

Penicuik to Edinburgh : Public Transport Links and Rail Feasibility Assessment

Report by Ian Johnson, Head of Communities & Economy

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1** This report provides a statement of the current issues relating to the transport links between Penicuik and Edinburgh, with particular reference to the potential for a heavy rail connection.

2.0 Background

- 2.1** At both strategic (South East Scotland Strategic Development Plan 2013) and local (Midlothian Local Development Plan 2017) planning levels, the A701 road corridor is identified as a growth area. The committed levels of development arising within this growth corridor include major housing at Bilston, Roslin and Penicuik, together with substantial retail and commercial development at Straiton. The most recent Census data (2011) indicates that around half of the workforce living in Penicuik travel to jobs in the Edinburgh area; there is no definitive evidence to suggest that this level of commuting would have altered significantly since 2011, nor that it will continue at a similar rate.
- 2.2** In recognition of this level of growth, the Local Development Plan includes a proposal for a new A701 relief road and A702 spur road, the former running to the west of the existing A701 to act as the main link for traffic between Penicuik and the A720 Edinburgh City Bypass. This will enable the existing A701 road to be re-prioritised as a public transport corridor, as well as a safer and more attractive route for cyclists and pedestrians. There has also previously been reference to the possibility of a light rail link along the A701, an extension of the Edinburgh tram network, and a link to the orbital bus proposals along the A720 City Bypass.
- 2.3** The proposal to re-establish a heavy rail link between Penicuik and Edinburgh has been considered by the Council since at least 2001, when a bid to the then Scottish Executive for funding for a feasibility study into the matter was submitted, but which was unsuccessful. More recently, in August 2012 and February 2013 the Council considered further reports on the *Penicuik Rail Line* which maintained the Council's continued interest in considering the project. Heriot Watt University undertook a Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP) Stage 2 Engineering Study in 2014, followed by a GRIP 3 Engineering Study shortly afterwards. That latter study recommended that further development to GRIP 4 stage be undertaken specifically to examine a route running from Pomathorn Road north eastwards along the track of a former railway through Rossllynlee, past Rosewell, and through Bonnyrigg, to link into the Borders railway line close to Eskbank Station. Since then no further work has been undertaken.
- 2.4** In resolving to adopt the Midlothian Local Development Plan at its meeting on 26 September 2017, Council agreed that
- “Further reports be brought forward in relation to a feasibility study in respect of a rail link to Penicuik.”

3.0 Rail Feasibility Assessment

- 3.1** Whilst the proposals in the adopted Midlothian Local Development Plan provide the opportunity for faster and more frequent bus services along the existing A701 road, the likely scale of demand arising from new development is such that all other public transport options are worthy of consideration. As noted above, one such option that has previously been considered is for a heavy rail link.
- 3.2** The previous study reports mentioned above provided a helpful initial assessment. However, they can only be regarded as the early stages of a full feasibility study, which would require substantially more resource if it is to provide a sound basis for any policy and investment decisions.

4.0 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report. If, at a later date, Council were to commission a comprehensive feasibility study then a budget would need to be identified.

4.2 Risk

If options for enhanced public transport links between Penicuik and Edinburgh were not assessed there is a risk that over-reliance on the bus services could result in issues of under-capacity of service to meet demand. If a decision is made to take forward the heavy rail option then a comprehensive feasibility study would be required to minimise the risk of unforeseen difficulties and wasted resources.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- Community safety
- Adult health, care and housing
- Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- Sustainable growth
- Business transformation and Best Value
- None of the above

4.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

More attractive and efficient public transport would enable residents of Penicuik to have greater access to labour markets and training locations, thereby reducing the relatively low levels of income and qualifications in Midlothian.

4.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

See paragraph 4.4 above.

4.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

See paragraphs 4.2 and 4.4 above.

4.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

If the heavy rail link proposals were to be taken forward then, at the appropriate stage, there would need to be extensive public and stakeholder consultation.

4.8 Ensuring Equalities

This report does not propose a new or revised policy, nor any service or budget change; and therefore has not required an equalities assessment. As part of any further study an equalities appraisal would be required as an integral part of the assessment.

4.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

The modal shift of travellers from private cars to rail would have a direct positive impact on environmental sustainability.

4.10 IT Issues

None.

5.0 Summary

5.1 The potential for a heavy rail link between Penicuik and Edinburgh has been under consideration for many years, although there has been little progress since 2013/14. The scale of forthcoming development approved in the new Local Development Plan for Penicuik and the A701 corridor is such that further consideration could be given to the potential to maximise the public transport link opportunities, including that of heavy rail.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that Council,

- i) agrees to receive a more detailed report on the relative merits of options to maximise the capacity and quality of public transport links between Penicuik and Edinburgh; and
- ii) receives a report which reviews in more detail the work already undertaken on the feasibility of a heavy rail link between Penicuik and Edinburgh, together with an assessment of the next stages in assessing the merits of such a proposal.

30 November 2017

Report Contact:

Ian Johnson, Head of Communities and Economy
ian.johnson@midlothian.gov.uk

Tel No 0131 271 3460

Background Papers: None