



Briefing on the Reopening of the Beverley to York Rail Line

The Minsters Rail Campaign is promoting the reopening of the direct Hull-Beverley-York “Minsters” rail line. It will be an alternative link from Hull and the East Riding to the rest of the rail network, needed because the existing rail infrastructure serving Hull lacks resilience. It will also be key to the long-term economic and social future of the East Riding, creating new travel opportunities and enhancing sustainable development. Without it there will be a long-term cost to the local economy. Regionally, it will contribute to the “Northern Powerhouse”, improving east-west connectivity.

A study by consultants Carl Bro in 2005 commissioned by the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC) found that the reopening would be feasible, achievable and affordable, and would represent value for money in terms of the Department for Transport’s benefit/cost analysis. There has, so far, been no progress towards reopening the line. (For a brief summary of the main points of the Carl Bro study, see the “Facts and FAQs” page on our website: www.minstersrail.net.)

1. Why is the Beverley to York rail line needed?

1.1 Main road corridors already inadequate; future demand

The two main road corridors through the East Riding - A1079 and A166 - are barely adequate to meet current needs. The ERYC Local Plan Submission Strategy Document (2014) recognises that the A1079 is already seriously congested at peak times and that “... *the road network cannot be expected to accommodate unconstrained traffic growth*” (paras 7.43-7.44). Congestion and delays on the A1079 already constitute an economic disadvantage for Hull and the East Riding.

Housing developments planned for the period up to 2029 will result in more than 7000 new homes being built along the former Beverley to York rail route. The A1079 will therefore experience increasing traffic density, delaying commuters and freight to an unacceptable level. Despite some improvements the A1079 is often slow. Many serious accidents occur, and it is reckoned to be the 7th most dangerous road in the UK (see www.a1079.org). Except for 1.5 miles, the 27 miles from Beverley to the A64 York bypass are single carriageway. Upgrading is hugely expensive (the dualling of one mile was cancelled due to costs rising beyond the estimated £14m) and will be of only short-term benefit, as traffic grows. The long-term alternative to massive expenditure on road widening is improved public transport.

1.2 Existing public transport too slow to bring about modal shift away from road

1.2.1 Bus services between Hull and York

Bus journeys on the A1079 corridor are slow (an hour for the 22 miles from Market Weighton to Hull, 45 minutes for the 21 miles from Market Weighton to York). At peak times buses are caught up in heavy congestion and not able to keep to schedule. They are not an attractive alternative for commuters. Similar problems are faced by bus services via the A166 and Stamford Bridge.

1.2.2 Rail services between Hull and York

Rail travel from Hull to the north via the East Coast Main Line (ECML) requires a journey to York. The current rail route between Hull and York via Selby is slow (most trains take 68-75 minutes), with irregular and infrequent services, some of which involve changing at Selby. (This contrasts with the Minsters line route which even in 1924 offered a Hull to York journey time of 56 minutes.)

The existing Hull-York service is not attractive to commuters. The planned improvement (an hourly service) is welcome, but will not be of benefit to Market Weighton, Pocklington and Stamford Bridge.

1.3 The need for an alternative route from Hull to the mainline rail network

The main line to Hull from the west is at risk of disruption. It passes along the Humber foreshore, an area at high risk of flooding, and the line was closed briefly by the tidal surge in December 2013. Predicted sea level rise in the Humber estuary may make this more a frequent occurrence. The 2010 ERYC draft Climate Change Strategy (para 4.5.6) states that before 2050 *“Alternative routes may need to be found or existing routes protected for road and rail infrastructure”*. The swing bridges at Selby and Goole add vulnerability to the routes serving Hull: shipping accidents or bridge problems are infrequent, but the resulting disruption is unpredictable and may be long-lasting. For reasons of network resilience a diversionary rail link to Hull is therefore needed. Clearly a reopened Minsters Line will not *replace* the main route to the west, but it will ensure that, if the latter is badly disrupted, Hull and the East Riding will not be cut off from the mainline rail network, with serious economic consequences (as was the case when the Devon and Cornwall main line was cut at Dawlish by sea damage for two months in 2014).

1.4. Sustainable development; long term transport planning

1.4.1 The obligation to favour sustainable transport

Government places an obligation on local councils to encourage sustainable modes of transport.

The ERYC Local Plan Submission Strategy Document (2014) contains the following statement:

(para 7.42) *“There is ... a need to pro-actively encourage sustainable modes of transport, alongside appropriate measures that seek to manage the use of the private car. This will be supported through ... the allocation of sites for development in a way which supports a reduction in the need to travel and promotes greater use of sustainable transport modes, such as public transport ...”*

As already noted, the ERYC Local Plan Submission Strategy Document recognises that the A1079 is already seriously congested at peak times. Without a sustainable public transport alternative, it is inevitable that the number of extra journeys which will result from the predicted housing developments along the A1079 corridor, plus freight haulage, will have a detrimental effect on journey times and on the quality of life of the population along the route.

In the same document (page 240) there is recognition that *“enhanced rail services may provide a key means of encouraging modal shift away from car use to help address highway capacity issues”*. This Campaign is of the firm view that a reopened Minsters line will be a highly effective way of encouraging modal shift away from car use and of meeting sustainable transport obligations.

1.4.2 Long-term transport planning

The ERYC Economic Development Strategy 2012-2016 (2012) advises priority for projects “which deliver connectivity infrastructure for growth”. Para 8.4.17 states: *“Delays and unreliability in the area’s transport infrastructure weaken the East Riding’s strategic position with its surrounding cities and also [have] a direct economic cost in terms of reducing productivity through increased journey times.”*

2. A future rail service between Hull and York via the Minsters route

The 2005 Carl Bro study found that the reopening of the Beverley to York rail line (closed in 1965) is feasible and that at £239m (2005 figure) the benefit/cost ratio would be favourable. It put forward potential routes round Market Weighton, Pocklington and Stamford Bridge (the original routes through them having been built over many years ago), chosen for sound railway engineering reasons.

The 2005 Carl Bro study also indicates that the direct rail link between Hull and York could match the best journey times of 90 years ago (i.e. under an hour). It would allow people in the Western Wolds towns a rapid journey by train to York for an easy connection onward by rail to their final destinations.

The 2005 feasibility study by consultants Carl Bro funded by ERYC showed that many private car users would switch to a rail service if it was available. Since 2005 conditions on the A1079 have deteriorated considerably, and this response would almost certainly now be higher. A study of Market Weighton in April 2014 by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies showed that better public transport links would be likely to reduce private car use if residents were able to rely on public transport for travel to work.

3. Transport needs that would be served by the direct Minsters line

The reopened Minsters rail line would be an important part of the region's transport infrastructure, serving both local and regional travel needs:

3.1 Commuting

The ERYC Economic Development Strategy 2012-2016 (2012) states that 45% of East Riding residents travel outside the area for work and 20% of the East Riding workforce travel into the area (page 7, para 2.3.3). A large part of this is by car. This can only increase due to projected housing development. The Minsters rail route will provide a welcome alternative for many commuters.

3.2 Education

Students in further and higher education are increasingly studying at universities and colleges near to home, due to high tuition fees. Local students at the universities and colleges in Hull and York represent a travel market whose public transport needs are not being met at present.

3.3 Health

The hospitals in Cottingham and Hull are major regional centres for many medical specialties. On-site parking is inadequate and expensive. A York-Hull rail service via Beverley, with connecting bus services, would meet the needs of patients and relatives from the Western Wolds towns.

3.4 Retail

A reliable rail service from the Western Wolds towns and villages would enable residents to access easily the major retail centres of Hull and York (and also Leeds and Meadowhall).

3.5 Onward rail travel via York; HS2

At present anyone from the Western Wolds making a long-distance rail journey must go to York by bus or private car. The Minsters line will connect at York with services to many long-distance destinations.

Plans for HS2 have been welcomed by Yorkshire councils and LEPs. York will become a major point of connection into HS2. But without a rail link to York through the Western Wolds, its communities and businesses will not be able to make best use of the economic and travel benefits which HS2 will bring.

3.6 Tourism

The current East Coast tourism business is valued at £500 million annually (April 2014). However, the ERYC Economic Development Strategy 2012-2016 (page 49 figure 14) shows "*underdeveloped tourism offer*" as a weakness. The Western Wolds market towns are in need of visitors to boost their economy but road congestion and lack of parking is limiting their potential.

Around seven million tourists from far and wide visit York every year, many by rail. Many of these could be encouraged to visit the East Riding towns but, given poor public transport, hire car is an option often chosen. If a rail service were available, they would be more likely to travel to the area. It must be noted that Hull's City of Culture status in 2017 will add to its tourism potential in the years beyond.

The reopening of the York-Beverley-Hull rail line could be a catalyst for a massive increase in heritage and countryside tourism not possible with road travel alone. Additionally, North Sea Ferries bring large numbers of foot and cycle passengers to Hull. The proposed rail service would offer them opportunities to explore the Western Wolds towns, as well as better connections by rail to the north.

3.7 Hull: new industrial development; freight

There are already few paths for freight trains as the number of passenger trains on the main line out of Hull increases. The new investment in manufacturing in Hull by Siemens will add to the pressure on the existing routes to the city, both road and rail, passenger and freight. If Hull-York services use the Minsters route to York via Beverley, this will free up much-needed paths for freight on the main line.

4. The position of the East Riding of Yorkshire Council (ERYC)

ERYC was originally very supportive of the reopening of the Beverley to York rail line.

It funded the feasibility study by consultants Carl Bro (2005) already referred to, which found that the reopening is feasible with a favourable benefit/cost ratio and identified workable alternative routes round Market Weighton, Pocklington and Stamford Bridge where the original line has been built over.

Safeguarding of the whole route, including the routes needed round the areas built over, was proposed in earlier documents that led up to the 2014 draft East Riding Local Plan. For example:

“The re-opening of the railway line between Hull and York is currently a long-term aspiration for both East Riding of Yorkshire and Hull City Councils. The provision of a direct rail line between Hull and York could significantly reduce traffic and congestion along the A1079. The East Riding of Yorkshire Council's LDF Preferred Approach Core Strategy identifies land to be safeguarded for the route where it is under development pressure or where it is the only workable route.”

ERYC Third Local Transport Plan strategy, 2011-2026 (2010) para 8.31

“This may be the last opportunity to protect a workable railway route... . Land will need to be safeguarded for both the line and possible station locations in and around the major settlements along the route.” ERYC Preferred Approach Core Strategy (2010) para 5.42

“Policy Statement: The Council will work ... to ... protect potential rail routes and facilities for the future.” ERYC Third Local Transport Plan strategy, 2011-2026 (2010) page 157

However, the draft East Riding Local Plan of 2014 does not safeguard the whole route including the alternative routes round the built-over areas (Market Weighton, Pocklington and Stamford Bridge). This is on the grounds that because it is unlikely that funding will become available for the reopening within the plan period (i.e. up to 2029), it is not possible for the Council to justify protecting the route.

This is understandable but, in comparison with the forward transport planning of some other local authorities, it lacks long term vision. If land needed for the new routes round built-over areas is developed with housing, it will make the reopening more difficult and more expensive. However, the East Riding Local Plan Submission Strategy Document does contain this commitment (para 5.59):

“the Council recognises the benefit that such a proposal [i.e. the reopening] could bring to the wider area and will work with neighbouring authorities, partners and funding bodies to explore opportunities to promote this course of action”.

5. A long-term aspiration: making it happen

All the local authorities along the route, including ERYC, have said that in principle they support the reopening of the line as a long-term aspiration. This support is most important.

The Minsters Rail Campaign believes that because of the line's wider regional significance, action towards reopening should not depend only on ERYC as the authority through which most of the line runs. We therefore welcome the setting up of the National Infrastructure Commission, and will work with bodies and policy-makers as appropriate, seeking their support for the long-term reopening and its funding to be added to the proposals to be considered by the N.I.C. We hope that this will lead to an updated feasibility study and costings, but most importantly for now, to the safeguarding of the whole route from any development which will make future reopening more difficult and more expensive.

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Revised 3 March 2016

