



17th March 2017

To: The West of West of England Joint Transport Board

The following statement is made on behalf of Portishead Railway Group to the West of England Joint Transport Board meeting on 17 March 2017, at BAWA, Southmead Road, Filton, Bristol, BS34 7RG.

Portishead Railway Group wishes to register its concern regarding the very large increase in the cost of reopening the line to Portishead. This has caused a similarly large increase in adverse social and other media comment, indicating a significant and rising level of scepticism in Portishead, Portbury, Easton-in-Gordano and Pill, the communities that would be served by the railway.

It is within this context that Portishead Railway Group draws the following to the attention of the West of England Joint Transport Board:

1. It seems the latest total project costs are not yet understood. Therefore, establishing the nature of an eventual service, understanding its costs, then holding a public consultation, and then submitting the DCO are all on hold for the time being.
2. Whatever Network Rail's costs are, at the Stakeholder Meeting held on 10 March 2017 they were described as being half of the new overall total project cost. Therefore, the task of understanding costs is far greater than only understanding the Network Rail portion.^{Note 1}
3. Reopening the Portishead route appears in Network Rail's Control Period 6 work-scope^{Note 2} so it should be possible to establish what level of funding Network Rail may already have to contribute towards the scheme. If that is currently zero then it may be possible, via central government, to get additional funding allocated within Control Period 6.
4. In summary, PRG requests and recommends that no decision should be taken until the costs and the sources of funding are sufficiently understood, for both the fast 2 tph service and a slow 1 tph service. PRG understands that the data required to allow the JTB to make an informed decision on this basis could be made available by the summer.

Portishead Railway Group is certain that the non-road transport needs of the public community the railway is intended to serve, which has grown apace over the last 20 to 30 years, are not going to abate. Indeed they are increasing.

Consequently, it is imperative that the railway to Portishead is reopened as soon as possible, to offer a credible service that many will prefer to their current travel by single-occupancy car. Portishead Railway Group supports the West of England Joint Transport Board and MetroWest in establishing an affordable railway solution.

Notes

Note 1; at the Stakeholder Meeting held on 10 March 2017, the latest total project cost of £140M to £175M was advised. 50% of this range was allocated to railway construction costs. The remaining 50%, £70M to £87.5M, was allocated to costs not associated with railway construction. These non-railway topics were given as: Land Costs, Highway Construction, Mitigation and Miscellaneous, Preparation Costs, Inflation, and Risk.

The approximate costs for many of the topics that make up the 50% allocated to non-railway matters will have been known for some time. Together, they alone far exceed the previous overall project cost of £58M. Therefore, the apparent emphasis on understanding Network Rail's increased costs is not understood by Portishead Railway Group. Understanding and validating all of the sources of cost increase should surely be the subject of equal emphasis.

There appears to be some speculation that a slow 1 tph service would be considerably cheaper but it is difficult for Portishead Railway Group to support this view: much of the existing track is too uneven for acceptable passenger services, the Pill-Portishead section of track still needs to be implemented, bridge/culvert works still need to be carried out, much of the tunnel work needs to go ahead in order to provide modern-safe passenger escape routes, and the stations and their access arrangements still need to be provided.

Note 2; Network Rail's Control Period 6 documentation includes several references to reopening the Portishead line. For example; on page 22 of Network Rail's Western Route Study the Portishead line (including designated new stations at Portishead and Pill) is shown as part of the **Planned Schemes included in the Baseline**. This apparent inclusion needs further investigation as a possible source of co-funding.

It is also possible that Network Rail's Level Crossing Closure Fund could finance the closure of the level crossing at Ashton Vale Trading Estate, or at least contribute to the cost of doing so.