

Agenda Item 5

Report to: Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board
Report Author: Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director, Blackpool Council
Date of Meeting: 7th January 2020

FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND: FYLDE COAST TRAMWAY LOOP

1. Purpose of the report:

To update the Board on the proposal for all three local authorities to include a funding request in their respective Future High Street Fund (FHSF) bids (by June 2020) to support a business case study into a Fylde Coast tramway loop.

2. Background:

The Fylde Coast is served by heavy rail by the North Fylde Line, recently electrified, and the South Fylde Line branching off at Kirkham and Wesham, which is single track to its terminus (Blackpool South railway station). Since electrification, the disused single track railway from south Fleetwood no longer connects at Poulton-le-Fylde.

The Blackpool Tramway, fully upgraded in 2012, operated successfully by Blackpool Transport along the coast from Starr Gate (Blackpool/Fylde border) to Fleetwood Ferry (Wyre). An extension to Blackpool North railway station is currently under development.

The proposal is to investigate the feasibility of two further extensions to the tramway, creating two tram/rail interchanges, with the aim of creating a more cohesive Fylde Coast public transport system, boosting Blackpool, Kirkham and Fleetwood town centres.

3. Proposition:

Following the discussion at the last Board meeting it is proposed that each local authority includes within their FHSF submission, a bid for resources in order for Blackpool Council, in conjunction with Lancashire County Council as transport authority for Fylde and Wyre, to undertake a comprehensive feasibility study to recommend a sufficiently developed preferred option, which will be capable of being implemented if a future funding opportunity becomes available.

It is important that this opportunity is pursued to prepare the way to develop the tramway network further to enhance the sub-region in terms of accessibility, regeneration and environmental sustainability and support important economic sectors such as tourism.

A more efficient and effective, modern and reliable, public transport system could be created by operating continuous tramlines between Kirkham and Wesham and Poulton-le-Fylde via Lytham St Anne's, Blackpool, Cleveleys, Fleetwood and Thornton. A tramway loop would also serve Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone, Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Hillhouse International Enterprise Zone.

In the north, the tramway would utilise the trackbed of the disused railway line between south Fleetwood and Poulton-le-Fylde. To the south, the tramway would use the trackbed of what is currently an operational railway, with an hourly service to Preston operated by Northern Railway. Clearly, this operator and Network Rail, who own and are responsible for the two branch lines would need to support the proposal.

It should be stressed that the proposal is to undertake a business case study, which may or may not conclude the above is feasible, deliverable and would offer value for money, in accordance with a WebTAG appraisal, necessary for all major transport schemes. A healthy Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of >2:1 would be the ideal. The outputs would be an initial options report and then a comprehensive business case for the preferred option, which would reference previous options appraisal work undertaken. It is estimated that a comprehensive business case study would cost c£2m, which would be split equally between the Councils.

A tramway loop would ensure the Fylde Coast's settlements are better connected and more accessible to each other, benefiting local residents and visitors alike. Trips for employment, education, leisure and other purposes could be made by an efficient public transport system, improving transport choice, benefitting the environment and the local economy, boosting the high streets of Blackpool, Kirkham and Fleetwood. This joined-up proposal would demonstrate to Government and key stakeholders that the Councils are serious about not only improving the area and reducing retail leakage to Deepdale, Preston and further afield, with more attractive centres that will draw people in, hopefully reducing the proportion of their spend elsewhere and online, but also encouraging modal shifts towards a more sustainable form of transport.

Whilst Blackpool and Fleetwood are already connected to the tram network, Kirkham town centre is somewhat detached from its local station, so would need to be better connected to Wesham by a regular bus service, possibly using low emission or electric vehicles as a complementary measure to serve the proposed tram/rail interchange at Kirkham and Wesham station. This complementary measure would be part of the proposal, as would the need for Northern Railway and perhaps other operators to stop all their services at Kirkham and Wesham to dramatically improving transport interchange and travel choice.

Connections by foot and facilities for the mobility and sensory impaired would be required at both Kirkham and Wesham, and Poulton-le-Fylde.

4. Proposed Tramway Loop:



5. Political Support:

Due to the economic and indeed potential environmental/low carbon benefits to such a proposal all three Fylde authorities have agreed that they would wish to incorporate the funding of such a study, jointly, in their respective FHSF bid submissions. Blackpool North MP Paul Maynard, who was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department of Transport in the last Government, is fully supportive of the proposal.

Preliminary discussions have already taken place with MHCLG officials on this strategic approach to be adopted by the three Fylde Coast authorities and they are in the process of exploring the approach which plays into two of the main FHSF themes regarding investment in physical infrastructure and improvements to transport access.

6. Recommendations:

- a) That the proposition is accepted, with any agreed amendments.
- b) MHCLG are approached to secure endorsement for the approach being undertaken with a view to Future High Street Funding.
- c) Lancashire County Council, as transport authority for the vast majority of the study area, are formally approached for their support.
- d) Blackpool Transport, Network Rail and Northern Railway are briefed on the proposal and are given an opportunity to input.
- e) Community Rail Lancashire, Transport for the North, the DfT and the Poulton and Wyre Railway Society are consulted.