

Rossendale secures study funding to get area back on track

May 16, 2022



Rossendale Council has been successful in securing £150,000 funding from Restoring Your Railway and Lancashire County Council to produce a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) into the Rawtenstall to Manchester travel corridor.

With high levels of commuter outflows leaving the borough to access employment, many into the Greater Manchester area, Rossendale is the only authority in Lancashire without a rail link and suffers from high levels of congestion. Rawtenstall's rail link closed to passengers in 1972 and freight in 1980.

Alyson Barnes Council Leader said: "There are major employment and residential projects planned in Greater Manchester in the coming years which will no doubt add to congestion on the M66 so we really need to plan now to minimise the effects of this on residents and businesses in Rossendale.

"The Strategic Outline Business Case that we are now undertaking is the first step in really understanding what will work for Rossendale."

The proposal to reinstate the rail link has been developed by some of the leading technical rail consultants in the country with the specific remit of finding an innovative working solution which also ensures the continued success of the heritage railway.

The proposed link would see journey times of around 50 minutes into central Manchester and it is predicted to reduce car journeys on the M66/A56 by anywhere between one to three million.

The link would have a relatively low cost as much of the infrastructure is already in place and would see the tram system also utilised with a specially designed interchange station at Buckley Wells to enable a fast seamless connection with Metrolink.

The plan would also enable the Heritage railway to operate a similar timetable with its heritage trains as it currently does and would see the retention of the steam age stations and signalling with the role of volunteers protected.

Cllr Barnes continued: "We really value the East Lancs Railway, which is an important and much loved asset for Rossendale and we are seeking a solution that secures the financial and operational future of the ELR. We want to make sure we maintain the traditional look of the station, the signalling, the ELR rolling stock allow and the important role the volunteers play to continue."

With other heritage railways such as the Weardale, Keighley and Worth Valley and Swanage Railway actively seeking a passenger connection to secure their futures, the East Lancs Railway would be able to operate in a similar way to today with its trains timetabled around passenger trains.

County Councillor Charlie Edwards, Lancashire County Council's cabinet member for Highways and Transport, said: "Reviving Rawtenstall's heritage railway for public use will open up more employment opportunities for residents and reduce congestion on the A56 / M66 corridor into Manchester, supporting progress towards a net zero carbon economy.

"We think these benefits make it a worthwhile strategic project to pursue and we will now work together to find an innovative solution to make this project work for the Railway and for Lancashire residents."

Systra Consulting who have been appointed by Rossendale Council to carry out the SOBC have produced a residents and business survey to assist them in drafting the report.

Cllr Barnes said:" It is vitally important we hear the views of residents and businesses, not just in Rossendale but all the way down the proposed line, in order to gain a greater understanding of the needs and requirements if commuters to help us secure this much needed investment in our transport infrastructure."

The study is expected to be completed around September and the surveys can be found on the councils website here for businesses <https://bit.ly/surveybusi> and here for individuals <https://bit.ly/surveyindiv> .The survey will close on 22 June 2022.