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| **Cheshire & Warrington Local Transport Body** |

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| **Date of Meeting:** | Friday 6 April 2018 |
| **Report of:** | Roy Newton |
| **Subject/Title:** | Mid Cheshire and Middlewich Railway Lines Study |
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1. **Report Summary**
	1. The Secretary of State for Transport has asked the LEP to coordinate a piece of work to examine the potential for the re-opening of the Middlewich railway line to passenger services. It is, therefore, proposed that the LEP coordinate a piece of work that assesses the potential for running passenger services along the Middlewich Railway Line to link to the Crewe Hub, with new stations at both Middlewich and Gadbrook Park and linkage with services along the Mid Cheshire Line.
	2. It is proposed to establish a working group to oversee the day-to-day management of consultants who would need to be procured to undertake the work. The working group would feed into a Stakeholder Group to make sure that it is rooted in, and properly reflects, the views and aspirations of users of the railway, as well as other stakeholders. The working group will report back progress and any emerging issues to the Local Transport Body.
	3. It is envisaged that the first meeting of the Stakeholder Group will take place in early May and that the study would take about 6 months. Funding will need to be secured to undertake this work and it is currently envisaged that contributions will be sought from C&WLEP, Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Cheshire East Council.
2. **Recommendation**
	1. The Local Transport Body is asked to endorse the proposed study.
3. **Background**
	1. The Secretary of State for Transport has asked the LEP to coordinate a piece of work to examine the potential for the re-opening of the Middlewich railway line to passenger services.
	2. For too many journeys across the Cheshire and Warrington area rail travel either is not an option or when it is an option it does not match the convenience, comfort or cost of travel by car. To support a doubling of the economy rail will need to play a greater part than it currently does. We need to revolutionise rail travel across the geography building on HS2 investment to create effective access to labour markets, population centres, education and healthcare in order to unlock growth.
	3. Internal connectivity by rail in the sub-region is limited, with particularly poor east-west connectivity and a number of towns with either poorly located stations or not having a local station at all. Middlewich is an example of the latter. The Middlewich branch line currently has no scheduled passenger services running along it and the previous station at Middlewich was closed in 1960, with the buildings being subsequently demolished. The line was reduced to single track and is currently used as a diversion route for the West Coast Main Line.
	4. The C&W LEP is coordinated a pan-regional partnership comprising Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Warrington Council, North Wales’ local authorities, Constellation Partnership and the rail industry to develop a West and Wales Rail Prospectus which sets out the collective long-term vision for improvements to the rail network, building upon the work and progress achieved to date through Growth Track 360, Constellation Partnership and Warrington New City. The prospectus aligns with TfN’s Strategic Corridor covering ‘West and Wales’ and sets out plans to transform rail travel through creating effective access by rail to labour markets, population centres, education and healthcare in order to unlock growth. This includes ensuring that an integrated rail network is in place that works for everyone.
	5. Key emerging priorities from the Rail Prospectus are the development of key hubs at Crewe, Chester, Warrington and Manchester Airport to improve inter-regional connectivity and enhancing the potential of the future HS2 network through improving connectivity on Strategic Rail Corridors. A priority is to increase connectivity to the intra-regional network by enhancing services through the proposed HS2 Crewe Hub and the other core hub stations (Chester, Warrington and Manchester Airport) to facilitate better interchange and hence open up a wider range of destinations. The vision is to increase service frequencies, reduce journey times and improve the quality of the trains across the network to support the growing economy, and includes the potential for the use of Middewich line for passenger use alongside improvements to the Mid Cheshire Line.
4. **Opportunities to Deliver Sustainable Economic Growth**
	1. The Constellation Partnership’s emerging growth strategy builds upon a new HS2 Hub Station coming to Crewe and the area’s success and growth in science, engineering, rail and automotive sectors. Through the expansion and regeneration of Crewe and stronger linkage to the cluster of towns and villages in mid-Cheshire, the Partnership aims to create the opportunity for growth that would otherwise take decades to deliver, and underpin Crewe’s position as the “Gateway to the Northern Powerhouse”. Connectivity to the HS2 Hub is, therefore, a key component to help drive this economic growth.
	2. Middlewich is a market town with a population of around 13,700. The closeness to the M6 motorway has led to the creation of a large distribution and business park at Midpoint 18 and the town centre has about 80 retail units. The town is identified as a Key Service Centre which is expected to accommodate in order of 75 hectares of additional employment land and 1,950 new homes in the period to 2030. The town is not currently connected to the rail network but the Cheshire East Council Local Plan Strategy sets out an intention to safeguard land to explore the potential delivery of a new train station on the Middlewich line.
	3. Gadbrook Park is a 100 Ha business park currently employing over 4000 people and located adjacent to the Middlewich branch line but not connected to it. The Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan identifies the Park as a key site which will be retained and protected for continued employment purposes. The Plan proposals are for an allocation of 3ha for employment classes B1, B2, B8 at Gadbrook Park with a further 19 Ha on land to the south A556/south-west Gadbrook Park for the same use classes. The Local Plan supports improvements and enhancements to the rail network and is proposing to safeguard sufficient land for a railway station.
	4. Provision of passenger services along the Middlewich line on to the Mid Cheshire Line opens up the opportunity for a large area to benefit from direct access to the Crewe Hub by rail. This includes Northwich, Knutsford and Middlewich together with the smaller villages along the Mid Cheshire Line. This access to Crewe Hub would not only provide access to HS2 fast services (especially to London and Birmingham) but also a wide range of West Coast Main Line and regional services thus significantly expanding the opportunities for rail commuting and business trips. At the same time a new station at Gadbrook Park would open up the ability for rail commuting to the business park, which suffers from significant peak road congestion at the moment, as well as giving businesses on the park direct access to Crewe Hub by rail.
5. **Proposed Study**
	1. Given the above it is, therefore, proposed that the LEP coordinate a piece of work that assesses the potential for running passenger services along the Middlewich Railway Line to link to the Crewe Hub, with new stations at both Middlewich and Gadbrook Park and linkage with services along the Mid Cheshire Line.
	2. The first stage will be to identify the potential demand for reinstating passenger services on the Middlewich branch line and identify any constraints to running these services. The work would need to assess:
* the opportunities for passenger services that re-use of the Middlewich line would offer, taking account the timetable interactions with platform availability at the Crewe Hub and current and proposed timetabled services on the Mid Cheshire Railway Line;
* the potential levels of demand for the services taking into account demand from the introduction of new stations at Middlewich and Gabrook Park and potential demand arising from unlocking development as a result of the introduction of the passenger services;
* assess options for where the passenger services should travel to and from, including the use of the Mid Cheshire Railway Line;
* understand the interactions of new services with Crewe Hub and current and proposed services on the Mid Cheshire Railway Line
* infrastructure capacity constraints that would need to be addressed to deliver the passenger services; and
* the financial income and operating costs of operating the identified passenger service options
	1. The second stage of the work would be to develop outline solutions, including high level cost estimates and value for money assessments, to address any infrastructure capacity constraints that had been identified in stage 1. The study would also review work previously undertaken e.g. the business case developed by the Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association.
	2. Both stages of work would need to be undertaken with Network Rail, who would be able to provide network details and advise on infrastructure capability and associated constraints. A detailed brief will be developed for discussion at the first Stakeholder meeting.
1. **Study Management**
	1. It is envisaged that the LEP would convene a working group comprising representatives from:
* C&W LEP
* Cheshire East Council
* Cheshire West and Chester Council
* Network Rail
* TfGM
* Merseytravel
	1. The working group would oversee the day-to-day management of consultants who would need to be procured to undertake the work. The working group would feed into a Stakeholder Group to make sure that it is rooted in, and properly reflects, the views and aspirations of users of the railway, as well as other stakeholders. The working group will report back progress and any emerging issues to the Local Transport Body.
1. **Stakeholder Group**
	1. It is envisaged that the Stakeholder Group will meet 3 times: at the beginning, part-way through and at the end of the study to ensure wider stakeholder technical and non-technical views are captured by the work. The proposed membership of the group includes:
* Department for Transport
* Network Rail
* Mid Cheshire Rail Users Association
* Mid Cheshire Development Board
* Middlewich Town Council
* CPRE
* Cheshire East Council
* Cheshire West and Chester Council
* Local MPs
	1. It is anticipated that the first meeting of the Stakeholder Group will take place in early May. It is currently envisaged that the representation of the two local authorities would be at senior officer level, but the transport portfolio holders would be welcome to attend. The LTB is also invited for its views on whether other stakeholders should be invited onto the Group.
1. **Funding**
	1. Funding will need to be secured to undertake this work and it is currently envisaged that contributions will be sought from C&WLEP, Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Cheshire East Council.