

Radstock – Frome Railway, Feasibility Study by Halcrow on behalf of Bath & North East Somerset U. A.

Re: Cabinet Meeting 16th January 2013 Agenda Item 14

The report was generally negative without looking at opportunities and ignored several matters.

1. For example, the possibility of a service through Westbury to Melksham and Swindon was ignored: similarly, there was no consideration of a service to Newbury. Most importantly, there is no regard of the potential benefits examined if Radstock is included in the Transport for Greater Bristol area, when this would greatly increase opportunities for through services and general flexibility.
2. The report focused on commuting (Section 5.5 of your paper) and ignored the potential for tourism, inward commuting, education and the general accessible “well-being” required today. There are many families in Radstock with just one car, who would welcome the opportunity to travel, especially with young children, when the “bread-winner” is at work. The elderly also find trains easier to access than ‘buses. I therefore contend that Social Inclusion should be better investigated and try to “promote independence”, as stated in your Corporate Objectives.
3. I find that using current service patterns to be somewhat disingenuous, as by the time of implementation, services in the surrounding area will have changed significantly.
4. Potential for infrastructure improvements was ignored. A new platform at Mells could be nearer the village while at Frome the chord to access Frome Station is unnecessary, with a new platform being directly behind the Cheese & Grain building, with access to a very large car-park.
5. An increase in the size of parking area at Radstock would help revenue and might also be useful for 'bus passengers. This would then be integrated transport.
6. Costs quoted are higher than I would have expected, having referred to others in the field. Most notable is “Management & Contingency”, which is 2/3 of the total.

7. "Soft" benefits are not mentioned, such as regeneration in Radstock
8. Usage figures were predicated on average population within walking distance. This ignores the obvious cyclists, potential car users and passengers from 'buses.
9. Sections 5.3 and 5.9 in your document mention the Sustrans cycle path. It is good that it is well-used, but there is no need for concern over impact as a Section 106 exists for the slight movement of the path to permit running trains.
10. Your Report (Section 5.7.) states that a Heritage railway would not be an option as it would link into the operational line at Hapsford Junction. This need not be the case: the lines could be kept separate and the Radstock line run to terminate at the platform behind the Cheese & Grain (see 4. above).
11. I am surprised that the Report does not examine other options for financing the build. If a new Planning Permission is to be granted, a Section 106 could force a new developer to contribute to this infrastructure.
12. I have established that it is feasible to use a mixture of senior professional engineers with volunteer labour, which would save some cost.
13. I am pleased to see that Officers recommend re-working of the Report using 2011 Census figures, but I believe that there is far more to be examined, as outlined above.

Finally, I would point out that for the last three or four years, passenger miles on rail has increased at a compound rate of 6%. During that time there has been greater than inflation fare increases in a poor economic environment: either of these have historically impacted usage. Less fuel has been sold and there are now fewer under 24's learning to drive. All of these factors should be taken into account in the Feasibility Study.

George Bailey
Radstock Action Group