

ANNEXE 2

Surrey County Council position on Guildford-Cranleigh rail link, December 2009

Background

During 1996-97 Surrey County Council thoroughly investigated the prospects for reopening of the Guildford-Cranleigh railway line, with options for either a conventional train service or a tram. Railtrack (the predecessor company of Network Rail) was commissioned to look at engineering issues and the County Council undertook extensive environmental and demand surveys. The conclusion was that no business case could be identified. In addition, the modelling demonstrated that most potential passengers on the train service would be current bus users, with few passengers likely to be switching from cars, meaning that a reopened line would have a limited impact in tackling congestion on the southern approaches to Guildford.

The County Council therefore decided to undertake no further work on this proposal. However, it supported the retention of the trackbed of the old railway as part of the "Downs Link" transport corridor for walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Substantial improvements to the quality of the Downs Link have been made in subsequent years, and this has resulted in considerably increased use of this very popular local facility.

Recent developments

In June 2009, ATOC (The Association of Train Operating Companies) published a report called "Connecting Communities". This suggested reopening a number of railway lines closed in the 1960s. One of the lines ATOC's report suggests be considered for reopening is the Guildford-Cranleigh line. ATOC estimates that the capital cost would be £63m and the benefit:cost ratio would be 1.7. The report proposes that potential sources of funding for reopening railway lines like Guildford-Cranleigh include "fares income, the private sector, Regional Funding Allowance, PTE or local authority contribution, and Government rail funding in 2014-19".

Current position

While we welcome the publication of ATOC's report, and support the development of public transport, we intend to maintain our existing policy towards the reopening of the Guildford-Cranleigh line. Although ATOC's work is helpful, it was inevitably quite a high-level analysis. In order to move the project forward, ATOC suggests that a new feasibility study/business case be commissioned.

We cannot identify any likely promoter with sufficient funding and interest in reopening the Guildford-Cranleigh line. Given the budgetary situation facing the County Council in the coming years, there is no prospect of us providing any substantial funding for this scheme. At ATOC's estimated £63m, the project is roughly twice the size of our Guildford Major Hub Scheme, and realistically would deliver benefits to far fewer residents.

With no obvious promoter of the reopening scheme, spending taxpayers' money on revisiting our earlier work also seems of little value, and we have no plans to do so. It would be essential in our view that any proposals for reopening the line ensured the retention of a walking/cycling/horse-riding route of the same quality as that existing at present, alongside any newly reopened railway.

In the meantime, we will protect and develop the Downs Link as a sustainable transport corridor.

Summary of current position

- We will not fund reopening of the Guildford-Cranleigh line
- We will not fund another feasibility study/business case for reopening the line
- We will protect and develop the Downs Link as a sustainable transport corridor