AGENDA ITEM NO 11

TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
BUDGET AND POLICY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 1st DECEMBER, 2026
PLYMOUTH TO TAVISTOCK RAIL LINK

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Committee and Council opportunity to consider the potential benefits, subject to agreement, associated with formalising and developing the existing informal partnership between local authority and other stakeholders in Devon in support of a Plymouth – Tavistock Rail Link.

2. CORPORATE POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

The Town Council has adopted strategic objectives which relate to community, environment and economy. For the purposes of this report, most especially:

'En8 Transport Connectivity - The Council will support initiatives which improve the critical connectivity of the Town with other settlements, and national transport infrastructure, with a particular focus on the reinstatement of rail links to Plymouth and then to Exeter and beyond...'

3. LEGAL AND RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

The Local Government Act 1972 affords the opportunity to local authorities to formally work together through Joint Committees. However local authorities may also collaborate on less formal terms to promote initiatives in the shared interests of the communities they serve. Tavistock is both a hub centre for services (to the town and wider hinterland in both Devon and Cornwall), as well as an important Northern gateway to, and provider of labour for, the City of Plymouth. As such the likely risk of not collaborating (see below) likely outweighs the risks of seeking to work together at this time if that can be achieved.

4. RESOURCE ISSUES

The resource issues associated with this report are set out therein. They principally relate to Member and staff time as/where needed, from participating authorities, alongside an ongoing commitment from the

Town Council - in particular to support associated events and initiatives.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The reinstatement of a rail link to Plymouth would relieve traffic congestion and road journeys (most especially on the already frequently congested A386), reduce journey times and carbon emissions - for both existing and projected future traffic movements.

6. COMMUNICATIONS ISSUES

A preliminary meeting has been held with a small number of stakeholders to assess viability.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

This Report is primarily scoping in nature so the Committee and Council can consider the options set out in para's 4.3-4.4 below.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 The Committee will be aware of the longstanding aspiration to restore a rail link between the Town and Plymouth. This is shared by West Devon Borough, Plymouth City and Devon County Councils (see also Tavistock to Plymouth Railway - Roads and transport for the Strategic Business Case).

1.2 However, with the Government discontinuation of 'Restoring Your Railway' funding there is a case for enhancing collaborative working to clearly articulate and reinforce the benefits of such a link.

1.3 The sub-national transport body Peninsula Transport is now taking the strategic lead on developing Plymouth Metro. It includes re-opening the Tavistock line from Bere Alston for through services, with the potential for extending them beyond Plymouth via a new station at Plympton as far as Ivybridge, as can be seen here https://link.edgepilot.com/x/i-QC3faCQMxLKoJMgj4mbUc?u=https://www.peninsulatransport.org.uk/our-work/plymouth-metro/ It is also worth noting that Tavistock is the only new/reinstated rail scheme for this part of Devon in Peninsula Transport's officially-adopted Strategic Implementation Plan, as can be seen here

https://link.edgepilot.com/x/uUGImh3pbNzJNe_LbSVea24?u=https://www.peninsulatransport.org.uk/strategic-implementation-plan/

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 Associated benefits include, but are not limited to:

a) Improving transport connectivity.
   i. The A386 is increasingly congested and has little potential for improvement given that, for much of its length, it runs through a protected landscape; furthermore
   ii. Increasingly the A386 is becoming a 'overflow' route from SE Cornwall to Plymouth with progressive increases to tolls on the Tamar Bridge as well as, in any event, being a main diversionary route (formal and informal) for when the Tamar Bridge is closed or otherwise subject to reduced traffic flows.

b) Environmental – reduced vehicle movements equate to lower greenhouse gas emissions, fewer traffic accidents and less working hours 'lost'.

c) Improving public transport (local and national) connectivity - currently public transport is only served via bus services – which do not even connect to the national rail network at Plymouth, and are all too often impacted by congestion. In addition a link would also improve social mobility and support economic independence for those without access to a car.

d) Supporting Defence Investment and National Security. An £84m contribution is planned to support defence spend in Plymouth Government Releases £50 Million Defence Growth Deal Funding to Plymouth - DPRTE alongside potential access to relevant funding streams within the £300bn Defence Spending Plan. These necessitate fit for purpose transport links and a skilled workforce from both the City, its immediate hinterland, and further afield. Without this link the defence investment will otherwise only add to pressure on the existing route (A386), already one of the most heavily congested in the region.

e) Economic – the potential for increased access into and out from Plymouth for work, culture, education, health and leisure - increasing mobility, creating and distributing wealth and improving wellbeing.

2.2 These benefits would accrue not only to the regional centre of Plymouth, but also reciprocally and more widely, to those areas either not currently served by the rail network, and/or where connectivity to Plymouth is not good (such as Tavistock). Accordingly that includes significant parts of North Cornwall, North and mid Devon.

3. A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

3.1 As referenced above there has historically been an informal collaborative approach as between the relevant local authorities in Devon. This continues to support reinstatement of the Plymouth Rail Link as part of a wider strategic approach to transport connectivity.

3.2 However, in recognition of the changed circumstances regarding Government investment in transport infrastructure it has been suggested that now may be the time for the relevant local authorities, together with the Combined Authority, to consider agreeing to work together and support reinstatement of the rail link between Tavistock and Plymouth.

3.3 That is not to disregard the value of other initiatives (such as a future line to Okehampton), or the contribution made by informally constituted groups such as Tavy Rail. But rather to recognise that the critical and expected 'gateway' priority, from both a financial and strategic transport perspective, is necessarily reinstatement of the Plymouth connection.

3.4 Providing a consistent and co-ordinated voice from the relevant local authorities as democratically accountable bodies, working with Members of Parliament and the wider cohort of other stakeholders, potentially provides a meaningful basis to explore, explain, coordinate and advocate the substantial benefits of rail connectivity in this area[1].

[1] A local example of co-working that has already been established elsewhere is the Northern Devon Railway Development Alliance, which also subscribes to Railfuture, an organisation which provides support and information for railway initiatives alongside deep links within the industry and Government https://link.edgepilot.com/x/0G1FkAiBLAN_jzn4eRUm0Es?u=https://www.railfuture.org.uk/Devon-and-Cornwall-Branch

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 This Council has a longstanding recognition of the criticality of rail connections through its Strategic Plan which are mirrored, at a wider level, by the policy positions of the principal authorities previously referenced. The changed situation regarding Government funding and, by implication, the wider economy however presents challenges to strategic transport initiatives.

4.2 Therefore, and having regard to the extensive benefits which could accrue to economy, people and place, alongside transformational transport improvements unlocking both Plymouth and parts of North & Mid Devon/North Cornwall, the Committee and Council may wish to consider exploring a more co-ordinated and formalised approach.

4.3 Such an approach could be to seek the views of partner authorities on:

- the formation of a Plymouth and Tavistock Rail Alliance (P*a*TRA) with a single goal, reinstatement of the Plymouth – Tavistock Rail Link;
- their potential support for same;

and, subject to support in principle:

- the basis of that grouping, including how best to involve and engage other stakeholders in the initiative.
- Seeking Membership of Railfuture[2] to gain access to sector expertise.

4.4 If supported in principle the Council may then wish to nominate a lead Member. In practice this would ideally be someone with a deep and longstanding involvement in the topic over several years, together with another Member with high level political and other connections to the principal authorities referred to above.

4.5 The instructions of the Committee and Council are sought.

CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
NOVEMBER 2026
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL

[2] in the sum of £25 annual subscription