

REPORT TO: WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 17 December 2021

REPORT TITLE: METROWEST 1B – PORTISHEAD LINE UPDATE

DIRECTOR: KATHRYN VOWLES – INTERIM DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update the Joint Committee on progress on the delivery of the MetroWest 1b – the Portishead line, the delay to the Development Consent Order (DCO), and steps to mitigate that delay.

Impact of Covid-19 pandemic

The Combined Authority has actively reviewed its key activities and work programme to reflect changing priorities as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specific issues relating to the Covid-19 situation that impact on or are addressed through this report are as follows:

- The initial lockdown period early 2020 initially impacted the DCO programme. The current delay reported in this paper is unrelated.
- Delivery implications of the pandemic have been addressed through a competitive procurement process.

Recommendation

- *Joint Committee to note the DCO delay and associated mitigation measures.*

Background / Issues for Consideration

- 2 MetroWest 1b, the Portishead Line is an important transport project for the region. It will see the delivery of two new stations at Pill and Portishead, the reopening of the disused line between the two stations, and an hourly passenger service to Bristol Temple Meads.
- 3 The project will deliver a range of benefits for residents, employees/employers and visitors to the region, as outlined below:
 - GVA growth post scheme opening: £31.86m
 - Additional jobs post opening: 514
 - Provides improved connectivity to Bristol Temple Quarter Enterprise Zones (EZ) 17,000 jobs and Bath Riverside EZ 9,000 jobs
 - Car-km network reductions of 4,000 in morning peak and 2,000 in evening peak
 - 50,000 additional people will have direct access to the rail network
 - 180,000 will have enhanced services to existing stations
 - Passenger trips will be 958,980 in 2021 rising to 1,295,103 in 2036
 - New stations will be DDA compliant
 - Reduced travel times; Portishead to Bristol by bus/car is 50+minutes

by train 23 minutes, Avonmouth to Bristol by bus/car up to 65 minutes
by train 28-32 minutes

- 4 The Portishead line is a "nationally significant infrastructure project" as defined under the Planning Act 2008. As a result, we have been required to submit an application for a DCO to the Planning Inspectorate, who will examine the application on behalf of the Secretary of State. The DCO (287 documents) was issued to the Planning Inspectorate Directorate on 15 November 2019 and accepted for examination on 12 December 2019.
- 5 The initial Covid lockdown in March 2021 caused some delay to the DCO process as arrangements for the Examination in Public had to be amended to enable the process take place remotely in a Covid safe manner.
- 6 The Planning Inspectorate, as Examining Authority, issued a Recommendation Report to the Secretary of State on 19 July 2021. Initially, the decision was anticipated by late October 2021, and the project has been progressing through procurement to ensure we can deliver at pace as soon as the decision was secured.
- 7 On the 20 October 2021, the Secretary of State confirmed the DCO decision will be delayed up to 6-months (from October 2021 to April 2022). The reason given related to further consideration of environmental matters.
- 8 On 9 November 2021 the Planning Inspectorate requested further information in relation to assessment of the scheme against carbon budgets. A comprehensive response was provided by the North Somerset Project Team on 23 November.
- 9 The decision to delay, lack of a clear reason and / or request for further information beyond that noted above, has been difficult to understand. It is understood there is sensitivity around the judicial review of current road schemes, but we don't believe this is applicable to our public transport scheme.
- 10 There is risk associated with delays. The project is currently being tendered to start early 2022 for delivery 2024 and reopening the railway 60 years after it closed. The risk of delay is heightened as ecological works need to take place early next year and are restricted to certain seasons. A delay to the DCO decision over three months, could become a year, with associated cost implications.
- 11 The project team at North Somerset Council and the Combined Authority have been working proactively with Network Rail and the DfT Delivery Team to put pressure on the DfT Planning Team to minimise the delay and resulting risk to the project. CEOs of both sponsor organisations have written to the Secretary of State, and Liam Fox MP secured a debate in the House of Commons on Friday 26 November on 'the future of Portishead railway.'
- 12 We have had positive engagement and support at CEO level with the DfT Delivery Team, and we believe it is likely that the delay can be limited, and a resolution will be secured over the next few weeks. In the meantime, the project team have been working with Network Rail and the DfT to ensure we are scenario planning to mitigate the risk of delay.

- 13 The aim of this paper is to keep Joint Committee informed of the risk and associated mitigation. We hope to share a resolution in advance of our next meeting in January 2022.

Consultation

- 14 This paper has been developed by the West of England Combined Authority in conjunction with North Somerset Council and Network Rail. No further consultation required on the content of the paper.

Other Options Considered

- 15 Not applicable

Risk Management/Assessment

- 16 A full risk register is in place for this project and recognises the risks and mitigation in relation to the DCO delay.

Public Sector Equality Duties

- 17 The public sector equality duty created under the Equality Act 2010 means that public authorities must have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 18 The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:
- Removing or minimizing disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
 - Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- 19 The general equality duty therefore requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services, including policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.
- 20 The project has been subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment, which will inform future decision making.

Climate Change Implications

- 21 On 19 July 2019, the West of England Combined Authority declared a climate

emergency, recognising the huge significance of climate change and its impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of the region's residents. The Combined Authority is committed to taking climate change considerations fully into account as an integral part of its governance and decision-making process.

Each report/proposal submitted for Combined Authority / Joint Committee approval is assessed in terms of the following:

Will the proposal impact positively or negatively on:

- * The emission of climate changing gases?
- * The region's resilience to the effects of climate change?
- * Consumption of non-renewable resources?
- * Pollution to land, water or air?

Particular projects will also be subject to more detailed environmental assessment/consideration as necessary as part of their detailed project-specific management arrangements

- 22 Taking the above specifically into account, please comment on any climate change implications arising as a result of this report, and include details of any mitigation:

This project is an important intervention as we move towards a decarbonised transport system, and providing a viable alternative to the private car, and specifically:

- Maximising the opportunities to enhance services in a joint up way that enable integration of transport services, and, a shift to more sustainable forms of transport
- Maximising the opportunities to minimise the carbon footprint of any construction project, through deliver to the whole life of the infrastructure.

Appendices: N/A

Background papers: N/A

West of England Combined Authority Contact:

Any person seeking background information relating to this item should seek the assistance of the contact officer for the meeting who is Ian Hird on 07436 600313; or by writing to West of England Combined Authority, 3 Rivergate, Temple Quay, Bristol BS1 6EW; email: democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk