

Report to: Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board

Report Author: Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director,
Blackpool Council

Date of Meeting: 17 December 2020

HIGH SPEED 2 AND THE GOLBORNE LINK

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To brief the Board as to High Speed Rail 2's potential benefits and disbenefits for Fylde Coast Rail services and to recommend a position be taken in relation to the Golborne Link's construction.

2.0 Recommendation:

2.1 That the Economic Prosperity Board and the three Councils join Lancashire County Council and others, including the West Coast Rail 250 campaign, in supporting the High Speed Rail 2 Golborne link's construction, maximising opportunities for direct Fylde Coast – London services to be retained when High Speed Rail 2 HS2 is in operation.

3.0 Background

3.1 This project has been established to address the inability to provide further capacity on the West Coast Mainline. Building a new line to high speed standards will reduce travel times between major UK centres considerably. The line will have few stops and passengers will interchange onto it at hub stations; their journey time will be considerably less than that provided by direct services on the classic alignment. Capacity released by High Speed Rail 2 can be used for a variety of local and regional purposes, including freight.

3.2 The project will be delivered in three principal phases up to an anticipated 2040 completion date:

- Phase 1 – London to West Midlands – anticipated opening between 2029 and 2033 – project on site
- Phase 2a – West Midlands to Crewe – no anticipated completion date as the hybrid bill is still in parliament
- Phase 2b – Crewe to Manchester, West Midlands to Leeds – this remains at a proposals phase and no anticipated completion date is given on the High Speed Rail 2 site.

3.3

A Department for Transport document in support of the phase 2a hybrid bill – [Report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk) envisages that on HS2's completion (pages 76-78) the Fylde Coast will lose its current direct London services and the open access paths (pages 63-64) to London that the Grand Central company was to have taken up. This is not part of a confirmed train service requirement, but clearly should not be ignored.

3.4

There is considerable pressure not to build a phase 2b spur from the high speed line to Manchester, to the Golborne area near Wigan, the Golborne link. This link would remove high speed trains from the West Coast Mainline and free up capacity. It would bypass Warrington and means that direct Glasgow access from there would be lost. However, without the Golborne link there appears little chance of maintaining direct Fylde Coast-London Euston services.

3.5

As noted above, transfer to high speed services at the eventual Preston hub would save Fylde Coast passengers journey time. However, a portion of passengers is recognised to be reluctant to change trains, although this is likely to decrease as the advantages become clear. Losing the four a day direct Avanti departures from Blackpool North is likely to be perceived as a retrograde step, particularly following the lengthy campaign fought to restore these direct London services. At present the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the rail services on offer, but rail access will be essential for post-pandemic economic recovery. Open access services were to have stopped at Poulton-Le-Fylde and Kirkham and Wesham. In the light of this, the Economic Prosperity Board might like to consider taking a position.

3.6

Also the Golborne link is clearly important to the Fylde Coast as it offers capacity that might preserve direct services and would also enable journey times between the area and major centres to be reduced. High speed trains south-bound from Preston would have to use the classic alignment for a longer time before they could go full speed from Crewe.