

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 29 July 2019

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Autun Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair) ,
Doug Bainbridge, Adrian Brown, Teresa Callaghan, Jody Hanafin and
Lorraine Rossati.

Also Present: Councillor Lloyd Briscoe (Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise &
Transport)
Mr Phil Daniels (Turnback Project Manager, Network Rail)
Mr Paul Codd (Stakeholder Manager, Govia Thameslink Railway)
Mr Trevor Mason (Principal Engineer – Transport & Policy, Hertfordshire
County Council)

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 6.57pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Booth and Jim Brown.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 25 JUNE 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee meeting held on 25 June 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the provisional date of 3 September 2019 for the Select Committee's next meeting, at which it was hoped that consideration would be given to the provision of Post Office services in the Borough. He asked Members to pencil in this date in their diaries/calendars.

3 STEVENAGE RAIL STATION UPDATE

The Network Rail (NR) and Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) representatives gave presentations which provided updates on the Stevenage Turnback (5th Platform) project, the Govia Thameslink Spring 2019 timetable and the wider works along the East Coast Main Line (ECML) in support of the King's Cross remodelling project.

The Network Rail (NR) representative advised that the Stevenage Turnback (5th Platform) project would provide a new bi-directional running line (2km) running parallel with the existing ECML into the new platform where services would terminate, also enabling passengers to interchange. Major works were planned as part of the upcoming engineering work on the ECML in August 2019, Christmas 2019 and February 2020. Access to the new platform would be via a new footbridge, with stairs and a lift down to platform level.

The NR representative showed a series of slides regarding the proposed new layout and some photographs of the work that had already been completed on site. He also introduced some design images of the north end of the new Platform 5, looking from various directions.

In terms of the current status and progress of works, the NR representative advised that planning permission had been obtained; there were ongoing land negotiations with the Council and land had been acquired from Legal & General; operational readiness discussions were ongoing with the Department of Transport and Govia Thameslink Railway; re-grading works were ongoing at the south end of the site; sheet piling was underway at north and south ends of the site; overhead line piling and track excavation had been completed in the north and central areas; and the changeover of a telecommunications mast and removal of the old mast had been completed.

In respect of future works, the Committee was informed that overhead line works were planned for the August 2019 Bank Holiday weekend, detailed design for the remaining works was continuing and integration would take place with other projects, such as the King's Cross Track Improvement scheme.

The Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) representative referred to the major incidents that had occurred on 25 July 2019 due to the extremely hot weather. Three areas of track lost overhead power cables. One of these, the Midland Main Line just north of St. Pancras, was still to be fully repaired, and had been operating on a reduced service. It was hoped that normal service would resume on 30 July 2019.

The GTR representative stated that, for the period 22 June – 20 July 2019, 73.2% of overall GTR services had been on time (ie. all stations called within 59 seconds of arrival time) and only 4.1% of services had been cancelled. For Stevenage, 72.5% of Thameslink trains had been on time and 5.3% had been cancelled. Between 2010 and 2019 there had been a 38% increase in the number of departures per day; a 92% increase in the number of seats available per day; and a 231% increase in passenger capacity.

In relation to the new 5th Platform, the GTR representative explained that the new 717 class trains were gradually replacing the old 313 class trains. It was hoped that the 717 trains would be fully operational on the Hertford North line by the summer of 2020. Whilst the 5th Platform works were taking place, there were two temporary bus services per hour to Hertford North (130-200 passengers per day) and one service per hour to Watton-at-Stone (30-40 passengers per day). Prior to May 2019, a maximum of 350 passengers used the service per day. As an example, he added that, inclusive of the temporary bus service, a journey from Stevenage to Cuffley would take 56 minutes in peak hours and 42 minutes off peak.

With regard to the East Coast Main Line upgrade, the GTR representative advised that, once completed, this significant investment would enable an additional two long-distance services an hour into and out of London and would improve train service reliability for all operators, including GTR. This would include the remodelling of King's Cross (track not station), the Stevenage Turnback and power supply upgrades. In respect of the King's Cross remodelling, the track infrastructure had life expired. The remodelling would result in six tracks into King's Cross, with signalling control being moved to York. 148 new signals would be created, as would 6km of new track, 31 switches/crossings and 15km of overhead line replacement.

The GTR representative referred to wider ECML upgrades, including seven months of intensive overnight and weekend maintenance from Winter 2019 to Summer 2020 on the Northern City Line, points replacement at Newark, and the Werrington Grade Separation. Disruption on the network would take place at the August Bank Holiday weekend and over Christmas in 2019; a series of weekend closures during 2020; and reduced King's Cross availability during 2021 (50% capacity, whilst the other 50% was being remodelled, with possible greater use of St. Pancras).

In respect of the August 2019 Bank Holiday (24-25 August) weekend, the GTR representative explained that a "Do not travel" message had been promoted. There would be 130 miles of line closures, including service to and from King's Cross/St. Pancras and Moorgate. It was accepted that it was essential for some passengers to travel, and bus services would be provided between 5.00am and 11.00pm on these days, in order to transport passengers to stations on the Bedford to St. Pancras line and Greater Anglia line. These changes would be communicated to passengers through a variety of methods. Feedback from the weekend closure would be evaluated and used in the modelling of similar weekend closures over the coming year.

During the course of the presentations, the following matters were raised:

- The NR representative confirmed that the Stevenage Turnback works were on schedule for completion in time for implementation within the Summer 2020 timetable;
- A Member who was a regular commuter raised the safety issue of Platform 1 at Stevenage Railway Station, which she felt was dangerous due to its narrow width in places, especially during the crowded peak periods and with the additional trains to St. Pancras. The GTR representative undertook to look into this issue;

- The same Member commented that the new carriages contained less seats which meant that passengers joining trains at Stevenage during peak hours invariably had to stand for their journey. The GTR representative explained that there were no plans for either additional trains or more trains to be of 12 carriage length, as the both the number of trains per hour and the size of the fleet were at maximum levels;
- In terms of the service on the Hertford North line once the Stevenage turnback facility had been completed, the GTR representative confirmed that there would be two trains per hour throughout the day;
- The Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise & Transport commented that he had been in discussion with County Councillor Derrick Ashley (HCC Executive Member with responsibility for Public Transport matters), who shared Members' concerns regarding the condition of Stevenage Railway Station. Business leaders also felt that the Station was a very poor gateway to the town. County Councillor Ashley would be pursuing the issue of potential improvements to the Station at a higher level;
- A Member considered that, as well as the look of the Station, there were a number of practical issues that needed addressing, including the improved availability of the toilets and lifts (both of which were frequently closed); the robustness of the entrance/exit gates, which often broke down due to the volume of commuters during busy periods; and the number of empty shop units on the concourse. The Chair commented that responsibility for maintenance of the street lift rested with the Borough Council. The GTR representative appreciated the issues raised and advised that Gregg's would shortly be opening one of those shop units;
- In response to a Member's question regarding the level of digital services on the ECML, the NR representative stated that there were currently no digital signals on the line. The use of digital signals would be piloted between Moorgate and Drayton Park stations before being rolled out to the remainder of the ECML. However, the current fleet of trains was digitally ready, and so there would be no need for a fleet upgrade once the signals had been upgraded;
- In response to a further question, the GTR representative confirmed that once the Stevenage Turnback facility had been completed and the 5th platform was operational, the journey times to and from Moorgate would not be drastically quicker, possibly a few minutes per journey;
- A number of Members commented that the GTR service had been much more reliable since the Summer timetable had been introduced.

In terms of the widespread desire to improve the appearance of Stevenage Railway Station, the HCC Principal Engineer – Transport Policy & Monitoring commented that this was an issue that could be raised as part of the process when the Thameslink franchise was renewed (currently planned for 2021).

It was **RESOLVED** that the updates on the Stevenage Turnback (5th Platform) project, the Govia Thameslink Spring 2019 timetable and the wider works along the East Coast Main Line in support of the King's Cross remodelling project be noted.

4 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None.

5 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

Not required.

6 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR