

## **ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **THE ROLE OF HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

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#### **1. Purpose of Paper**

This paper sets out Hertfordshire County Council's position in regard to rail services, with particular reference to Stevenage.

#### **2. Background**

Hertfordshire County Council is the transport and highway authority for the area, but it has no statutory powers in regard to railways.

The council considers the railways as an essential element of the overall transport network, noting that the rail mode share in Hertfordshire for work trips is 16%. Over 60,000 people commute out of the county by rail each day, with 12,000 commuting into Hertfordshire. The county council therefore wishes current service levels to be maintained and, where possible, improved.

Stevenage is the third busiest station in Hertfordshire, with 4.5 million passengers per year.

#### **3. Rail Policy**

The county council's overall policy for rail is set out in the Local Transport Plan, adopted in May 2018. The policy wording is as follows:

The county council will support and promote rail use in the county, especially in order to reduce car use. To do this it will:

- a) Work with the rail industry and other partners to seek improvements to train services in regards to capacity, journey times, frequency and range of destinations served.
- b) Work with the rail industry and other stakeholders to make rail travel more attractive through improved fares and ticketing, upgraded station facilities and better access and interchange by sustainable modes of transport.
- c) Support Community Rail Partnerships in the county.
- d) Publish a Rail Strategy setting out how the county council's objectives can be achieved.

#### **4. Rail Strategy**

As referenced in the policy, the county council publishes a Rail Strategy which sets out its aspirations for developing rail services. The current Rail Strategy was published in June 2016, with an update expected in late 2018 or early 2019.

The county council's top priorities for the East Coast route as set out in the Rail Strategy are:

- “secure better long distance connections from Stevenage to the north from the new InterCity franchise and progress comprehensive development of Stevenage Transport Hub to support Stevenage’s increasing importance as a growing population and employment centre, and its enhanced role as an interchange hub.
- “further build on the GTR plans by promoting service improvements (capacity, frequency, speed) through development of ‘Hertford Loop Metro’ to take advantage of the new Stevenage turnback platforms and new rolling stock, and develop Stevenage as a transport hub.
- “HS2 Phase 2 will relieve capacity pressure on the ECML from 2033 onwards. The county council will develop plans and lobby for increased long distance stops at Stevenage and increased local service frequency and capacity at other key stations”.

The Rail Strategy also sets out the county council’s support for the following proposals:

- The development of a new station building at Stevenage which will be integrated into the wider town centre development;
- The implementation of the Thameslink Programme to increase services and connections at Stevenage;
- A new station in south Stevenage (on the Hertford Loop), as promoted by Stevenage Borough Council.

#### **5. Links with GTR**

Hertfordshire County Council continues to maintain good links with Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR), the local train operator serving Stevenage. The county council holds quarterly meeting with GTR to discuss operational issues and opportunities for further development. Periodically GTR is invited to update the county council’s elected members through the Growth, Infrastructure, Planning and

the Economy Cabinet Panel, most recently at the meeting held on 20 September 2018.

The county council also attends the Thameslink Programme Stakeholder Group, which provides an input to the current upgrade programme.

## **6. Other Links with the Rail Industry**

The county council maintains links with the wider rail industry, either on an on-going or ad hoc basis as appropriate. For Stevenage the relevant links include:

- Dialogue with Network Rail on the development of the Stevenage Turnback scheme, which will provide the necessary capacity for services from the Hertford Loop;
- Dialogue with GTR on developing the replacement bus service on the Hertford Loop to Stevenage which will be required from May 2019 until the Stevenage Turnback scheme is delivered.
- Membership of the East Coast Mainline Authorities (ECMA) group.

## **7. Links with Rail User Groups**

The county council will support recognised rail user groups, and in recent years has taken a more active stance in seeking their views to help develop its own responses to consultations on new franchises and timetable changes. There are 50 railway stations in Hertfordshire and therefore it is difficult for the county council to be aware of all the local issues without the input from the user groups.

The county council will generally champion the issues raised by the rail user groups where this accords with the Rail Strategy. However, in cases such as timetable changes where improvement to services at one station may be detrimental to others, the county council will need to take a strategic view.

The county council currently has active links with seven rail user groups across Hertfordshire, and engages with collective groups such as Railfuture.