

BRIEFING NOTE

MOTION: New railway stations and electrification along the Lancaster - Morecambe - Heysham branch line

Lancaster City Council notes that:

- a) Morecambe and Heysham Councillors representing the almost 37,000 residents of the wards: Heysham Central, Heysham South, Heysham North, West End, Westgate and Poulton, are calling on the Council to support new railway stations or halts alongside other improvements to the Lancaster-Morecambe-Heysham railway line.
- b) The 37,000 residents of these communities only have the public transport option of bus services, yet there is a railway line running right past them. Having access to the railway network would enhance the lives of our residents, connect us directly to national railway services, take traffic off our roads, reduce congestion throughout the district and help us achieve our net zero targets. It should also make the rail line more profitable for the operator as it will deliver many thousands more paying customers per year.
- c) We are all great supporters of the Eden development in Morecambe and are well aware of how transformational it has the potential to be.
- d) Lancashire County Council has responsibility for transport and not City, however Lancaster City Council is the accountable body for the Eden funding and is represented on the working group looking into the parking and transport needs of the visitors to Eden.
- e) The great majority of residents are fully supportive of the coming of Eden however their main concerns are the traffic and parking impact on the lives of the people who live in the area.
- f) Eden will be generating up to 4,000 visitors to Morecambe per day, a significant proportion of whom will be encouraged to arrive by train, necessitating an improvement to the service between Lancaster and Morecambe and beyond to Heysham Port.
- g) We understand that discussions are in their very early stages about such modernisation and improvements, including a new transport hub and some form of electrification, either through overhead lines or through the use of battery trains.
- h) Lancaster Civic Vision has made a point of lobbying Lancashire County Council and Lancaster City Council with regards to this electrification of the service.
- i) Transport improvements shouldn't just be to the benefit of Eden and its visitors but equally should benefit local residents.

Lancaster City Council believes:

Substantial benefits to the local community can be achieved by new stations or halts to be built in Heysham, between Oxcliffe Road and Mossgate Park, in Westgate near to the football stadium and in Poulton at York Bridge. Visitors to Morecambe could be served by a station with an adjacent 'park and ride' car park on land already owned by City and County at the end of the Bay Gateway near the Trumacar roundabout. These new stations should be built whilst other improvements to the service including its electrification are being implemented to benefit visitors to Eden.

Lancaster City Council will:

- 1) adopt the above as its preferred position in relation to railway stations on the Lancaster – Morecambe – Heysham line;
- 2) make the case to the appropriate bodies and organisations at every available opportunity for new railway stations in Westgate, Poulton, Heysham and also potentially at the end of the Bay Gateway with an adjacent ‘park and ride’ car park;
- 3) call for all parties to work towards a solution that will deliver an improved rail service for the residents of Morecambe and Heysham as well as for visitors to Eden and users of the port.

PROPOSERS:

Proposed by Councillor Catherine Potter. Seconded by Councillors Joanne Ainscough, Catherine Armistead, Matthew Black, Phillip Bradley, Roger Cleet, Claire Cozler, John Hanson, Prof Chris Harris, Paul Hart, Colin Hartley, John Livermore, Margaret Pattison, Susan Penney, and David Whitaker.

OFFICER BRIEFING NOTE

The City Council has previously tried to lobby for improved railway infrastructure, including stations along the route.

During the planning application process for Morecambe Football Club’s Globe Arena (now the Mazuma Stadium), officers and the applicant tried to persuade Network Rail to include a rail halt as part of the development, but to no avail. Prior to this, the Council also tried allocating land for aspirational rail halts in the district, one of which could have been at Mossgate Park, but Network Rail did not express an interest in developing the infrastructure that was required at the time.

But the reallocation of funding from the cancellation of the later phase of HS2 towards major local transport improvements provides new encouragement for ambitious transport projects in the district.

As part of the Eden Morecambe discussions, officers have been working with colleagues at Lancashire County Council to explore the potential for new infrastructure. These discussions have included the potential for an electrified or battery-powered railway line to Morecambe; investment in the quality of Morecambe Railway Station (station buildings and facilities); and improvements to the number and/or regularity of services connecting Morecambe to the West Coast Mainline.

Approximately 24% of the north’s rail network is currently electrified. Electrification costs will vary depending upon the extent of infrastructure change that is required. For example, aside from the provision of overhead lines, there will be changes needed to level crossings, signal equipment, station platforms and bridges to accommodate the new infrastructure. As a broad benchmark, the ongoing electrification of six miles of the Bolton to Wigan line was estimated to cost £78m and involved extensive changes to infrastructure. Whilst the Morecambe line is not as long as the Bolton-Wigan line, construction costs will have risen since.

Additional railway stations in the locations indicated would provide local residents with greater travel choices. A new station at Heysham is particularly needed given that Heysham does not currently benefit from a viable passenger rail service or a credible station despite its considerable population and employment hubs, especially at the power station and the port.

The creation of a passenger station alongside a park and ride could provide genuine change to help ease local commuting/school run patterns and improve air quality.

As ever with the creation of new stations, there is a balance to be considered. More stations along a branch line means more stops, which means longer journeys. This may have the impact of reducing the overall number of services that can operate along the line. This is because service patterns must align with the rail network's national priority services, which are inter-city trains between Scotland and London and freight trains using the West Coast Mainline. The fact that the branch line joins the West Coast Mainline means that there are limitations regarding the volume of services that can operate in between these national services.

The motion aligns with the Council's climate emergency declaration and the excellent work that the Council's various teams are progressing in preparing for a low carbon future. City Council officers have a good working relationship with their County Council colleagues regarding rail matters, and both Councils have previously successfully collaborated regarding HS2 and local rail improvements. Prior to the recent announcement, the County Council were active on the district's behalf in discussing the potential for improvements to the Morecambe branch line with Network Rail and service operators.

It is recommended that in the first instance officers meet with County Council colleagues to explore the feasibility of the options referred to in the motion.

Where there is full (or even partial) support from the County Council in their role as transport authority and from the rail service operators (who will advise whether the proposals represent value for money in terms of service viability), then the City Council will lobby for an ambitious, improved Lancaster – Morecambe – Heysham branch line.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS
The Section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no comments.
MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS
The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no comments.