



Media release

13 November 2014

WISBECH RAIL LOBBY ON TRACK

A campaign to re-open the rail line between Wisbech and March is firmly on track after CEOs from Anglian Water and some of the region's biggest businesses joined forces yesterday (Thursday November 13) with Stephen Barclay MP, Steve Count leader of Cambridgeshire County Council, John Clark leader of Fenland District Council, RailFuture and local councillors to launch Wisbech's Infrastructure for Growth lobby.

The train line would connect Fenland to the economic powerhouse of Cambridge and be 'an economic game-changer' delivering huge benefits of job creation, attracting business and investment to the local area. It would also bring benefits for Cambridge and the wider county, with affordable homes just 40 minutes' commute away helping to reduce pressure on the over-heated housing market, reinforcing the city's rapid expansion and reducing congestion on the surrounding roads.

The Infrastructure for Growth lobby is the latest development to come out of the Wisbech 2020 Vision - a wide-ranging strategy aimed at transforming the Fenland town that is being spearheaded by the leaders of the county and district councils and the local MP. It has the backing of the town council as well as local businesses and community groups.

It is the first time major businesses in the East of England have taken the lead on the rail campaign, adding commercial expertise and economic weight for consideration by Government in February or March next year when funding for transport schemes is likely to be available.

Anglian Water's CEO, Peter Simpson, has taken a leading role in bringing other major businesses to the table. It's hoped the support of major employers will fast-track progress. Peter said: "Wisbech is at the geographical centre of our region, and when we started looking at some of the challenges it faced, we asked ourselves what we as a company could do to help. We could see the opportunities and we were anxious to help up the ante. The 15 year contracts we have with our supply chain partners means we're well placed to link up stakeholders and organisations which specialise in delivering large infrastructure schemes just like this - to build the best possible plan, drive down costs and support the councils in presenting the strongest business case possible to the Government.



"This is not just about creating a commuter town for Cambridge, it's about building Wisbech and the wider Fenland area as a whole. Businesses like Anglian Water supporting the local councils and Stephen's vision helps make proposals much more powerful. Now is the critical window when we can make Wisbech's opportunities a reality."

Stephen Barclay MP, who already helped secure funding for a feasibility study earlier this year, will be making the case for the £70 million investment directly to the Transport Minister next year. Speaking at the launch today, Stephen said: "Today's launch of the Wisbech Rail Infrastructure Lobby Document is an important step forward in showing both the strong business case for re-opening the line and also the active support of major employers in the region for this to go ahead. I am grateful to Anglian Water and their major suppliers for their work which strengthens the bid for the next round of funding. The document highlights the clear benefits the line will bring to Cambridge, Wisbech, and Fenland as a whole and sets a positive timetable for key actions to be delivered. It is vital that momentum is maintained and I will continue to press local council bosses to fast track work on the upcoming engineering studies so that we qualify for more central government funding as soon as it is available."

Cambridgeshire County Council Leader, Steve Count, said: "We are working hard with our partners to push this forward and make a real difference to the people of Wisbech. Government is used to hearing from politicians but it is a powerful voice that hopefully vibrates around Westminster when we are joined by the business community. The pledge made by Anglian Water at the last Wisbech 2020 Summit to bring their commercial and business weight and expertise is already bearing fruit. They and the business community are great allies in explaining to Government, just how important a rail link to Wisbech is in bringing forward jobs and prosperity."

The Wisbech 2020 Vision coalition businesses Anglian Water, Mott Macdonald, @One Alliance, Grontmij, Skanska and Rail Future will also support the future application to Network Rail.

Fenland District Council Leader Cllr John Clark said: "Re-opening the rail link from Wisbech to March – and thus creating a direct link to Cambridge and Peterborough – would undoubtedly be the single most important factor in transforming our local economy. It would bring more jobs, more homes and more business into the district. That in turn would boost local people's incomes, raise the aspirations of our young people and create



more opportunities for them in the future. It would be, as the document we are publishing today says, a real 'economic gamechanger'.

"It is something that the people of Wisbech are demanding as their right. For too long, Wisbech and Fenland have been side-lined from the rapid growth we have seen elsewhere in Cambridgeshire."

Peter Wakefield, Chairman of Railfuture East Anglia said: "We at Railfuture are heartened that the benefits that a rail link brings to a community are recognised so strongly by successful businesses and our local authorities. This tremendous effort is given added legitimacy by the thousands of Wisbech and district residents who took the time to sign the online petition that called for the railway from Wisbech to be opened on to Cambridge. This is a real community effort."

People can continue to sign the petition for the railway line re-opening at: wisbechrail.org.uk/petition

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Editor's notes:

More information on the Wisbech 2020 Vision is available at: www.wisbech2020vision.co.uk

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