



REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 1ST JULY 2014

SUBJECT: EXTENSION OF BEDLINOG LINE / DOWLAI PARK AND RIDE

REPORT BY: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To appraise members of the potential to extend the current freight line between Ystrad Mynach and Cwmbargoed to Dowlais Top to facilitate the potential future reinstatement of a passenger train service.
- 1.2 To seek members comments so that this can be reported to Cabinet for their consideration.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The potential to reinstate a passenger train service between Ystrad Mynach and Bedlinog has been developed previously through the Rail Strategy promoted by Sewta, the recently disbanded transport alliance for South East Wales. More recently, the opportunity to extend this to Dowlais Top as part of the remediation works associated with the open cast site at Ffos y Fran provides an opportunity to revisit the business case and consider the potential benefits.
- 2.2 In conjunction with Merthyr Council, Jacobs transportation consultancy was engaged to undertake a basic appraisal of the demand and business case. This identifies a stronger case for the delivery of the scheme in future based on an extension to Dowlais, rather than termination in Bedlinog and complements future development plans for the site at Dowlais Top. A stronger business case for the reinstatement of this line will support the provision of a station at Nelson within Caerphilly county borough.
- 2.3 This report summarises the appraisal and seeks members support to develop and promote the scheme (in conjunction with Merthyr Council) and ensure it receives due consideration amongst the other rail priorities identified and being developed in south east Wales.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 To work towards the Council's corporate objective of improving peoples' living environment through targeted actions, regulation, information and advice.
- 3.2 Engineering Division Objective: To provide safe and efficient transport and land drainage infrastructure through quality services delivered by means of cost effective management, maintenance and improvements of networks.
- 3.3 This proposal will help realise one of the main Aims of the Caerphilly County Borough Local Development Plan (Adopted November 2010) which is: "To provide a modern, integrated and sustainable transport system that increases opportunity, promotes prosperity and protects the

environment; where public transport, walking and cycling provide real travel alternatives". Further, it meets Key Objective 16 of the LDP, which seeks to "Reduce congestion by minimising the need to travel, promoting more sustainable modes of transport and making the most efficient use of existing transport infrastructure."

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 The current railway line between Ystrad Mynach and Bedlinog / Cwmbargoed is used by freight trains carrying coal from the Miller Argent open cast site adjacent to Dowlais Top to Aberthaw power station. Part of the site is coming to the end of its productive life. Miller Argent has offered to make provision for ground profile reinstatement of the former rail alignment (on a revised alignment to be agreed with Merthyr Tydfil CBC) that would facilitate the future reinstatement of a passenger line to Dowlais Top as part of the land formation delivered in the remediation of the open cast site. Miller Argent confirm that the Ffos y fran reclamation scheme has some 6-7 years of coaling and a further 2 years of final restoration to go and the company is currently working with Merthyr Tydfil Council to take account of the land formations as part of getting the correct levels in place for a future rail scheme.
- 4.2 The Sewta Rail Strategy 2013 proposes extending the passenger rail network to Bedlinog via Nelson and Trelewis along the existing freight line. Merthyr Tydfil and Caerphilly Councils jointly commissioned a further study with a transportation consultancy that had previously undertaken such work for Sewta (Jacobs) to examine the practicality, cost and business case implications of extending the proposed service further north to Dowlais Top, to the north east of Merthyr Tydfil.
- 4.3 Merthyr Tydfil Council identifies the reclaimed open cast site as an area for future development and the site has potential to offer a significant park and ride car park. The provision of a train service to this site would add significant value to potential developers. The proposed new service would run from Cardiff via Ystrad Mynach and Caerphilly and provide the opportunity for a new station located at Nelson. Further feasibility work on the most appropriate site for a station to serve the village is required, with consideration given to access and parking and any land requirements necessary to deliver the best solution that will sustain the strongest passenger growth.
- 4.4 The study looks at options of operations and operating costs, based on one or two trains per hour, with diesel or electric propulsion. It includes an engineering assessment and estimates the capital costs, demand and revenue forecasts and an economic appraisal. Attached to this report is a summary of the key points of the study, which gives an overview of the assumptions made and the key considerations.
- 4.5 The study concludes that it would be practical to extend the proposed passenger rail service along the existing line and beyond to a new terminus to serve a new development site at Dowlais Top. The infrastructure to provide an hourly service would be much less than for a half hourly service and would protect existing freight paths on the line. The new station could be supported by a large car park and provide for park and ride demand, which is limited at the existing station at Merthyr Tydfil. The new station could therefore provide a complementary role as well as providing enhanced connectivity between Merthyr Tydfil and Ystrad Mynach and Caerphilly.
- 4.6 The area beyond the catchment of the new station at Dowlais Top contains significantly more people and businesses than the wider catchment of the potential new station at Bedlinog. This positively influences the forecast demand for a new station at Dowlais Top that could not be justified for the station at Bedlinog.
- 4.7 The new rail service would open up a greater range of destinations served by rail – including between Dowlais / Bedlinog / Trelewis and Nelson and other stations on the Rhymney Line, although the vast majority of trips forecast would be to Cardiff.

- 4.8 The economic appraisal suggests that the business case for a diesel service is stronger than further electrification of this section of the network (which is outside the scope of the Valley Lines Electrification scheme). The option of an hourly service to Dowlais Top provides best value for money and, with a reasonable share of the Heads of the Valley demand, has a strong business case with a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 6.0. In Guidance issued by the Department for Transport, scheme with a BCR greater than 4.0 are rated as 'very high' value for money.
- 4.9 The key recommendations of the study were:
- To seek restoration of the rail alignment in the remediation of the open cast site.
 - The gradient is a key issue – remediation should take account of minimising further works at the Bogey Road bridge.
 - Change aspiration to Dowlais (i.e. extended from Bedlinog)
 - Further investigation into the post resignalling timetable on the Valley Lines network.
 - Consider including scheme and particular the rolling stock requirement into the scope of the next Wales rail franchise.
 - Further analysis of Dowlais passenger demand.
 - Protect the land to preserve the opportunity, through the respective Council's LDPs.
- 4.10 The Welsh Government is responsible for the development and delivery of major transport infrastructure schemes and has a number of identified priorities. With endorsement from the wider Council, officers and members could make formal representations to the Welsh Government, in particular to ensure the scheme is recognised and considered as rail priorities are developed. It is envisaged that Merthyr Tydfil Council would take the lead in developing the scheme further, supported by this Council, including through discussion with Network Rail and Arriva Trains.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no specific equalities implications arising as a result of this report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 No immediate financial implications, but more detailed feasibility and development work is required to take the scheme forward. Rail Schemes are typically developed in a GRIP (Governance for Railway Investment Projects) framework, defined by Network Rail, in order to minimise and mitigate the risks associated with delivering enhancements to the rail network.
- 6.2 The GRIP process divides a project into 8 distinct stages – the work commissioned to date is a very basic GRIP 1 (output definition) – the next stages are to develop GRIP2 (feasibility) and GRIP 3 (option selection). The funding requirement to develop a scheme through these next stages would be significant (estimated at between £0.5m and £1.0m) – it would involve detailed engineering assessments, ground investigation, signalling planning, station location / design development, as well as a more robust development of the business case / timetabling options etc. It would also be possible to split feasibility into phases (Ystrad Mynach to Bedlinog / Bedlinog to Cwm Bargoed).
- 6.3 In recent years, the funding to develop a scheme through these initial stages of feasibility and option selection would derive from regional priorities for rail developed by Sewta under the Regional Transport Plan, funded by the Welsh Government. Following the dissolution of the regional transport consortia, it is unclear at present how funding for future schemes will be managed or allocated. The Welsh Government is developing the concept of a Metro transport system for south east Wales, which is a strategy for improved rail and bus connectivity through improved infrastructure and services. It is envisaged that this is the mechanism that will determine the priorities and funding for delivering future schemes. The design and delivery of schemes that involve the operational railway is undertaken by external Consultants who specialise in developing these types of schemes, or by Network Rail directly.

6.4 There are no funds within the Council's Capital Programme to progress feasibility on the scheme.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 Comments received are covered in the main body of the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Members are asked to consider and comment upon the content of the report prior to submission to Cabinet for approval.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Scrutiny Committee members' comments considered by Cabinet prior to approval of the project.

11. STATUTORY POWERS

Government of Wales Act 2006
Railways Act 2005

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Background Papers:

Sewta Rail Strategy 2013: Final Report published March 2013 (Jacobs)

Sewta Rail Strategy Update 2013: Appraisal of Extension of Bedlinog Line to Dowlais Top published April 2014 (Jacobs)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Sewta Rail Strategy Review 2013 – Extension of Bedlinog Line to Dowlais Top – Summary of Key Findings