

**FEASIBILITY STUDY INTO THE REOPENING OF THE LEAMSIDE LINE –  
MEMBERS ITEM**

**Report of the City Solicitor**

**Strategic Priorities: Attractive and Inclusive City  
Corporate Improvement Objectives: CI101, CI104**

**1. Why has this report come to Committee**

- 1.1 The Committee has earlier agreed to receive a report on the Feasibility Study into the Reopening of the Leamside Line and the Councils intended response to the study.
- 1.2 Mr. Bernard Garner, Nexus Director General and Richard Thompson (Network Rail) have been invited to the meeting to discuss the implications of the feasibility study and the current position.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The Leamside line opened in 1839 and was formed from the original lines of the Newcastle and Darlington Junction railway and the Durham Junction Railway, The line constituted part of the original East Coast Mail Line route from Edinburgh to London, eventually being incorporated into the North Eastern Railway.
- 2.2 The Leamside Line closed to all traffic during 1992. Regular passenger services ceased in the 1960's and between these dates the route continued to be used by freight trains until the decline in the regions coal and steel industries brought about the diversion of remaining services via the East Coast main Line (ECML) through Durham City.
- 2.3 Since 1992, minimal structural maintenance has taken place and there has been natural and man made damage. However, the corridor remains intact and is uninterrupted by development. The line remains the property of Network Rail and has never formally been closed.

**3. Current Position**

- 3.1 Since the closure of the Leamside Line, the number of passenger trains along the ECML has doubled, freight train volumes have increased and the scale of congestion on adjacent road corridors has worsened. Transport policy has also changed such that several disused or freight only routes have been or will

be upgraded elsewhere to carry passengers again, including the Nottingham to Workshop, Cardiff to Ebbw Vale Parkway and Airdrie to Bathgate routes.

- 3.2 These developments have led to a growing belief that the Leamside line could play an important role in delivering improved links between the Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear and also improve links to local communities along the route, such as Washington and Fencehouses.
- 3.3 A partnership led by Nexus and comprising representatives of Sunderland Council, Durham County Council, One NorthEast, The North East Assembly and the Association of North East Councils commissioned Faber Maunsell to undertake a study into the feasibility of reopening the Leamside Line.
- 3.4 The study identified the following benefits in reopening the Leamside Line:-
  - Cutting train travel between Newcastle and Middlesbrough to less than an hour – linking city regions that together make up the fourth largest conurbation in the UK.
  - Bringing rail services to modern Washington for the first time
  - relieving congestion on the A1 and A19.
  - Building rail capacity for the North East for local passenger trains, freight, and as a relief route for the east coast main line.
  - Providing substantial economic benefits for employers along the route, through access to freight flows and increasing the labour market.
  - Unlocking the potential of adjacent development sites.
  - Relieving commuter overcrowding on the existing east coast mainline route into Newcastle.
- 3.5 The study also raised a number of key issues, including:-
  - The reintroduction of rail services on the Leamside Line is feasible at a cost estimated at the time of the study as £50-65 million;
  - Demand forecasts suggest daily demand in excess of 2000 passenger trips from station along the route;
  - The best use of the line would be as a route for services connecting the Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear city regions. Local passenger trains and freight services could also be accommodated;
  - The study show that the line's reopening would result in a range of wider economic benefits;
  - Innovative funding sources to meet the capital costs of the project may be required, as there is currently little prospect of central government funding.
- 3.6 Since the completion of the report on going meetings have been held with Network Rail and the Department of Transport
- 3.7 Mr Bernard Garner, Nexus Director General and Richard Thompson (Network Rail) have been invited to the meeting to discuss the implications of the feasibility study and the current position.

## **4 Recommendation**

4.1 The Committee is asked to consider the response received.

### **Background Papers**

Council's Constitution  
Overview & Scrutiny Handbook

R C Rayner,  
City Solicitor

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