

Position Statement regarding the ATOC Report, Connecting Communities. June 2009

26th June 2009

The Wisbech and March Bramley Line was established, in late 2003, as a community heritage railway in the knowledge that the restoration of full network passenger services on the March – Wisbech line faced immense difficulties. In the view of the Bramley Line Committee the ATOC report has not changed the position in that respect.

The Bramley Line considers it would be irresponsible to cease its efforts to establish a community heritage service on the line because of the publication of the ATOC report. The report in respect of the March – Wisbech line contains only an option for review not a proposal for the restoration of a service.

The capital costs to reinstate a full national rail service are at least £12m and probably more. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out recently the country is entering a period of austerity. The service proposed by ATOC is between Wisbech and Peterborough via March for which we believe an adequate express bus services already exist.

This makes it highly likely that the ATOC option will not be progressed or will, at the very least, be shelved until funding is available. In the light of this, any decision by the Bramley Line not to continue to campaign to establish a community heritage service could leave Wisbech without any prospect of a rail service for a very long time or even at all.

Network Rail has confirmed to the Bramley Line that the establishment of a community heritage service would not be a barrier to network services returning to the line in the future. Nor would the re-establishment of network freight and/or passenger services on the line curtail heritage rail operations.

Community heritage railways require significantly less capital costs to re-establish services and lower operating costs. Across the country local authorities have recognised the benefits community heritage railways bring to their areas. The support offered has ranged from financial support to providing professional expertise and assisting with gaining RDA and other funding. You have to look no further than East Dereham to see what a community heritage railway can do for a rural market town.

We would like our local councils to work with us to secure the line and make this a great attraction to the local area and a useful service for the communities of Wisbech, Coldham and March. We will be inviting the local council to a meeting with us to discuss this further.

In this respect the Bramley Line will continue to seek the financial support to purchase the lease to the line and operate a community heritage service between March and Wisbech. Once successful in obtaining the lease, the Bramley Line will not rule out operating a commuter service between March and Wisbech if demand is there for it and a business case made for it.

