



APPENDIX

AGENDA ITEM: 5(j)

Cabinet: 20th January 2009

Report of: Interim Policy Services Manager

Relevant Portfolio Holders: Cllr M. Forshaw

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**SUBJECT: MERSEYSIDE RAIL ROUTE UTILISATION STRATEGY
(CONSULTATION DRAFT)**

District-wide interest.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members of the content of Network Rail's Merseyside Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS), which sets out the strategic vision for the future improvement of the local rail network.
- 1.2 To provide members with the opportunity to express comments, and to recommend a response to Network Rail's consultation on the Merseyside RUS.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the responses in Section 5 of this report be forwarded to Network Rail.
- 2.2 That the Interim Policy Services Manager report back to keep members updated with the content of the final Merseyside RUS, and also on any future consultations on the draft Merseyside RUS in due course.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Council Officers and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transportation met with officers from Network Rail in June 2008 to discuss rail issues in West Lancashire and to seek to influence the Strategies for Lancashire/Cumbria and

Merseyside. Cabinet approved comments on the Lancashire and Cumbria RUS on 17 June 2008 and the finalised strategy was included in a member's Update.

- 3.2 Network Rail published the Merseyside Route Utilisation Strategy (RUS) on 28th November 2008 for consultation purposes. Comments are invited on the draft RUS before 20th February 2009, so that options can be refined based upon the responses of stakeholders, with publication of the final RUS expected in April 2009.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The RUS analyses the current capability and capacity of the railway in order to measure its ability to cater for existing demand and highlight current gaps, and to forecast demand to identify future gaps. A set of options has been generated to potentially bridge these gaps, and the most promising and value-for-money solutions will be implemented over a 10-year period from 2009.
- 4.2 The Merseyside draft RUS identifies gaps in the local rail network, and focuses particularly on two strategic rail corridors out of Liverpool, the Northern Line to Ormskirk, Southport and Kirkby and the Wirral Line to Birkenhead and Chester. The RUS identifies the route between Liverpool and Ormskirk as the second most popular route on the Mersey rail network, carrying approximately 3.7 million passengers between Liverpool and Ormskirk annually.
- 4.3 The Merseyside RUS has identified five generic gaps in the network, these include:
- Capacity at Stations – particularly at stations within central Liverpool;
 - Capacity, Trains and Infrastructure – sustained passenger growth has resulted in significant capacity issues and overcrowding on a number of services;
 - Connectivity and Journey Time – some parts of the RUS area have poor or no access to the rail network;
 - Getting to the Train – many passengers use the private car to get to local stations and many car parks are already at capacity;
 - Train Punctuality and Performance – there are a number of constraints on the network which can result in significant delay to passenger and freight services.
- 4.4 The Merseyside RUS seeks to tackle the connectivity issues of rail services between Liverpool and Skelmersdale and it is acknowledged that there is an insufficient rail service in this area relative to the size of the catchment area. Several options are set out to show how Network Rail feel that service provision can be improved in this area.

Option 1: An extension to the quarter-hourly service between Liverpool Central and Kirkby, to terminate at a new station in the centre of Skelmersdale. Rainford will become an interchange station for services to / from Wigan Wallgate. The infrastructure cost of this scheme is estimated at £60 million.

Option 2: An extension to the quarter-hourly service between Liverpool Central and Kirkby terminating at Up Holland. Up Holland would then become an interchange station for services to / from Wigan Wallgate. This would require electrification and double tracking to Up Holland. The infrastructure cost of this scheme is estimated at £40 million.

- 4.5 The draft Merseyside RUS indicated that Option 1 is seen as the preferred option, as it is believed that the long term financial feasibility of providing a station in Skelmersdale is greater than electrification of the line to Up Holland, as set out in Option 2. It is recommended that should Option 1 be taken forward that a more detailed business case is prepared to better understand the viability of the proposed scheme.
- 4.6 The Merseyside RUS also refers to services between Liverpool and Ormskirk and seeks to support the recommendations of the Lancashire & Cumbria RUS of providing an hourly service on the Preston – Ormskirk Line and the reinstatement of infrastructure to improve connectivity with both Preston and Southport respectively.

5.0 ISSUES

- 5.1 The District Council's recommended response to Network Rail's draft Merseyside RUS is outlined below:

Option 1

- 5.2 It is recommended that the District Council should support the inclusion of this option within the final RUS. It is widely acknowledged that Skelmersdale lacks sufficient rail facilities for a town of its size, the provision of such a facility in the centre of the town, coupled with a frequent rail service to Liverpool will see significant regeneration benefits.
- 5.3 Whilst support for this option is recommended it should be commented that no option has been provided within the RUS to look at the potential for a new station to be created at West Pimbo (Skelmersdale South). A study was undertaken in 2002 in relation to the provision of rail services in the Skelmersdale area and it was concluded that the best option in terms of financial viability was the electrification of the line from Kirkby to Skelmersdale and the creation of a station at Pimbo. It is recommended that this be put forward as a potential option that should be considered as part of the RUS process.
- 5.4 Should option 1 be carried forward as a preferred option within the finalised RUS, future consideration will need to be given to the implications of providing a rail facility on the regeneration scheme for Skelmersdale Town Centre. Although there is no reference in the SPD / Masterplan to the provision of new rail facilities in the town centre, however, this does not mean that such a facility could not be included within future regeneration proposals.

Option 2

- 5.5 It is recommended that the District Council should indicate that this option should not be brought forward within the final RUS. Although, it could be acknowledged that the improvement of rail services to Up Holland will assist in providing better connectivity to Skelmersdale, it will not provide as effective solution as option 1.
- 5.6 The Merseyside RUS also makes reference to increasing the capacity of trains on key routes, including the service between Liverpool and Ormskirk. It is recommended that such provision is supported as it would seek to relieve passenger overcrowding on trains, particularly in peak times.
- 5.7 It also recommended that comment be made on the relationship between the Merseyside and Lancashire & Cumbria RUS. That the action points and options contained within these two documents should be read in conjunction and that a joined up approach is used when implementing schemes across the RUS areas.

6.0 PROPOSALS

- 6.1 Network Rail has provided the District Council with the opportunity to make comments on the draft Merseyside RUS until 20th February 2009. It is proposed that the District Council writes a response to Network Rail's consultation as broadly set out in Section 5 of this report.
- 6.2 In summary, it is proposed that the Council gives strong support to the option to provide a new rail facility within centre of Skelmersdale.
- 6.3. It is also proposed that a Members Update is produced on the detail of the final Merseyside RUS, and will also inform members of any arising consultation on the draft Merseyside RUS in the future.
- 6.4 It is recommended that the District Council enter into negotiations with Network Rail and other key stakeholders on the integration of the rail line into Skelmersdale Town Centre.

7.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 7.1 Future investment in the rail network and the provision of new services will increase rail patronage in the District, and provide West Lancashire residents with better access to key services, employment and recreation within and outside the District, whilst also increasing sustainable transport patterns and reducing the amount of journeys made by private car.
- 7.2 One of the key themes identified by the Sustainable Community Strategy is to improve access for all.

8.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The supported options contained within the draft Merseyside RUS in the main are predicted to have positive Benefit to Cost Ratios for Network Rail who will be funding the proposals.

- 8.2 There will be resource issues in terms of officer time spent liaising with Network Rail and preparing any District Council comments on future proposals.

9.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 There is a risk that any decisions made on the Merseyside RUS could adversely affect local rail services if the Council's views are not given sufficient weight.
- 9.2 The implementation of the option to create a new rail facility in Skelmersdale Town Centre will have implications on the SPD / Masterplan which was adopted by Council on 10th September 2008. The Council and developer partner will need to work with Network Rail to ensure that the inclusion of a new rail facility in Skelmersdale will enhance the regeneration benefits for the town.

10.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 It is important that robust options for the future improvement of the local rail network are strongly supported by the District Council in order to encourage increased rail patronage and more sustainable modes of transport.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no evidence from an initial assessment of an adverse impact on equality in relation to the equality target groups.

Background Documents

The following background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) have been relied on to a material extent in preparing this Report.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Document</u>
November 2008	Merseyside Route Utilisation Strategy (Consultation Draft)

Appendices

None.