

Report for New Forest HAT 9.4.10

Subject: Proposal to re-introduce passenger train services on the Waterside

1. Background

- 1.1 The report 'Connecting Communities' issued by the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) in June 2009 identified some 30 disused or freight-only lines across the country with the potential, if re-opened to passengers, to make a worthwhile contribution to the economy.
- 1.2 Heading the list, with the most positive Benefit :Cost ratio of any, was the Waterside Line. This endorsement by ATOC provided the impetus for the County Council's present initiative.
- 1.3 However, it should be noted that the costs allocated to reopening lines in the ATOC report have been found to be considerably understated when local authorities have looked in depth at lines around the country, which means that the report has put an optimistic gloss on the Benefit: Cost ratios.

2. Current situation

- 2.1 An exploratory meeting was held on February 11 at Hythe & Dibden Parish Hall attended by representatives of Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council, and all the local councils from the Waterside under the chairmanship of Cllr Kendal, Executive Member for Environment. South West Trains were also represented, but Network Rail's representative presented his apologies.
- 2.2 Unanimous support was given to the creation of a Waterside Community Rail Partnership with the aim of re-introducing passenger trains on the Waterside line between Totton and Hythe.
- 2.3 A feasibility study is in course of preparation, funded principally by the County Council, New Forest District Council, New Forest National Park Authority and Hythe & Dibden Parish Council on the basis of a through service running initially between Hythe and Southampton Central.
- 2.4 The study will examine the costs and benefits of re-opening the line to passengers, including the operational and infrastructure improvements which would be necessary to run passenger trains over what is currently a freight-only line.
- 2.5 It will make recommendations as to the level of service which could be provided and consider the case for new or re-located stations, and whether it would be possible to extend beyond Hythe, possibly into the Fawley complex.
- 2.5 It will assess likely passenger demand and resulting revenue, and evaluate the environmental and social benefits of restoring the passenger service which was withdrawn in 1966. It will also look at the likely impact on bus services and the Hythe Ferry operation.

3. Next steps

- 3.1 In drawing up the consultant's brief for the feasibility study, officers will take into account a recent piece of work by a student team from Southampton University

Engineering Dept which quite by coincidence has been evaluating the case for reinstatement of a passenger service on the Waterside as a degree project.

The student team is keen to share its findings with officers and a meeting is being set up for mid-April.

- 3.2 Once the consultant's brief is finalised, it will be necessary to go through the County Council's new procurement procedure to select the successful bidder among the four firms who feature in our framework contract:- Atkins, WSP, Amey and Halcrow.

Michael Hedderly
Rail Officer
30.3.10