

## Wisbech Rail Consultative Group

**Wisbech Rail Consultative Group** is a newly formed group with the key objective of stepping up the public lobby for the Wisbech to March railway to be reopened, to make the case for the establishment of a town centre station in Wisbech and to expertly inform debate with the public about how to achieve these objectives. Railfuture East Anglia's Wisbechrail is part of this group.

### Wisbech Rail: background

There is a long history of efforts to restore passenger train services to Wisbech since withdrawal of service in 1969. Freight services continued until 2000. The railway from Wisbech to March has never been formally closed and is officially "mothballed" and is still a part of the national regulated railway network. The original act of Parliament still obtains right up to the town centre site available for a station.

In the meantime in spite of a growing population, there has been a growing sense of isolation within the town, exacerbated by declining social, economic and educational outcomes compared to the south of Cambridgeshire.

The most recent attempt to restore the railway link commenced in early 2013.

Railfuture East Anglia, encouraged by a report issued by the Association of Rail Operating Companies, which suggested that the railway could be and should be restored, decided to leaflet every home in the town with information about how restoration could be brought about. Every resident was invited to sign an online petition.

The subsequent history of this campaign plotted chronologically on the Wisbechrail website: [wisbechrail.org.uk](http://wisbechrail.org.uk)

### Public Support has been clearly demonstrated

1. Early 2013 volunteers delivered 11000 leaflets to every dwelling in Wisbech and 2000 more in March and Manea.

The leaflet pointed out the advantages of a railway restoration from Wisbech and invited the recipient to go online to sign a petition calling for Cambridgeshire County Council to officially start work on a feasibility study leading to the creation of a business case. Very quickly over 5000 people signed mainly from the Wisbech area and from wider Cambridgeshire.

2. The Petition accepted as legitimate by Cambridgeshire County Council and presented to full Council meeting on 16th July 2013.

3. The full council voted to accept the petition and authorised several pieces of work that established that the restoration was feasible and that there was a good business case.

4. Subsequent polling in 2017 by Fenland District Council has shown that Wisbech residents put the restoration as their priority for improving the prospects for the town (95% and 75% of responses in two surveys).

5. Support for the reconnection has been strong among the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties throughout the County.

6. Successive Secretaries of State both for Transport and of Housing, Communities & Local Government have expressed support on many occasions.

The current Secretary of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, has five times expressed support. The newly elected Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority Mayor, James Palmer has stated on numerous occasions that Wisbech rail is a priority for his administration.

7. There has been huge and unrelenting support from the Wisbech area Member of Parliament, Steve Barclay.

## The Business Case

The County Council has produced a series of studies showing that the reconnection has a good business case especially if a town centre station is provided and a service runs to Cambridge. These studies can all be located on Cambridgeshire County Council 's website.

The outline business case is here:

[ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/March to Wisbech Rail Link Outline Business Case v1.3.pdf](https://live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/March%20to%20Wisbech%20Rail%20Link%20Outline%20Business%20Case%20v1.3.pdf)

The various Benefit to Cost Ratios (BCRs) and Benefits are described in the Economic Case section:

*“The option of a direct service between Wisbech and Cambridge, at a frequency of 2 trains per hour (2tph) with the ‘Town Centre’ site, generates a core Benefit:Cost Ratio of 2.27, improving to 2.87 when Wider Economic Benefits (WEBs) and option/non-use values are considered. The comparative Net Present Values (NPVs) are £107.7M and £158.1M. When additional wider economic impacts are considered, including reductions in spatial inequalities, alleviation of unemployment, house price impacts, and acceleration of local development in the Wisbech area, the BCR increases to 4.41, with an NPV of £288.7M. Based on current assumptions regarding allocation of capital costs, with the ‘Town Centre’ site carrying the cost for the A47(T) overbridge, the ‘Parkway’ site carries lower capital costs and therefore a higher BCR of 2.77, improving to 3.20 when Wider Economic Benefits (WEBs) and option/non-use values are considered, and 4.80 with the additional wider economic impacts. The equivalent NPVs are £116.0M, £144.2M and £249.3M respectively. The provision of the desired service pattern is predicated on improvements at Ely North Junction, providing sufficient paths for both passenger and freight services.”*

For Wisbech station layouts and location look in Sections 6.7 and 6.8 here:

[ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/March to Wisbech GRIP 2 Study Report B.pdf](https://live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/March%20to%20Wisbech%20GRIP%202%20Study%20Report%20B.pdf)

The detail within these studies has reached NetworkRail's GRIP2 level.

It is worth highlighting one point of detail - the GRIP 2 BCR was as higher for the station south of the A47 (not hugely so, but higher) - but the town centre station (not surprisingly) has higher wider economic benefits:

*“The figures quoted above assume a Town Centre Station; they increase slightly for a station south of the A47 due to the reduction in costs due to the removal of the cost of providing a bridge for the A47 over the railway. However, a town centre station would provide a greater level of wider economic benefits for Wisbech.”*

Railfuture strongly supports the siting of the station for Wisbech in the town centre where there is land available.

Note that as a part of the feasibility and business case work all modes are required to be researched. Heavy rail proved to be clearly the preferred option.

*Network Rail’s GRIP divides a project into eight distinct stages. The overall approach is product rather than process driven, and within each stage an agreed set of products are delivered.*

- 1. Output definition*
- 2. Feasibility*
- 3. Option selection*
- 4. Single option development*
- 5. Detailed design*
- 6. Construction test and commission*
- 7. Scheme hand back*
- 8. Project close out*

## Case study

The case study of the Barking Riverside Extension refers to the investigation of all modes.

**A comparative study of the rationale of restoring the railway from Wisbech with that of building a new railway from Barking station to Barking Riverside to enable the construction of a new town at Barking Riverside, projected population 27000.**

**This new railway was approved by the Secretary of State in 2017.**

**We suggest reading this by substituting “Wisbech” for “BRE” !(Barking Riverside Extension.)**

These excerpts are from the Inspectors report (giving approval for the new railway and) for the location of Barking Riverside station as a part of the building of a new railway to the Barking Riverside brownfield site in east London:

*1. Network Rail believes that the proposed Barking Riverside Line has a number of benefits, including:*

- Providing a new rail link to support development and regeneration of Barking Riverside, and*
- Providing new journey and interchange opportunities by extending GOB London Overground services to and from Barking Riverside. (in the case of Wisbech the equivalent would be a new service from Cambridge to March into Wisbech).*

*2. The BRE would have very few environmental dis-benefits, and any remaining after mitigation would be readily outweighed by the benefits to the greater public good of having the BRE in place.*

*3. The Inspector noted that the primary aim of the BRE scheme is to support economic development and population growth by unlocking the full residential development potential of the Barking Riverside area through provision of new sustainable transport infrastructure. The Inspector noted that this area is currently very isolated in transport terms and its development is therefore dependent upon provision of new public transport infrastructure, specifically new rail infrastructure, not just to provide sustainable accessibility but to overcome the perception of remoteness.....*

*.....Currently the area is very isolated in transport terms with in part zero Public Transport Accessibility Levels (PTALs). Its development is therefore dependent upon provision of new public transport infrastructure, specifically new railway infrastructure, not just to provide sustainable accessibility but to overcome the perception of remoteness and to ‘put it on the map’. The higher densities and reduced car parking necessary to achieve 10,800 homes are dependent on provision of a new fixed public transport link to the centre of the proposed new development.*

*4. The Secretary of State notes that with the delivery of the BRE scheme, the area is capable of accommodating 10,800 homes, for a population of 27,000 and providing 4,600 jobs but that the draft s106 agreement and the planning permission associated with this development restricts delivery to 1,500 homes until the Order and planning direction for the BRE scheme has been secured and to 4,000 homes until the BRE scheme is operational. The Secretary of State notes that amongst others, the BRE scheme is specifically supported by the Mayor of London, members of the London Assembly and LBBB. The Secretary of State agrees with the Inspector that the aims and need for the BRE scheme are clearly established and widely supported (IR 8.6).*

5. *The Secretary of State agrees with the Inspector that the Barking Riverside development requires a major fixed track system to kick start the main development (IR 8.10).*

*TfL considered six alternatives to the BRE scheme including underground, light rail and bus based options (IR 3.13).*

*A multi-modal spine road with a new high frequency bus service to the Royal Docks. This was rejected as potentially giving rise to significant adverse environmental effects in relation to biodiversity, flood risk and flood defences. It was also regarded as having insufficient public transport capacity to support the proposed 10,800 homes at Barking Riverside.*

- *Enhanced Bus services. Again this was rejected as not providing sufficient assured and sustainable public transport capacity to serve 10,800 homes. The number of buses that would be required would be likely to cause and be involved in road congestion adding to dwell times and journey times.*

6. *The primary aim of the BRE is to support economic development and population growth by unlocking the full residential development of the Barking Riverside area through provision of new sustainable transport infrastructure<sup>12</sup>. The further aims of the BRE are derived from the Mayor's Transport Strategy 2010, namely to:*

- *improve transport connectivity;*
- *enhance quality of life;*
- *improve safety and security;*
- *improve transport opportunities;*
- *reduce transport's contribution to climate change and improve resilience;*

7. *The development of Barking Riverside to its full potential forms a crucial component of the London Plan as elaborated in the London Riverside Opportunity Area Planning Framework (OAPF) for the LROA. It is capable of accommodating 10,800 homes for a population of 27,000 and providing 4,600 jobs. It is a critical component of LBBD's spatial strategy as embodied in both its core strategy and its site specific allocation for 10,800 homes*

## Cambridgeshire Growth: supporting Cambridge by developing Fenland Housing: new dwellings along the Wisbech to Waterbeach/Cambridge railway line

The table below shows the current population of the major settlements along the railway line from Wisbech to Waterbeach.

	Dwellings	Population			Notes
	Local Plan	2018	Local Plan	Total	
Wisbech	2600	35000	7800	42000	Fenland DC and KLWNBC
March	3100	25000	9000	34000	
Chatteris	1250	10500	3750	14250	via Travel Hub at Manea
Manea				3000	
Ely	3480	21000	10440	31440	
Waterbeach	12000	5000	36000	41000	
<b>TOTAL Wisbech-Waterbeach corridor</b>				<b>165690</b>	
Wisbech Garden Town Aspiration	12000	-	-	35000	Aspiration (not in LP)
<b>TOTAL Including Aspiration</b>				<b>200690</b>	
Cambridge North redevelopment	7000				Sewage works redevelopment further aspiration

Note: Wisbech current population based on continuously built up area of Wisbech, Leverington, Emneth, Elm and Friday Bridge and Wisbech in Norfolk. LP assumes average of 3 persons per dwelling.

Note that historically Wisbech's population has been consistently under estimated owing to its position on the border between Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

The table includes the figure of new dwellings approved for each settlement in the Local Plans of Fenland DC, King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, East Cambridgeshire DC, South Cambridgeshire DC.

A reference has been made to the number of dwellings that may be authorised should it be possible relocate the Anglia Water sewage works by Cambridge North station.

Cambridge North station serves roundly 15000 existing jobs in the immediate area with many more to come as the immediate station area is transformed into a new city quarter as Cambridge becomes increasingly polycentric based on its railway stations.

Many thousands of the Cambridge population will be within a 10 minute cycle ride of Cambridge North when all the network of cycleways is centred on it are completed.

The developers of Waterbeach have stated that their vision for the 12000 new homes is one of few cars stored within the development. To achieve this vision they require a 15 minute interval train service in each direction serving Cambridge North, Central and South.

As well as the aspiration of the Combined Authority for 7000 dwellings at Cambridge North there is an aspiration by Fenland DC for 12000 dwellings to be built in an exciting Wisbech Garden Town.

## Trans-Cambridgeshire Rail Link

**The train service from Wisbech to Cambridge will bring huge benefits right across County.**

The best BCR for the restoration of the railway from Wisbech is a 2tph (trains per hour) service through to Cambridge. This must be the focus of efforts to restore services.

The full range of benefits of the Wisbechrail restoration can only be captured by taking into account the current population and the large number of dwellings approved in outline along the whole route from Wisbech to south of Cambridge.

**The train service through March is (including already planned enhancements):**

- 1tph Birmingham-Peterborough-March-Ely-Cambridge-Stansted Airport and return.

This is a long distance limited stop service that serves Cambridgeshire by enabling users to move long distances relatively quickly. **This should be developed in this role and not be modified to do local work.**

- 1tph (Colchester)-Ipswich-Bury St Edmunds-Ely-March-Whittlesey -Peterborough.

This is also a long distance limited stop service. This should be developed in this role and not be modified for local work. Its current Manea stop should be transferred to the 2tph Wisbech-Cambridge service.

**In addition to the above, the following trains run through Ely (including already planned enhancements):**

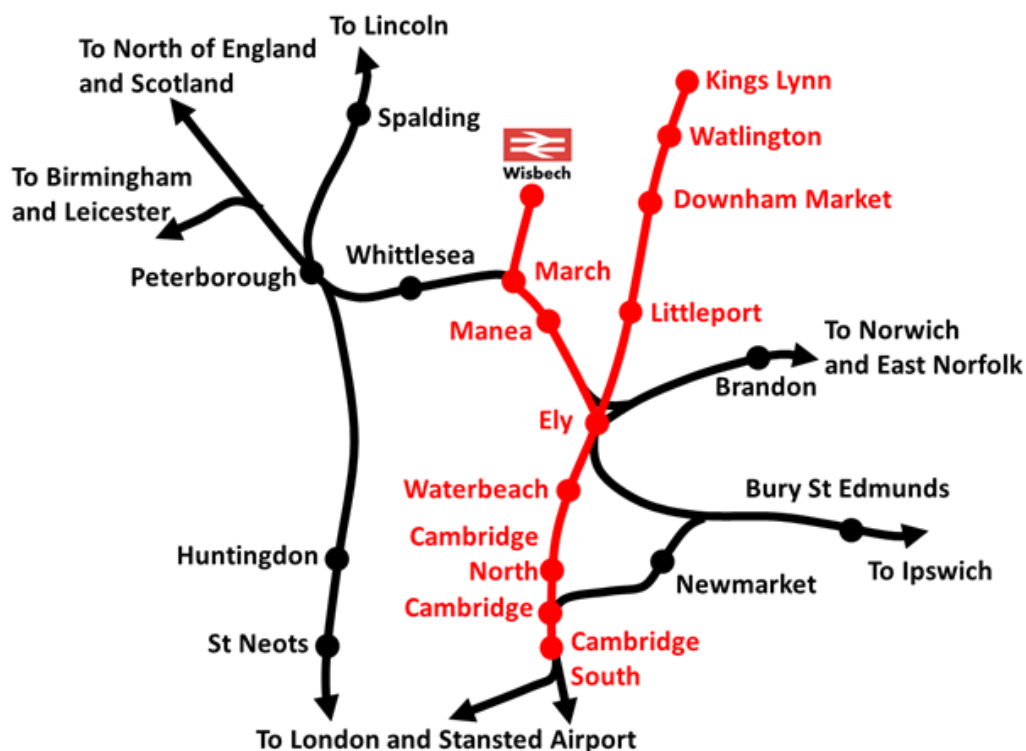
- 1tph Norwich-Ely-Cambridge-Stansted Airport
- 1tph Norwich-Ely-Peterborough-Nottingham-Liverpool
- 2tph King's Lynn-All stations-Cambridge South

We would recommend that the 2tph ex Kings Lynn stopping service be combined with the 2tph ex Wisbech stopping service to give an Ely to Cambridge Central all stations service every 15 minutes.

This metro like service plus the two non-stop services would enable a huge modal shift off the A10 road to be worked towards.

**The indicative timetable below shows how a 15 minute interval between Ely and Cambridge could be achieved.** (Indicative only but based on current King's Lynn Cambridge services). Note: The current short workings between Ely and Cambridge in the afternoon peak would probably be unnecessary and can be removed.

## Map showing TransCambs Rail Link



## Indicative timetable TransCambs Rail Link

King's Lynn		xx:54		xx:24
Watlington		xx:01		xx:31
Downham Market		xx:08		xx:38
Littleport		xx:17		xx:47
Wisbech	xx:43		xx:13	
March	xx:55		xx:25	
Manea	xx:00		xx:30	
Ely	xx:10	xx:25	xx:40	xx:55
Waterbeach	xx:20	xx:35	xx:50	xx:05
Cambridge North	xx:25	xx:41	xx:55	xx:10
Cambridge Central	xx:29	xx:45	xx:59	xx:14
Cambridge South	xx:33	xx:49	xx:03	xx:18
	+	***	+	***

xx indicates the same minutes past each hour

\*\*\* then non-stop to Kings Cross

+ The most efficient way of working through Cambridge station and in rolling stock use, would be to combine the Wisbech to Cambridge service with the Cambridge to London Liverpool Street service.

Note: The new bi-mode trains on order are not compatible for working with the new outer suburban electric-only trains on order.



## Regional and National Connectivity

A Trans Cambs Link service outlined above will have huge connectivity benefits at local, regional and nation levels:

- At March for and via Peterborough to the West Midlands; East Midlands; Yorkshire; NorthEast; Manchester; Scotland.
- At Ely for Norwich; Yarmouth;
- At Cambridge for Stansted Airport; London; Stevenage; Heathrow Airport; East Croydon; Gatwick Airport; Brighton and soon Milton Keynes; Oxford; Swindon; Bristol.
- Trans Cambs will be a game changer for a North Cambridgeshire and East Cambridgeshire in terms of connectivity.

## Trans Cambs stations

- All stations must be very user friendly. They should all have large, warm and welcoming waiting areas, toilets, covered platform area with adequate heating.
- All must have user friendly and adequate ticket vending machines with staff available to help at Wisbech, March, Ely from first to last train services.
- A multimodal Smart card must be developed for all services within Cambridgeshire and neighbouring areas especially within the Cambridge travel to work area.
- All stations must have high quality cycle parking facilities.
- A network of quality cycle ways must be developed centred on the stations.
- Larger than needed car parks must be available at each station to ensure no potential user is turned away.

### At Manea:

- A quality **rural travel hub** must be developed to enable a user-friendly transfer, from car, cycle and bus to train.
- Chatteris must be the focus with a quality cycle path being developed as well as a dedicated bus link.

### At Wisbech:

- The station must be in the town centre and it must be a quality building that enhances its already quality built environment.
- The station should become a **travel hub** for car, cycle and bus to the surrounding district including Sutton Bridge, Long Sutton and Holbeach.
- A network of cycleways should be planned to the station.
- The land around the station should be developed as a hi tech startup area of workshops/ laboratories: a rail-based enterprise zone.
- Fares between the two prongs of Trans Cambs must be synchronised and both incorporated into the Network Card Area.

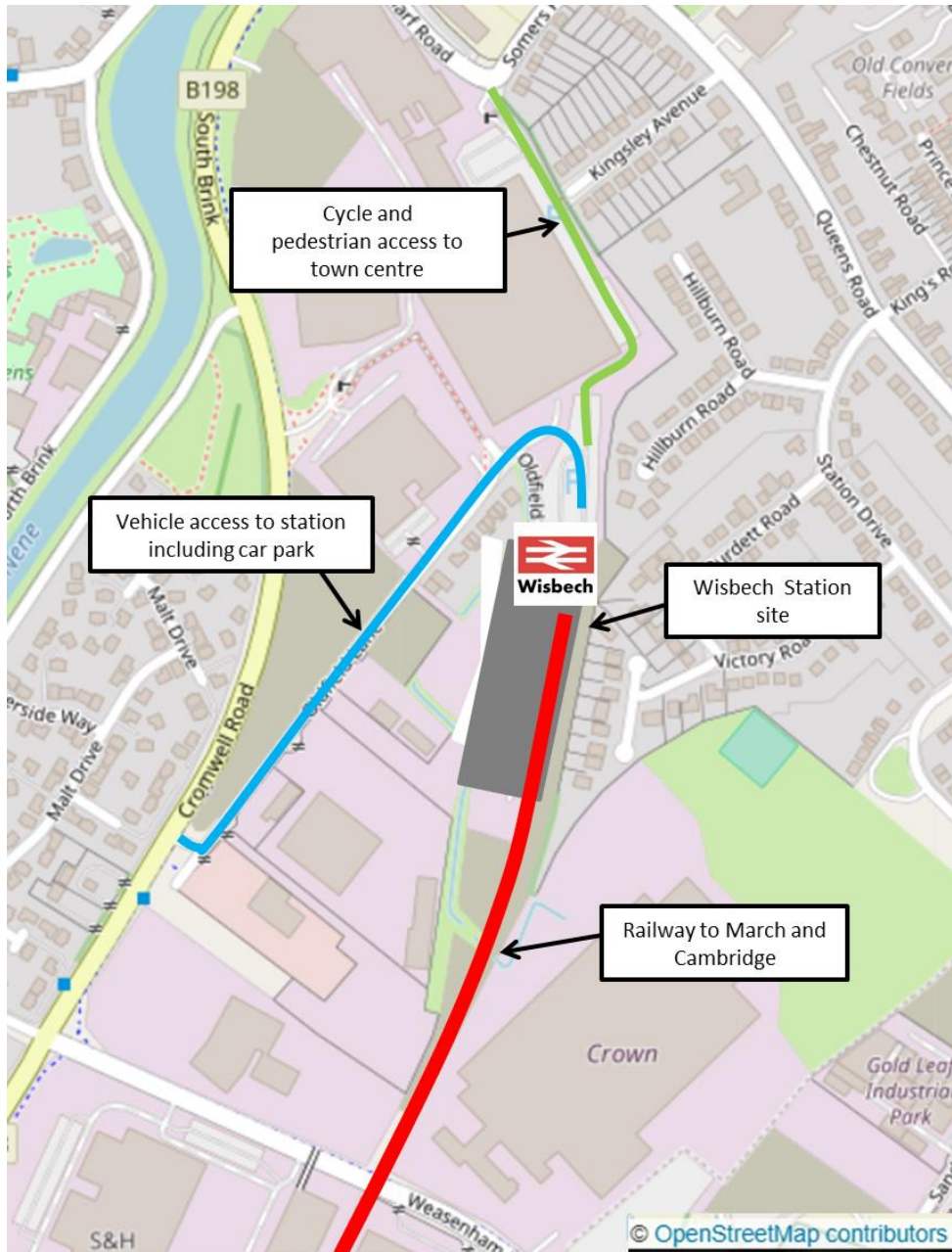
Special attention must be put into developing a fare structure that enables tertiary education to be easily accessed across Cambridgeshire to:

- Wisbech College of West Anglia.

- Cambridge a Regional College via Cambridge North, the Sixth-form Colleges, private schools.
- Access to all these institutions must become rail based not least to cut down a large volume of current road-based travel.

The station at Wisbech should become central to the life of the town.

### Potential site for a Wisbech town centre station



## Freight

The current agricultural processing industries of Wisbech are international in scale. There is a large amount of raw material imported and carried to the factories by road vehicle.

Informal studies have indicated that major companies would transfer train loads amount of freight to rail if the railway is restored to Wisbech.

A freight terminal site should be identified.

Railfuture East Anglia [www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/East+Anglia) @RailfutureEA

Paul Hollinghurst, Secretary Railfuture East Anglia paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

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Registered Office:- 24 Chedworth Place, Tattingstone, Suffolk IP9 2ND*