

WANDSWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 20TH FEBRUARY 2013

EXECUTIVE – 25TH FEBRUARY 2013

Report by the Chief Executive and Director of Administration (on behalf of all officers concerned) on the Proposed South London – Heathrow Rail Link Project

SUMMARY

The Council has a long history of campaigning for improved public transport services for its residents. Following the funding agreement which will bring the Tube to Battersea through the Northern Line extension it now seeks to achieve a direct link to Heathrow from Clapham Junction. This will aim to create a 30-minute journey to the airport for Borough residents.

The Council has consistently argued for improved surface access to Heathrow as essential for the efficient running of a two-runway airport. It had previously supported Airtrack, a project spearheaded by British Airports Authority (BAA) that would have provided direct rail services from Heathrow to London Waterloo, Reading and Guildford.

Since BAA's decision to abandon the project in 2011 the Council has been leading work in south west London looking at alternative options for improving access to the airport from this part of the capital.

A series of meetings have been held with organisations involved with the previous scheme and other interested parties. From these discussions it is clear that there is still widespread, in principle support for improved rail access from South London to Heathrow.

As a result of the work done to date, the Council will shortly be in a position to consider a number of different route options which can be assessed for feasibility and viability.

It is proposed to appoint an appropriate consultancy to do this work, and for them to commence in March 2013. Following this, the Council would seek to establish a formal stakeholders group including other local authorities and transport bodies.

The Director of Finance comments that the cost of the consultancy to undertake the feasibility assessment is estimated to cost up to £25,000 and will be met from the Transportation revenue budget in 2012/13 and 2013/14.

GLOSSARY

BAA	-	British Airports Authority
DfT	-	Department for Transport
SLHRL	-	South London – Heathrow Rail Link
TfL	-	Transport for London
VNEB	-	Vauxhall, Nine Elms and Battersea
WRAtH	-	Western Rail Access to Heathrow

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Strategic Planning and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to support (a) the recommendations to the Executive in paragraph 3.
2. If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve any views, comments or recommendations on the report, these will be reported to the Executive or to the appropriate regulatory or other committees for their consideration.
3. The Executive is recommended to –
 - (a) Note the continued and widespread support for a direct rail link from South London to Heathrow Airport;
 - (b) Note the opportunity for the Council to take the lead in building the case for a new direct rail link to Heathrow from Waterloo and Clapham Junction, and subsequent benefits to residents; and
 - (c) Approve the appointment of an appropriate consultancy to conduct an options selection and feasibility assessment in March 2013.

INTRODUCTION

4. The Council has a long history of campaigning for both short-term and long-term transport improvements for its residents. Most recently the Council has secured Government backing for the Northern Line Extension which will bring the Tube to Battersea. It is continuing to examine further proposals for linking Clapham Junction to the Underground network.
5. The inadequacy of existing surface access to Heathrow was a key component in the Council's successful campaign against the previous government's third runway proposal. The Council's position remains that improved surface access is essential for a properly-functioning two-runway airport. As part of its

position on Heathrow, the Council has advocated major improvements to surface access to the airport from South London.

6. The original Airtrack scheme would have provided direct rail services from Heathrow to London Waterloo, Reading and Guildford, and offered an alternative to the existing rail routes to Heathrow (Heathrow Express, Heathrow Connect and the Piccadilly line) which do not serve south London. It would have also reduced the number of journeys to the airport by car.
7. The scheme was estimated to cost around £673 million. Work was originally forecast to have commenced in 2011 to be operational by 2015. In April 2011, BAA announced that it was abandoning the project citing the following reasons:
 - a. The impact of increased train frequencies on level crossings and highway access. Despite considerable efforts, including discussions with Network Rail and the local highway authorities, BAA were unable to develop solutions which could fully address these impacts.
 - b. The Comprehensive Spending Review and absence of a public sector contribution to funding to reflect the substantial third party benefits of the project.
8. In October 2011, the Council announced a revised plan called Airtrack Lite, designed to deliver rail access to the airport without increasing the frequency of trains over level crossings. Since then, a number of meetings have been held with organisations such as BAA, Vauxhall Nine Elms Battersea (VNEB) landowners, Greengauge 21, Hogan Lovells law firm, Surrey County Council and Atkins Engineering Consultancy. The objective was to review the reasons why Airtrack failed and to assess the level of support for an alternative scheme.
9. It is clear that there is still widespread, in principle support for improved rail access from South London to Heathrow, in particular the Nine Elms regeneration area and proposed US Embassy provides potential new demand for such a scheme.

CURRENT STATUS

10. There is a clear opportunity for the Council to take the lead in building the case for a new direct rail link to Heathrow. This would not be a re-run of the previous Airtrack proposal. The key objective would be to secure a direct rail service from Clapham Junction to Heathrow in 30 minutes. The service would most likely originate from Waterloo.
11. Lessons have been learnt from the failure of Airtrack and from the support being enjoyed by the Slough Council-backed Western Rail Access to Heathrow (WRaTH) project which is progressing successfully with support from Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT).

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12. Network Rail and the Mayor of London have publicly acknowledged that there is a gap in the rail network between South London and Heathrow airport. The Council's current initiative is supported by Transport for London (TfL). The original Airtrack business case highlighted that passenger demand was much higher from South London than from Surrey or Reading. The anticipated impact of VNEB on the business case adds further weight to focusing on the links from London.
13. The case for a new Clapham Junction to Heathrow link will be strengthened by the potential for an interchange with Crossrail 2 at Clapham Junction. The Council is working with TfL on the development of options that would serve Clapham Junction and Tooting Broadway. The business organisation London First has published its preferred route which supports this alignment. The Council is working closely with TfL to ensure that changes to the current safeguarded route best serve local development and transport needs.
14. Surrey CC are currently developing a county-wide rail strategy to consider the future shape of rail services across Surrey, which will consider the possibilities of rail access from Surrey into Heathrow.
15. In the same way that the authority led on the Northern Line Extension project the Council is well placed now to lead the development of a study into a rail link from south London to Heathrow. By taking the initiative in driving the project forward the Council is best placed to ensure that benefits to residents can be optimised.

NEXT STEPS

16. To move this project forward it is now proposed to do some substantive work and create a time frame for developing the scheme.
17. A workshop for interested parties will take place on 27th February 2013 and will include representatives from Network Rail, TfL, Hounslow and Richmond. The workshop will look at a number of initial route options. Once these have been identified there will be a requirement to assess these options for feasibility and viability. In order to make this piece of work as robust and compelling as possible, the council need to appoint an appropriate consultancy to do this work, to commence in March 2013.
18. The brief for this work is to:
 - a. Undertake initial feasibility and viability assessments of the selected options;
 - b. Canvas key stakeholders views on each of the viable options; and
 - c. Propose a preferred option.
19. The work should take approximately three months and cost a little under £25,000.

20. This piece of work would help to select a preferred option and would provide evidence of its feasibility. It would enable the Council to have constructive early conversations with key bodies such as Network Rail and the DfT.
21. It would also identify the key stakeholders who would be invited to join a stakeholder group to be in place by summer 2013. This group would take responsibility for promoting and lobbying for the rail link, and share any future costs of taking the project forward. It is envisaged that the group would be chaired by the Leader of the Council.
22. A key aim is that by summer 2014 the preferred option would have the support of Network Rail (with the project in their Control Period 6 plans for 2020 – 2024) and the DfT (in their national infrastructure plan and specified in the next South West Trains franchise, due to start in 2017).

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE

23. The Director of Finance comments that the cost of the consultancy to undertake the feasibility assessment is estimated to cost up to £25,000 and will be met from the Transportation revenue budget in 2012/13 and 2013/14.

CONCLUSION

24. Improved rail access from South London to Heathrow airport would benefit Wandsworth residents, businesses and further support economic growth in the Nine Elms regeneration area. It would serve airport passengers and employees throughout the whole south London region. There is strong and widespread, in principle support for this proposal. A timetable has been developed which sets out the key milestones which will need to be met to give the Council the best chance of realising its aim of creating a direct rail link from Waterloo and Clapham Junction to Heathrow airport.

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Wandsworth,
SW18 2PU.

PAUL MARTIN
Director of Administration

12th February 2020

Background papers

There are no background papers to this report.

All reports to Overview and Scrutiny Committees, regulatory and other committees, the Executive and the full Council can be viewed on the Council's website (www.wandsworth.gov.uk/moderngov) unless the report was published before May

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2001, in which case the Committee Secretary (Martin Newton –, 020 8871 6488; email mnewton@wandsworth.gov.uk) can supply it if required.