

Harrogate Line electrification is now supported by all the local Councils

The need to electrify the Harrogate Railway Line between Leeds, Harrogate and York has now been fully endorsed by all of the Local Authorities concerned. Following extensive research and lobbying by Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce, supported by Harrogate Borough Council and local MP Andrew Jones, the plans to radically improve the services now have full support from the leaders and relevant senior officers at City of York Council, North Yorkshire County Council, Leeds City Council, West Yorkshire PTE (Metro) and the Leeds City Region Transport Panel.

Harrogate Borough Council voted unanimously in favour of a cross-party motion *"The Council supports the efforts by the Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce to upgrade the rail service on the Leeds-Harrogate-York line that serves this District and will do all it can to help those efforts come to fruition"*.

The North Yorkshire County Council Harrogate Area Committee had a full presentation on the plans on 1st December and voted unanimously *"to call upon the Executive to join Harrogate Borough Council in giving support to the proposals by the Harrogate Chamber of Trade and Commerce to electrify the Harrogate railway line to Leeds and York and bring local rail travel up to modern standards of efficiency, speed, frequency, comfort and reliability, in order to improve the economic vitality of the region and achieve a modal shift from private to public transport. We ask the County Council as the Transport Authority for the largest part of the line to take the lead in making a joint submission to the Department of Transport for capital funding, together with WYPTE and City of York"*.

All the Councils are now working together to produce a Development Plan looking at the possibilities of upgrading the route by either of two options – Either **Plan A** using conventional 25kV overhead electrification with cascaded electric trains, similar to the electrification of the Airedale/Wharfedale routes to Skipton and Ilkley - Or **Plan B** using a modern form of 750v DC 'third rail' electrification with refurbished London District Line D78 rolling stock, as originally proposed by Harrogate Chamber. If both forms of electrification prove impossible in the short term then additional and upgraded diesel rolling stock would be pursued as an interim measure.

Metro Chairman Cllr James Lewis said *"All the partners agree that something needs to be done to improve the Harrogate Line, and soon. It is clear from the discussions we have had so far that the route needs electrifying and it needs doing as soon as possible. The Harrogate Line generates all-day passenger flows serving a wide range of markets including commuters at both the Leeds and York ends of the route, long distance traffic to/from London, conferences and events as well as leisure travellers. The Line Development Plan will need to reflect all of these different markets, as well as enabling a new station to serve Leeds Bradford International Airport."*

Brian Dunsby, Chief Executive of Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce, said *"the Chamber Officers are delighted that all of the Local Authorities concerned have now agreed on the need to electrify the Harrogate Line, with a common approach and strategy that benefits all of the locations along the whole 39 mile route and also enables construction of several new Stations along the line."*

Mark Leving is the Project Director of the Harrogate Line Development Company, which was set up by Harrogate Chamber to promote this important project. Mark has considerable experience as the former MD of Hull Trains, from where he first proposed operating direct London-Harrogate trains in 2008.

Mark said "we are delighted that the three transport authorities have agreed with our analysis of the problems and future needs of the route. We have been able to pull the previously disengaged parties together to form a unanimous single voice in favour of common-sense electrification of the line, thereby unlocking both service level improvements and development potential for additional stations. This represents a long awaited and much needed first step in being able to establish the necessary business case and funding. There is much work still to do, but we now need to ensure that impetus is maintained and that the right specifications and detailed objectives for the whole route are pursued".

Metro Chairman Cllr James Lewis added "The proposed electrification of the Trans-Pennine route will present opportunities for 'fill in' schemes, such as the Harrogate and Caldervale lines, that would present the opportunity for more through-running of electric trains across the network. As well as providing the groundwork for a much-needed station at the Airport, this comprehensive electrification of the network would meet the on-going forecast growth in passenger numbers and prepare the way for ensuring the benefits of a high-speed rail link would be felt right across the City Region."

Commenting on the recent meetings, Harrogate Borough Council Leader Cllr Don Mackenzie said: "The latest meeting of the Leeds City Region's Transport Panel was particularly positive for Harrogate because it represents another endorsement of the proposal to upgrade the Harrogate line. All parties are now agreed that electrification of the line is the top priority. It is vital that we can speak with one voice, because only with consensus are we likely to obtain funding to take this forward. This scheme, promoted by the Harrogate Chamber, has had the support of the borough council from the outset, and we will continue to give it our full support, because it is so important for the prosperity of the district."

Mark Leving added: "The meeting was a vital part of the process of winning the hearts and minds of an informed and important group of stakeholders, with unanimous support expressed at the end of the meeting. The good news was that we achieved a consensus that the route should be electrified on the basis of the endorsement of the rail industry Vehicle /Traction Energy Systems Interface Committee in September which was that any form of electrification is better than no electrification and that both 25kV AC and 750v DC options should be pursued in parallel, with the 25kV option as Plan A and the 750v DC option as Plan B. This policy also received the endorsement of the Leeds City Region Transport Panel on 2nd December, so effectively the route becomes the region's next highest rail priority after the Trans-Pennine electrification just announced. It was also recognised that previously suggested Tram-Trains are not currently appropriate technology for the Harrogate Line on operational, technical or economic grounds".

Ends

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