

THE CASE FOR A CHINGFORD TO STRATFORD RAIL SERVICE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council has campaigned for many years for a rail service to be introduced between Chingford and Stratford to connect Waltham Forest to the Lower Lea Valley. Walthamstow and Chingford are located only a few miles from Stratford but are not connected to it by rail.
- 1.2 The alternative of a public transport journey by bus to Stratford is very slow indeed. The narrow, congested roads in the borough mean that a four mile journey from Walthamstow to Stratford at peak times typically takes 40 minutes. The eight mile journey from Chingford to Stratford takes over an hour. With few opportunities existing for the introduction of further bus priority measures on the routes to Stratford, this situation is unlikely to improve. It will get even worse if traffic congestion on the boroughs' north/south routes increases.
- 1.3 Several decades ago, rail services did indeed operate between Chingford and Stratford. However, in the 1960s, the infrastructure which makes the service possible, the Hall Farm Curve at Coppermill junction, was removed. The HFC connected together the Chingford to Liverpool Street line and the Tottenham Hale to Stratford line.
- 1.4 If the HFC were to be reinstated, rail services could then operate from the five stations in Waltham Forest (Chingford, Highams Park, Wood Street, Walthamstow Central and St James St) on to the HFC, through the disused station at Lea Bridge on Lea Bridge Road and then on to Stratford. The journey time from Chingford to Stratford would be approximately 20 minutes and from Walthamstow Central to Stratford 10 minutes.
- 1.5 In recent years the case for the HFC has strengthened considerably. The need to connect the borough to the Stratford City development, the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics site and the major regeneration areas in the Lower Lea Valley means that there would be a much greater demand for the service than previously. In addition, planned housing growth in Waltham Forest of up to 10% by 2016 means that more people will need to access job opportunities. Once easy access to Stratford is established, there are convenient onward links to destinations in all directions.

2. Infrastructure Requirements

- 2.1 At Chingford, ample platform and storage capacity for a new service already exists and at Stratford, platforms 11 and 12 on the Lea Valley Line are available and currently used at well under capacity. The Hall Farm Curve is therefore the only element of new infrastructure required to operate a Chingford to Stratford service. The Railway embankment for the HFC still

exists and is in good condition and the necessary land required to reinstate the curve is in Network Rail ownership.

- 2.2 In 2002 the Council received a £50,000 grant from Transport for London to commission a study to assess the feasibility of the Hall Farm Curve scheme. The study, carried out by Hyder Consulting, concluded that the scheme was technically feasible. Four different options were considered, the most favourable being a double track chord with a new crossover at either end. The 800 metres of double track, associated junctions and crossovers, overhead electrification and signalling was designed in some detail and costed up at £14m. It is acknowledged that the cost of rail infrastructure has risen sharply since 2002, meaning that the likely cost today would be in the region of £25m - £30m.

3. Achieving Implementation

- 3.1 Network Rail receives funding from the Government in 5 year 'control periods' and the money is used to maintain and renew the national rail network and introduce new schemes to boost capacity and relieve overcrowding. Control Period 4 has just started in April 2009 and will run until March 2014, the total funding available to NR being £28.5bn. Although it is extremely unlikely that the Hall Farm Curve could be funded and constructed during CP4, it is a realistic ambition that the Council will be able to make a case for its inclusion in the CP5 programme (2014 - 2019).
- 3.2 The precise arrangements for the assembly of schemes for CP5 is yet to be agreed but this is likely to follow a similar pattern to that used in CP4. The process would start around Summer 2010 with the Department for Transport producing a 'High Level Output Specification'. The HLOS sets out what the Government expects the railway to deliver during the 5 year control period. The HLOS will be developed and refined over about two years. The Office of Rail Regulation will then produce a 'Statement of Funds Available' for CP5. Finally in 2013 NR will produce its Strategic Business Plan which will include the costed up new infrastructure schemes for 2014 - 2019.
- 3.3 Waltham Forest Council needs to be in a position by Summer 2010 to effectively present its case for the Hall Farm Curve to all the appropriate authorities and then carry out extensive lobbying to promote the scheme. The aim is to secure its inclusion on the national rail programme by 2013.
- 3.4 The policies being developed by the new Mayor of London appear to provide an increased level of support for more modest infrastructure projects such as the Hall Farm Curve. Previously emphasis was placed on very large infrastructure schemes such as the East London Line Extension and Crossrail. However, attention now seems to be focussed on more modest schemes which can achieve 'quick wins'. Another factor favouring the timing of the scheme is that during CP4 vast amounts of funding will be required to construct the £16.5bn Crossrail scheme. As CP5 approaches, Crossrail expenditure will start tailing off, releasing more funds for other projects.

4. The Regeneration Case

- 4.1 The case for the Hall Farm Curve rests on the fact that, by a possible implementation date of around 2016, the service would be well used and the revenue raised would at least cover the operating costs. Previous studies concluded that the demand for a rail service from Chingford to Stratford today was relatively low and this would not justify its introduction.
- 4.2 Transport for London has recently carried out some work for the Council using its 'Railplan' public transport model to test the viability of a Chingford to Stratford rail service in the year 2016. Railplan is a very complex model programmed with all the rail and bus services in London and can also estimate modal shift from car travel on to public transport services. It was assumed that for the 2016 scenario all the population and employment growth set out in the London Plan would be in place. The model gave very promising results for the HFC scheme. Assuming a 15 minute frequency service between Chingford and Stratford, the benefit to cost ratio was approximately 8:1 for 8 car operation and nearly 14:1 for 4 car operation. The four car BCR is very high and indicates that trains would be full in peak periods.

5. Lea Bridge Station

- 5.1 Lea Bridge Station was closed to passengers in 1985. If reopened it would provide access to the Lea Bridge Gateway area, the borough's largest industrial park and also access to the Lea Valley Park. The number of households located within walking distance of the station is currently relatively low but this is set to increase as there are a number of possible development sites around the station.
- 5.2 The reinstatement of the Hall Farm Curve would considerably strengthen the case for reopening the station because it would provide rail access to the LBG industrial park and the Lea Valley Park from Walthamstow and Chingford. Consequently many existing car trips could be converted to rail. Access to the Lea Bridge area would also be provided from the upper Lea Valley as trains already run between Stratford, Tottenham Hale and destinations further north.
- 5.3 The 2002 Hyder study also looked at the cost of reopening the station and the preferred option was costed at £4m. Again this cost would be considerably higher today. The design proposed a new station building and entrance off Argall Way, lengthened platforms, a new footbridge and lifts for full accessibility.

6. Stratford City Development

- 6.1 The Stratford City development will create many job opportunities for Waltham Forest residents but currently public transport access to the site is very poor. The Chingford to Stratford rail service would have the potential to transfer large numbers of trips from car to rail.
- 6.2 The Section 106 Agreement for the Stratford City development includes a financial contribution of £4million towards construction of the 'Chingford Link' ie the Hall Farm Curve. An immediate issue is that a condition of the S106 requires all necessary approvals for the scheme to be in place and funding for the whole cost of the scheme to be secured by 1 January 2010. If these requirements are not satisfied then there are provisions to reassign £2million of the contribution to bus improvements and traffic mitigation measures in Waltham Forest and the remaining £2million to other schemes in the wider area. Clearly the 1/1/2010 requirement will not be met. The Council is therefore seeking a deed of variation to the Section 106 Agreement to be agreed by all parties to extend the date for the Chingford Link approvals and funding regimes by a number of years, so that the £4m contribution can still be used for the scheme.

7. The Way Forward

- 7.1 In 2010 the Council will have the opportunity to present its aspiration for the Hall Farm Curve to government and regional organisations and commence the process for securing its inclusion in Network Rail's CP5. Recent discussions with Transport for London have indicated that their view on the scheme is more positive than previously. The Hall Farm Curve may be the type of project which TfL would be able to support in terms of achieving mayoral objectives.
- 7.2 Two pieces of work are being carried out in 2009 to further develop the scheme. Firstly an expert rail consultant is being employed to review all the information collected so far, update the design work done in 2002 to give a realistic cost estimate of the scheme at today's prices and then put together an outline business case for the scheme. Secondly a professional lobbying organisation is being employed to promote the scheme to government and regional organisations and to a wider audience. To assist in the process, a high quality 'glossy' document will be prepared to set out the merits of the scheme.

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