supporting Demographic Change	**D1:** Develop a set of station standards to prioritise investment towards a network that is accessible and welcoming to all.	**D2:** Support flexible lifestyles with consistent data connectivity.	
Underpinning Growth	**G1:** Unlock the potential of rail freight through facilities and network capacity.	**G2:** Ensure that the network around our key towns and cities can accommodate future service growth.	**G3:** Ensure that rail maximises its potential to deliver social value through skills, employment and supply chain.

The strategy and Executive Summary sets out a plan for pursuing the priorities identified above.

The strategy identifies the development of the network, through improved service specification as well as new stations and routes, as a long-term priority. The region has experienced great success securing funding for new and re-opened stations and routes which we will seek to continue.

Growing the role of rail freight, as proposed within the South West Freight Strategy, is further endorsed within this rail strategy, and a series of interventions have been identified within the document to address the current challenges faced by the rail freight sector.

Shorter-Term Initiatives

Whilst it is recognised that achieving the desired outcomes of the strategy as a whole will take a number of years and sustained collaboration with stakeholders, the strategy has identified a number of areas where shorter-term initiatives can create meaningful progress in delivering these outcomes. The following measures require collaboration between the rail industry and local partners, but we are confident that they can be delivered within the next 12-24 months:

Initiative 1: Joined-up Mobility (C2)

Integrated fare and ticketing solutions between rail and other forms of local mobility.

Timetable integration between rail and local bus services, and connection guarantees.

Stations as local mobility hubs with targeted infrastructure investment

Initiative 2: One-stop-shop for rail (C3)

Whole-system mapping, consistent across all modes.

Combined portal for door-to-door travel information.

Online availability for the Devon & Cornwall Rail Card, with future extension to cover Somerset.

Improved onward travel information at stations and on trains.

Initiative 3: Trialling Innovation (E2)

Examining the potential for our network to be a test bed for emerging decarbonisation solutions.

Initiative 4: Joined-up disruption management (R2)

A joined-up approach to disruption management, covering rail and local mobility.

Initiative 5: Improving accessibility (D1)

 Developing a minimum standard for our stations and delivering priority investment.

Summary

In order to deliver these prioritise within this timeframe, it will require collaboration, focus and resources with all stakeholders playing their part. Based on this, Peninsula Transport commits to:

- Fostering collaborative relationships between the rail industry, local businesses and planners, to ensure a joined-up approach across our economy and society.

- Along with our partners, leading the integration of our transport networks to deliver door-to-door mobility solutions.

- Sponsoring the technical work necessary to underpin and refine our ambitions.

- Targeted provision of match-funding to support the delivery of projects.

- Presenting a unifying voice for the region on the national level.

Peninsula Transport further requests that it will need support from the government through:

- A provisional development fund to progress our package of short-term initiatives and mature our network design work.

- A meaningful, effective role for Peninsula Transport in the future structure of the rail industry.

3. Financial Considerations

The cost of producing the Rail Strategy and Executive Summary documents comes from allocated funds from the Department for Transport (DfT) from FY21/22. The work has been undertaken within approved budgets.

4. Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations associated with this paper.

5. Risk Management Considerations

The Peninsula Transport Programme Management Group reviews risk and assigns the required mitigation actions across the Peninsula Transport work packages on at least a monthly basis. The group reports monthly to the DfT in compliance with the terms of the DfT's funding support letter.

6. Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations

This Paper has provided details of the main recommendations from the Peninsula Transport Rail Strategy. These recommendations cover short term initiatives, reflecting current economic conditions, as well as long term objectives for the rail network in the region, building on the success of rail infrastructure investment in recent years across the peninsula area.