

Dear Councillors,

Campaign to Reinststate the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton Railway Line

Summary

Since addressing the Transport, Environment and Economic Scrutiny and Overview Committee in April 2015, the following events have happened relevant to and having a bearing on the Campaign:-

1. The above proposal was mentioned on the penultimate page of the October 2015 NYCC Strategic Transport Prospectus but delivery not expected until 2045!!!
2. NYCC Executive Committee finally refused an application in August 2015 for £18,000 towards a benefit/cost analysis.
3. A Leeds-Newcastle journey time of 60 minutes on Northern Hub wish list.
4. NYCC Update on Rail Developments and Priorities by the Assistant Director, Highways and Transportation dated 26th August 2016 published totally overlooking the needs of and benefits to Ripon of a railway station.
5. Frequency of Leeds-Harrogate rail service increasing from two to four trains an hour by December 2017 announced in new Northern franchise.
6. Kings Cross-Harrogate service increasing to every two hours by 2019 announced by new East Coast franchise operator using new Class 800 bimode trains.
7. Intention to build Harrogate Western Bypass costing £90m to ease congestion in central Harrogate particularly in the peaks published.

Discussion

Although mentioned in the 2015 NYCC Strategic Transport Prospectus as eight words, the delivery date is not until 2045. This is far too distant for the prosperity of Ripon and surrounding area. Both the campaign Committee and Ripon City Council strongly feel that this railway is urgently needed for connectivity and the prosperity of Ripon and hinterland.

Austerity was the reason given by the Executive Committee of three for refusing an application for £18,000 for a feasibility study into reinstating this rail link. Grants far in excess of this amount have been awarded in the County for other transport related projects.

The Northern Hub has published a proposed rail journey time of sixty minutes between Leeds and Newcastle but without a target date. The route is not the current one via York as York is not included so we have to assume that this is an extension of HS2/HS3 beyond Leeds which is not planned until post 2035.

This has been another excuse for NYCC Executive delaying support for a reinstated rail link through Ripon stating that this will just duplicate routes, but to achieve a target time of sixty minutes Leeds-Newcastle, Ripon will not be considered as a stop on any high speed route and neither will Harrogate be as Cllr Don Mackenzie has suggested. Therefore, Harrogate

and Ripon will need their own route to the North and that has to be reinstating the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton line.

The NYCC August 2016 Update on Rail Developments and Priorities para. 3.1 states:-

1. Transformational changes to the Leeds-Harrogate-York line delivering improved journey times, increased frequency, modern high quality rolling stock and customer service and ultimately electrification.
2. Access to HS2 hubs within 40 minutes for 85% of the County population.
3. Access to a railway station within 20 minutes for 75% of the population.

Transformational changes may happen on the Harrogate Loop, but Harrogate passengers will still take an hour longer than necessary and an enforced change of trains at York to travel to Northallerton and stations beyond without reinstating the Harrogate-Northallerton route.

Ripon is currently more than 40 minutes from an HS2 hub and more than 20 minutes from a current railway station by public transport and definitely more than 20 minutes by car in the peaks. Reinstating the Ripon station will correct this and increase connectivity for those living within 20 minutes of Ripon.

In the same Update, £275,000 is being spent by NYCC on "Access to Rail" studies for most market towns in North Yorkshire with rail stations. This works out at £30,000 per study except Harrogate that is getting £75,000 for the same study.

Ripon is being disadvantaged thrice in that we do not currently have a railway station, has been refused funding for a study to achieve this aim and is not receiving a slice of the £30,000 improvement investment cake per market town because we do not have a railway station.

The DfT has instructed Arriva, as part of the winning bid for Northern, that service frequency between Leeds and Harrogate must be increased from two to four trains per hour for most of the day and two trains per hour instead of one in the evenings from December 2017. The winning bidder of the East Coast franchise is proposing to introduce Kings Cross-Harrogate trains two-hourly from 2018. This will be difficult to implement as siding space to accommodate these trains during layover in Harrogate station, until time to return to Leeds, was removed in the 1990s. This was not appreciated by Network Rail or both operating companies until I questioned them about capacity in late 2015.

My suggestion to Network Rail was to install the former Dragon Junction, between Harrogate and Starbeck, and two sidings on the old Ripon line with one siding extended to Bilton Lane and basic single platform station there concurrently with resignalling and upgrade of the Harrogate-York line in 2018. This would provide space for the terminating Leeds-Harrogate service, twice an hour, to layover and turn back together with the Kings Cross service out of the way of through services on the "main line". The trackwork and signalling would be a similar cost to providing sidings at Harrogate station for this purpose

but with the additional benefit of providing another Harrogate railhead and station car parking currently not available at the stations between Knaresborough and Pannal inclusively. The only additional cost would be for the basic single platform and car parking area at Bilton.

The Network Rail Capacity Director has shown an interest but needs convincing by support and lobbying from NYCC for this proposal.

Once this has been installed, there is the option to reinstate northwards towards the former Ripley station where a Park&Ride station adjacent to the A61 would be useful for commuters from Ripon and Nidderdale with two services an hour to Harrogate and Leeds without the need to use the A61 into and through Harrogate particularly in the peaks.

Construction of a Harrogate Western Relief road is being pushed hard by Harrogate Chamber and NYCC through Cllr Don Mackenzie. In a recent edition of the Harrogate Advertiser, Cllr. Mackenzie stated that this is the only option for traffic reduction in central Harrogate but reinstatement of the Ripon-Harrogate railway line has not been considered as an option to reduce car congestion.

In 2004 as part of a Demand Forecast study, origin and destination traffic surveys were conducted along the A61 between the north end of Ripon bypass and Ripley. From this it was estimated that 144,000 car journeys annually along the A61 would convert to rail resulting in 144,000 less cars in central Harrogate of which 112,000 annually terminated in Harrogate and wouldn't use a Western Relief road. Many journeys into Harrogate along the A61 were to access a railhead at either Harrogate, Hornbeam Park, Pannal and even Weeton.

As these figures are now nearly thirteen years out of date, NYCC should insist on an up-to-date Demand Forecast on the A61 north of Harrogate to determine how much traffic in central Harrogate is through traffic and how much would convert to rail if the railway line to Ripon is reinstated before a decision is finally made to approve a new road.

Preparing a case for a £90m Harrogate Western Relief road has been estimated to cost NYCC £0.5m in a recent press release, yet only in 2015 I was refused £18,000 towards a feasibility study into reinstating a railway line through Ripon on the grounds of austerity cutbacks.

I am asking for your support once again to fund a benefit/cost analysis for reinstating the Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton railway line before Network Rails Route studies stakeholder consultations ends in June 2017.

Dr Adrian Morgan,
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Ripon.

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