

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee: Agenda Item 7: A386/Rail Project (Minute \*O&S 69 above refers)**

**Questions received in advance for the Devon County Council lead Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, Development and Waste**

**Questions from Cllr Ric Cheadle:**

1. Which parts of the proposed route of the rail link are not in public ownership and what is being done to acquire those that are not?
2. How much funding is DCC prepared to commit towards the project (amount / in which years)?
3. Could we have a summary, of the anticipated £93 million costs, estimating where the funding would come from. What would be WDBC's / DCC's 'share'?
4. If the DCC proposed bid for infrastructure funding is not successful, what are DCC's fall-back options?
5. Where, in terms of infrastructure priorities, does the restoration of this rail link sit?
6. Whose responsibility is it to provide the strategic infrastructure required to match development?

**Question from Cllr Lucy Wood:**

Context:

*The A386 from Yelverton to Roborough is becoming increasingly dangerous for cars and cyclists due to the increase in volume of traffic particularly commuters on their way into Plymouth.*

*I am aware that we are waiting for a feasibility study to be carried out into having a cycle track built alongside the A386 prior to committing to the circa £2M it will cost to build.*

7. Can this feasibility study be prioritised by DCC to ease traffic on this route?

*(This potential solution is supported by Sustrans, a 3000+ signature public petition and by Geoffrey Cox MP. This solution would fit under our Green agenda by reducing pollution and reliance on cars, it will increase health and wellbeing, reduce accidents and strain on the NHS and help us to build a strong resilient community with fewer health needs.)*

### Questions from Cllr Robin Musgrave:

8. Could we be given some understanding as to how the initial cost estimates were so absurdly low given the latest estimated costs of £80 plus millions to re-establish the Tavistock / Bere Alston rail link?
9. Have we learned any lessons from this exercise given the likely significant loss of credibility that will likely occur with any future proposals for use of the track-bed?
10. Over previous years, the County has invested significant money in providing access to the track-bed for potential use by walkers and cyclists alike. Will the County be prepared to complete this work to provide a very practical cycle link between Tavistock and the Bere Peninsula – with the additional benefit of linking up to the Tamar Trails and the Gawton Gravity Hub?

### Question from Cllr James Spettigue

Context:

*As climate change has come sharply in to focus it is becoming clear that the problems we are facing today are likely to worsen in the coming decades.*

*Repair of the Dawlish line last time I believe cost in the region of £1.4 Billion and now network rail plans to concrete over a portion of the beach at Holcombe at a cost of £80 Million, which I believe does not take in to account other improvements the line requires. Rain fall and stormy weather conditions are on the increase and there are nobody knows if this newest improvement would provide a definitive answer to the problem, in my opinion, it does not. It does not resolve the issue of the lines proximity to the ocean at a time when, increasingly, our planets weather is unpredictable and in some cases unprecedented.*

*The cost of shoring up the Holcombe stretch of track may be lower than an alternative route but who can tell how much the next repair or the one after that may cost, I believe a longer term view is required by network rail to mitigate this risk.*

11. What is YOUR view on network rails decision to undertake these works and continue to focus its priority on maintaining the Dawlish line instead of a plan to create an inland alternative heavy rail route which although being of a higher cost, is far less likely to incur Climate change and severe weather related damage and would give long term economic benefits to this region which desperately needs them?"

### Questions from Cllr Andy Coulson

Context:

*DCC made representations to the 3<sup>rd</sup> September O&S Committee to present the DCC position regarding the reinstatement of the Bere- Alston – Tavistock Rail Link. ([link here to minute](#))*

*During that session, reference was made to the cost inflation of the project between the period that new housing developments within Tavistock were proposed and now. At the time that the developments were proposed the public were reassured that the S106 money from these developments would mitigate the effects of increased population by part funding the reinstatement of the rail link. At that time costs for this project were cited as in the region of £17 million, thus feasible given the amounts of S106 on offer.*

*Since then we have been repeatedly told that these costs have risen to circa £93 million (as at 3<sup>rd</sup> Sep) with no further explanation. Even taking into account inflation, rises in steel costs etc this is an exceptional rise in costs. The concern of many in our communities is that given the lack of any substance behind these increases in cost that perhaps they have simply been inflated as to rule out any further discussion or lobbying on the matter. It is becoming increasingly difficult when dealing with our communities to reassure them that this isn't the case, especially when local members aren't armed with the facts.*

12. Given that the scale of development in Tavistock and surrounds was predicated on provision of a sustainable strategic transport link, what are the changes in material circumstances that have brought about the rise in inflation?
13. Where is the detailed breakdown of costs as asked for via email by colleagues prior to 3 Sept O&S Committee; as promised by DCC Officers during said Cttee and since chased by myself (email dated 21 Sept)? This lack of response and transparency has done little to dispel negative public opinion (as above), much of which has for some time been of the view that the rail link was never likely and was purely a ruse to persuade Members at the time to agree development (please see Para 26(a) of 3 Sept O&S Cttee Minutes).
14. It was stated by DCC representatives at 3 Sept O&S Cttee that at the time, there was no Central Govt appetite to consider an overland alternative to the Dawlish line and therefore no active lobbying of Central Govt by DCC. Since the General Election, the Government has stated its ambition to address historical regional imbalances in infrastructure, particularly in the North as well as announcing a 'Beeching Reversal Fund' to reinstate railways. In light of this change of strategic context, what is the proposed DCC course of action? Can the representative reassure both WDBC and the public that the previous policy will be revisited and a more vigorous approach adopted?

### **Questions from Cllr Tony Leech**

Context:

*There are now concerns about what is happening with the rail line from Okehampton to Exeter as the Americans (British American Railways BAR) are now advertising that they want to sell off all their assets, which may or may not include the lease for the line from Aggregate Industries, and the lease for the Station from Devon County Council (DCC).*

15. What is DCC doing to facilitate this lines reinstatement?

16. As the lease of the line is absolutely crucial to the reinstatement of a full-time rail service, which is also part of the DCC Transport Plan, what discussions have DCC had with Aggregates Industries over the years about the transfer of the lease for the railway line?
17. The main railway station belongs to DCC and is leased to BAR. What is happening to this lease, and can the lease be sold off and, if not, will DCC take it back?
18. Would DCC be open to talks with local interested parties about taking over the Station as a lease or as an asset transfer?