



**From the Chief Executive**

Anglia Route Study Consultation  
Network Rail (Group Strategy)  
2nd Floor, Cottons Centre  
Cottons Lane  
London  
SE1 2QG

3 February 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

**Anglia: Route Study – Long-term Planning Process – consultation response**

I am writing to you on behalf of a coalition representing a single voice for business in the *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area. As a coalition, we are responding to the invitation to comment upon the Network Rail Anglia Route Study Draft for Consultation, dated November 2014. We are a key member of the Wisbech 2020 Vision, which is a coalition of both public and private sector partners, whose priority is to deliver an economic game-changer for North Cambridgeshire through an integrated strategy for rail, road, and growth infrastructure. The vision of Infrastructure for Growth for Wisbech is summarised in the attached 2020 vision document.

The central element of our vision for Connecting North Cambridgeshire is the **reopening of the currently mothballed railway line between Wisbech and March to allow direct access to Cambridge, and onto Peterborough, Stansted Airport, and London.** Reopening the passenger railway service has a positive business case and offers the opportunity to open up the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough jobs market to Wisbech residents through an efficient and sustainable transport option,



**Anglian Water Services**  
Lancaster House, Lancaster Way,  
Ermine Business Park, Huntingdon,  
Cambridgeshire PE29 6YJ

Tel 01480 323000

[www.anglianwater.co.uk](http://www.anglianwater.co.uk)

Our ref PS/EMH

Your ref: Anglia Route  
Study Consultation



Registered Office  
Anglian Water Services Ltd  
Lancaster House, Lancaster Way,  
Ermine Business Park,  
Huntingdon,  
Cambridgeshire PE29 6YJ  
Registered in England  
No. 2366656.  
**an AWG Company**

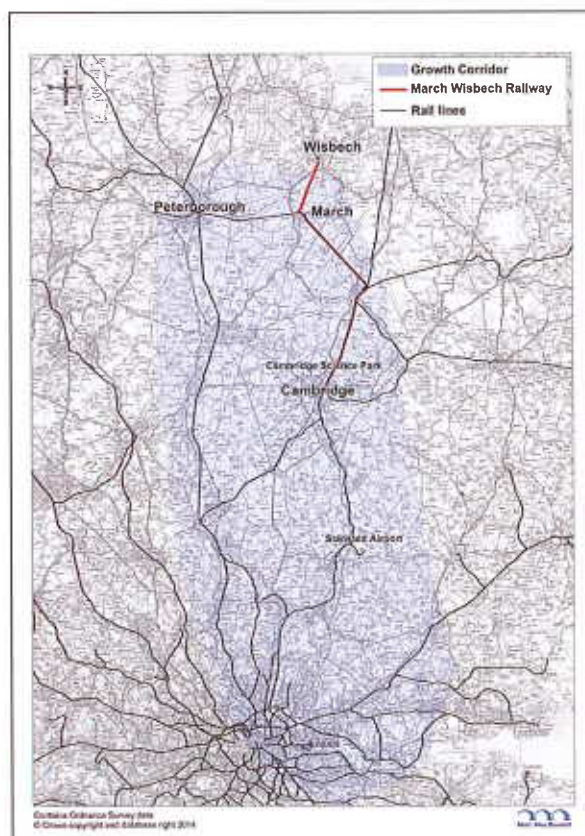
whilst also enabling the reinstatement and further development of freight services. Target travel times of less than an hour to Cambridge and Peterborough would support business and boost employment opportunities within Wisbech through increased accessibility. Equally, the much more affordable housing market within Wisbech would become more easily accessible to support the fastest growing areas of *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough*. The burgeoning Cambridgeshire and Peterborough jobs market will become available and accessible to Wisbech residents, helping to transform local aspirations and improve education, training, and skills.

As such, we believe that there is a substantial and compelling economic case for reopening the Wisbech to March line – an ambition that has attracted strong business, community, and cross-party support – and therefore we believe it should be included within the strategic vision for the Anglia network over the next 30 years and be incorporated in the forthcoming East Anglia Rail Franchise. This letter, together with our attached 2020 vision document, sets out our case.

## Strategic Case

March and Wisbech sit within the *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area. *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* is one of UK and Europe's key assets, successfully competing on the international stage, with a strong presence of European and global businesses and a world-class university, driving a world-leading research and development community and source of growth industries now and for the future.

The LEP agreed its Growth Deal with Government in 2014 based upon its Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), "*Internationally Competitive/Nationally Significant*". The SEP is focused on developing growth sectors, particularly technology sectors, and research and innovation, underpinned by "a transport network fit for an economically vital high-growth area".



The SEP has identified as a priority greater access to the rail network where there is an economic case for investment, and where a new rail link or station would unlock growth or regeneration and have transformative benefits to an area. Rail offers real potential to support growth, and the partners are keen to ensure it plays a more significant role and provides direct links to key employment areas and new settlements. The SEP specifically identifies reconnecting Wisbech to the rail network as a growth opportunity for *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough*.

However, as Railfuture note in their response to the East Anglia Rail Franchise consultation,<sup>1</sup> although the region is a net contributor to the Treasury and the existing rail franchise does not require a subsidy and pays a premium to the Government, the level of rail investment has been low compared with other areas. Railfuture also highlight that "when investment has taken place, the results have been spectacular", such as the hourly direct Cambridge–Norwich service.

Wisbech is the largest settlement in Fenland. The town and its hinterland have a population of over 40,000. Wisbech is a great place to live and work, with a rich heritage, fine Georgian architecture, and historically has played an important role as a thriving trading hub serving a very wide rural catchment. But today the town is also facing many tough challenges, including low skills and aspirations, a narrow economic base, and weak connectivity, with both constrained road infrastructure and no current operational rail link.

Wisbech is just 20 miles from Peterborough and 30 miles from Cambridge, the economic drivers of the area and significant economic contributors to the UK as a whole. But heavy congestion and parking charges of up to £30 a day mean car commuting to Cambridge and Peterborough is impractical, as are the long, complex, and often indirect journeys currently available on public transport. Reopening the rail line would provide quicker transport access to key Eastern growth areas, particularly the London–Stansted–Cambridge–Peterborough growth corridor, whose importance is recognised by Government and which links the Cities of Peterborough and Cambridge, Cambridge University and its hi-tech cluster with London and its diversified business base. Conversely, the rail service would also mean Wisbech entering the search area for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough workers looking for affordable places to live.

*Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* is the fastest growing part of the UK over the last decade, but it is well recognised that the growth corridor is an area with substantial pressure in terms of business, housing, and infrastructure. Without infrastructure investment to improve labour market

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.railfuture.org.uk/east/docs/Railfuture-East-Anglia-Greater-Anglia-Franchise-Aspirations-2014.pdf>

access and increase the accessible supply of housing and business premises, future growth will be constrained, to the detriment not only of the East Anglia region but the UK as a whole.

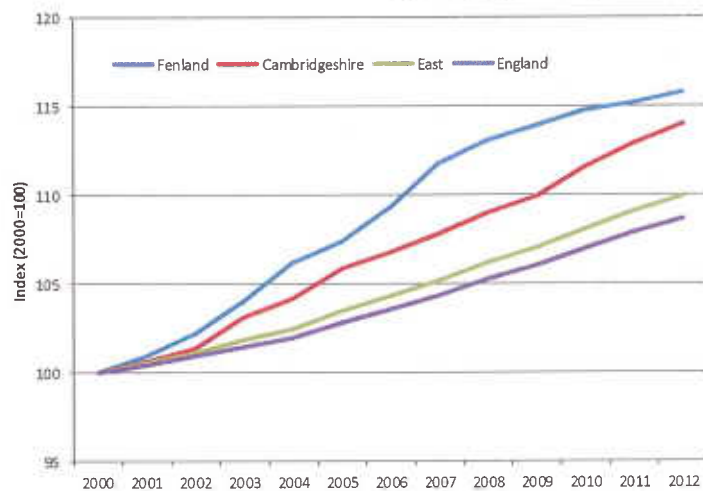
Alongside Cambridge, Peterborough acts as an important economic powerhouse within the immediate area. Peterborough has strong growth rates, and analysis by Centre for Cities identifies Peterborough as one of the UK's fastest growing cities.<sup>2</sup> This growth has translated

into 14,000 net new jobs over the past 5 years despite the economic downturn. Locally 70% of Peterborough businesses surveyed in 2014 have reported concerns around skills gaps and shortages. A connected train service between Wisbech and Peterborough would provide a positive flow of future labour to help continue economic growth and provide employment opportunities for Wisbech and Fenland residents.

In conclusion therefore, there is a strong strategic case for reopening the March–Wisbech line, not only for the significant local benefits that it would bring, but also to support the rapid growth of *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough*, one of the UK's key national and international economic drivers.

There is also a strong economic and business case for the scheme, which is set out below.

Population growth, 2000–12



<sup>2</sup> <http://www.centreforcities.org/reader/cities-outlook-2015/>

## Economic Case

Independent assessments undertaken in 2014 by Atkins on initial cost and revenue estimates<sup>3</sup> and Mott MacDonald on wider economic benefits<sup>4</sup> show that the scheme, depending on which station site and service option combination is progressed, could have a **benefit-cost ratio (BCR) in the range of 2.3 and 3.0**. This work is currently being further developed by Mott MacDonald on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council, including the consideration of operational and engineering constraints through a Network Rail-compliant GRIP 2 study.

This strong value for money occurs because of both the existing travel demand patterns, where rail could help alleviate road congestion, and the fact that Wisbech has a flexible and pro-growth planning framework in place that means reopening the line to March could have a significant wider impact on the local economy through a number of channels.

With a direct rail service it would become feasible for Wisbech to provide **affordable and high-quality housing** to support the high level of labour demand that is centred on the **key growth centres** in *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* – particularly the Cities of Cambridge and Peterborough and Cambridge Science Park. This in turn will provide further demand for local services and amenities **creating employment** and contributing to the **regeneration of the town centre** and longer-term economic challenges, such as high levels of unemployment and social deprivation. Given the unique nature of the town's economy, dominated by agri-food processing with a self-contained labour market, the rail service will be influential in changing the dynamics of the local labour market by enabling the town to provide commuter housing to support the expansion of Cambridge and to diversify its employment base – as local demand and therefore services expand in response to the improved residential offer. An expanded and improved residential offer would also help to retain those higher skills within the labour market that are currently in short supply.

The development of a rail station and direct rail service would also enable the town to market itself more effectively for **inward investment**, particularly within the agri-food sector, which is not only regionally significant but also developing new, high value added niches and looking to further develop international research links with Cambridge University and the University of East Anglia in Norwich.

---

<sup>3</sup> Atkins (7 December 2012) "March - Wisbech Rail Study: Stage 1 Final Report" and Atkins (4 April 2014) "March to Wisbech Rail Study: Capital Cost of Re-opening the Line", reports for Cambridgeshire County Council

<sup>4</sup> Mott MacDonald (March 2014) "Wider Economic Benefits of a Rail Service Between March and Wisbech", report to Cambridgeshire County Council

Overall, the proposed scheme would make a significant contribution to the local economy of Wisbech, including through the following identified benefits:

- **Primary indirect benefits amounting to £56.7million** over a 60-year appraisal period for a direct service between Wisbech and Cambridge. The main drivers of these benefits are through reductions in unemployment, valued at £43.8million, and agglomeration benefits of £9.4million, which values the extent to which the rail service improves the accessibility of an area to a greater number of firms and workers.
- **Secondary indirect benefits** through further land utilisation (than already allocated in Fenland's Core Strategy) due to higher economic growth with the rail service than without. Overall the following benefits attributable to the rail service could occur collectively for Wisbech and March:
  - 392 additional houses built over the Core Strategy period
  - £39.2million of capital expenditure associated with the house building
  - **236 additional full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs over the Core Strategy period**
  - £13.3m of additional gross value added (GVA) benefits per annum once all jobs come forward
- Furthermore, the option value and non-use value analysis shows a **significant value is placed by residents on having access to both social and economic opportunities through the proposed rail service**. This reinforces the assumption that a resident in Wisbech places significant value on having access to the Cambridge job market, not because they currently work there, but because they may wish to have the choice of working there at some point in the future. The overall value could be in the region of £19.3million–£41.5million over a 60-year period.

The scheme also offers the potential to use the line for freight, particularly given the importance of agri-food and logistics companies to Wisbech, with significant multimodal freight requirements. This consultation is continuing with significant interest being generated, including from major employers, such as Del Monte and Partner Logistics, who are supporting our proposal from both a freight and business passenger perspective. For example, Del Monte's site is located immediately adjacent to the line, and the company is keen to see the line reopened as soon as possible to facilitate a rail route to/from London docks. The potential for east-west links along the Felixstowe-Nuneaton-Birmingham freight rail corridor is also recognised. Other businesses also emphasise the importance of a rail link to the growing

passenger and cargo hub of Stansted Airport, which can currently only be reached by road from Wisbech.

In summary, we believe that reopening the March–Wisbech line has a number of significant and compelling social, economic, and business benefits for March, Wisbech, and *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough*, supporting housing, employment, and retail growth. Investment in rail and road infrastructure is also a necessary precondition for the delivery and success of the Wisbech Enterprise Park, which includes opportunities for business, industry, and housing growth. And this impact is not only local, with economic impact felt across *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* through improved labour market connectivity.

### **Commercial Case**

Further business case development is currently being undertaken by Mott MacDonald on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council to develop the initial work undertaken by Atkins between 2012 and 2014.<sup>5</sup> This original assessment forecast rail demand growth from 2009 to 2029. These forecasts showed that **demand for the new service for travel to/from Wisbech will be in the range of approximately 500,000 trips per year** – and this does not account for additional induced demand created by expanding the business and employment reach of the *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* economy through the reopening of the line, plus growth at other Cambridgeshire communities served by the additional trains.

Operational costs vary substantially between the service patterns tested, with the preferred option of a direct service between Wisbech and Cambridge having an annual cost of approximately £2.8 million, with **modelling suggesting that revenues could cover operating costs without ongoing subsidy.**<sup>6</sup>

The capital cost including optimism bias for reinstatement of the line for passenger services, overhaul of the signalling and level crossings is estimated to be in the range of £40–57 million (2014/15 prices) depending on the station location and whether or not an over bridge for the A47 is included or not. These costs were calculated in line with a GRIP 1 cost estimate.

---

<sup>5</sup> Atkins (7 December 2012) "March - Wisbech Rail Study: Stage 1 Final Report" and Atkins (4 April 2014) "March to Wisbech Rail Study: Capital Cost of Re-opening the Line", reports for Cambridgeshire County Council

<sup>6</sup> Atkins (4 April 2014) "March to Wisbech Rail Study: Capital Cost of Re-opening the Line" plus current work by Mott MacDonald for Cambridgeshire County Council

In summary, initial work concludes that, whilst further work is required, a commercial case can exist for reopening the March to Wisbech line to passenger traffic.

### **Further Business Case Development**

Mott MacDonald has been commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council to advance the previous studies, updating the demand forecasts to reflect the current situation and economic climate and develop a DfT-compliant outline business case. This will be supplemented by a Network Rail-compliant GRIP 2 study, addressing the trackwork, signalling and operational constraints of reinstating passenger and freight services. Provisional results from the business case have been incorporated in this document, and are expected in full in early February 2015, with the GRIP 2 study reporting by the end of March 2015. Subject to the findings of both of these studies, the business case will then be developed to a full outline for DfT consideration by May 2015.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the coalition and the partners supporting the Wisbech 2020 vision believe that there is a very strong case to make for reopening the railway line between Wisbech via March onto Cambridge, Peterborough, Stansted Airport, and London for passenger and freight services. Previous investments into the Anglia franchise area have proved very successful, and we believe this new investment opportunity generates significant wider economic benefits well beyond the transport case for investment.

Reopening the line has been identified as a key local priority for Wisbech to deliver growth in housing, employment, and retail, and is an essential element for the regeneration of a town that offers a number of assets for East Anglia but also faces serious socioeconomic challenges. This connectivity would also facilitate the wider growth of *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* by expanding access to affordable housing and therefore increase the effective size of the labour market, and increase the accessible stock of affordable business premises. *Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough* is the fastest growing part of the UK and is one of only three net contributor areas to the Treasury. This creates pressures that must be addressed if growth is to continue and if the economic area is to flourish and succeed in the global competitive marketplace. Investment in reopening the rail line therefore supports not only local growth and regeneration but also one of the UK's main national and international growth areas.

Further work is currently being finalised on the business case for reopening the line for passengers and freight, and we urge that Network Rail's long-term planning of the Anglia region and the Rail Executive's East Anglia



Franchise take the reopening of the line with direct services to Cambridge into account if these benefits are to be realised for the region and the UK. We would request that the reopening of the March-Wisbech railway line to passenger services and freight should be included within the final Anglia Route Study, with explicit mention in the Executive Summary under "Geographic Scope and Baseline Assumptions" para 0.2.3 as a scheme to be progressed during CP6.

If you wish to discuss any elements of our response further or require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details above.

Yours sincerely,



**Peter Simpson**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Anglian Water**

*On behalf of a coalition of major businesses supporting this priority rail link*

