

Feasibility study for Isle of Wight railway extension

July 6, 2021



A business case considering the re-opening of the railway between the existing Island Line and Newport has been submitted to the Department for Transport by the Isle of Wight Council.

The authority, supported by Island MP Bob Seely, is seeking government support from the 'Restoring Your Railway' programme to further develop the case for reinstating some of the Islands' lost rail links.

The project will aim to reinstate the disused rail line between the Island Line and Newport, via Blackwater, providing a frequent, fast and reliable railway service from Ryde Pier Head to the Island's county town.

Councillor Phil Jordan, Cabinet member for transport and infrastructure, said extending the Island's rail network had significant potential to boost the local economy while helping to ease congestion and reduce carbon emissions.

He said: "Reinstating this rail link is vital to supporting the economic growth of our Island and to help reduce carbon emissions. It will provide a viable alternative to private car travel by improving journey times and connectivity.

“We’ve submitted a strong case and hope the project will be successful in moving to the next stage. The government has previously signalled support for our ambitions and we’re hopeful they’ll help us progress this scheme further.”

In May 2020, the council received up to £50,000 from the Restoring Your Railways programme to prepare a feasibility study for restoring former rail links between Newport and Ryde and Ventnor and Shanklin.

In December 2020, the council appointed a consortium of organisations, led by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR Ltd), to prepare a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) — an early feasibility study — and supporting work.

Extending the existing Island Line to Newport via Blackwater was identified as the most viable element of the project to be progressed as an initial phase, at an estimated cost of £67 million.

The proposal would utilise the former Sandown to Newport railway — the track bed of which remains very largely intact — to link the existing Island Line to Newport. Existing cycling and walking routes would be retained and enhanced alongside any new rail infrastructure.

Future phases of the project could also enable an extension of the service between Ryde Pierhead and Ventnor, improving accessibility for residents and supporting Ventnor to reach its full potential as a visitor destination.

Mr Seely said: “This bid is an opportunity to bring about major change and regenerate our towns. It is a vision designed to unlock the Island’s growth and development potential by using transport to connect people to businesses, jobs and education.

“Restoring branch lines between our two main towns would enable greater integration with cross-Solent transport providers, encourage low-carbon travel, bring people closer to town centres and encourage a holistic approach to active and public transport.

“By breaking the cycle of unsustainable, car dependent greenfield development, new transport links into town centres could support a recycling culture of housing within our towns and villages.”

Should the SOBC be approved by the government, then the project will progress to the next stage, which is the preparation of a more detailed Outline Business Case.

Stakeholders which contributed to the project will be invited to an online presentation from the project team in due course.

The SOBC Executive Summary is available to download
at: <https://iwightinvest.com/regeneration-prospectus/restoring-your-railway/>

Photo credit: South Western Railway