

In 2019 the Government announced a funding package to support the re-instatement of railways closed by the Beeching Review, under the title 'Restoring Your Railway'. As part of this process Expressions of Interest were sought for potential projects across the UK.

In response to this Helston CIC, sponsored by MP Derek Thomas and supported by local Cornwall Councillors, submitted an Expression of Interest to the 'Restoring Your Railway' Fund. The objective of the submission was to outline the potential for the re-instatement of a rail link to Helston from the main GWR line.

The submission was successful and Helston CIC was invited to submit a more detailed feasibility study to the 'Ideas Fund' which is part of the programme aimed at supporting early stage work on potential rail projects.

Discussions with a number of stakeholders including Derek Thomas, County Councillors of the areas affected, Helston Railway, Cornwall Council and various specialists concluded that the development of an initial feasibility study suitable for submission to the 'Ideas Fund' was worthwhile.

The scope of the feasibility study answered the questions posed within the Ideas Fund bid submission document which cover:

- Financial Overview: outline costs, possible funding sources and risks
- Strategic Overview: justification for the project, dependencies, stakeholder management
- Socio-Economic Benefits: transport benefits, economic benefits, social benefits, fit with local and national policies etc.
- Deliverability: technical assessment and feasibility, operational issues, review with Network Rail, likely programme of works etc.

However, the stakeholder discussions also agreed that this will be a project which would likely evolve from firstly, the establishment of a green link along the approximate route of the original railway line. As a second stage of the project a light, electric passenger link could be developed. Consideration of a full rail link would also be included as an option to consider against light rail.

The project team understands that this is a long-term project and it is not defined at this stage what further funding support we may be able to win. However, we have a number of important reasons to progress this work:

- The Ideas Fund closed for bids in November 2020 and another round of funding is unlikely. It was therefore important to submit a proposal to Government before this date
- Connectivity is a vital issue for Helston's economic prosperity - this proposal will create the data and justification to support future bids for improved transport links

- If we have any aspiration to develop a Helston rail link it is extremely important that we get our project ‘on the list’. The number of potential rail projects is growing across the country and we need Helston to be included now before the queue of projects gets any longer
- Public support for a renewed rail link is high and the fact that we are working on this, albeit a long-term project, will show that we are actively seeking ways to support Helston

It is unlikely that we will secure large sums of money from Central Government but hopefully we will be able to justify enough support to justify moving to a more detailed project phase and keep the project alive.

The complexity and technical nature of this stage of work required the support of specialists who have access to the socio-economic data as well as the technical knowledge and Horscroft Research Solutions and Aecom Rail were commissioned to assist the team in developing a detailed proposal. The activity to coordinate and support was covered with volunteer time from Helston CIC (David Turnbull) supported by Mike Thomas and John Martin and sponsorship by Derek Thomas.

A detailed proposal, setting out the case for Helston was submitted to Central Government in February 2021. Unfortunately the available funds country-wide were very limited and Helston was not selected for further funding at this stage.

However, we continue to seek opportunities to take the project forward. To date we have achieved the following:-

1. A clear socio-economic case for reconnection of the rail line. This has been assessed and confirmed as strong by Central Government.
2. Helston is now listed within the Network Rail Plan for the South-West as a project to be developed later in the 2020’s.
3. The profile of Helston’s connectivity issues has increased within Cornwall Council and Central Government resulting in funding via the Town Vitality Fund to develop proposals for a range of connectivity issues including cycling, walking, bus connectivity as well as continue to pursue the rail link.

At present we do not have any immediate opportunities to bid for further funding to develop the rail reconnection project, however we are in the process of commissioning the next stage of assessment of the old rail line as a cycle and walking trail connecting Helston to the Cornwall Wide Cycle Network – see the Wider Cycling Connections project.

Helston CIC
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