

10th March 2016

Full Council: The Future of Island Line

We are writing to you ahead of Full Council's consideration, on 16th March, of "The Future of Island Line – Options Report" by Christopher Garnett (Agenda item 7; Paper D).

As paragraph 4 of Paper D sets out, Full Council previously agreed a motion about Island Line at its meeting on 2nd September 2015, which supported the service remaining as a fully integral part of the South Western rail franchise for the entire duration of its post-2017 period, and agreed that the Department for Transport (DfT) would be asked to ensure that the franchise specification invites bidders to set out how they would invest in, maintain and improve the service throughout this time. This is, of course, the settled view of the Full Council – and we believe that it should remain so.

The Garnett Report, which is included in your Full Council papers, proposes that the best way forward would be for Island Line to operate as a separate franchise. We fundamentally disagree with Mr Garnett's analysis in this regard, and find his arguments unconvincing. We therefore would not wish to see Full Council endorse his view in this respect, which would serve to encourage the DfT to exclude Island Line from any specific obligations in the forthcoming Invitation To Tender (ITT) specification for the South Western rail franchise. Instead, we take the view – as set out in Option 4 of the Full Council paper – that the decision made by Full Council on 2nd September 2015 should be confirmed / reaffirmed.

We are also concerned at the rationality of some of analysis offered by Mr Garnett (particularly in respect of his suggestion of a tram model), and our concerns on this are best articulated in the enclosed paper – "A Technical Response to the [Garnett] Report" – which has been written by a KILF supporter and St Helens resident, Mark Brinton MIET. Mr Brinton is a practising railway engineer, with over forty years of experience (mainly in traction and rolling stock engineering) – including in relation to Island Line.

Although Mr Brinton's paper is lengthy, we consider that it provides a much-needed critique of Mr Garnett's report, and that members should therefore take its content into account when considering what stance to take at Full Council next week. We highlight some of Mr Brinton's key points below.

Proposal for a tram vs Tube Stock and alternative long-term options

- *"With regard to the difference between "heavy rail", "Island Line" and "light rail/tramway" track maintenance standards there is a myth perpetuated mainly by tramway enthusiasts that Island Line is maintained to "heavy rail" standards and therefore excessively expensive.... The argument that a tramway would be cheaper to maintain does not stand close scrutiny."* [page 6]
- *"The tramway will require track maintenance standards significantly higher than that necessary for a railway operating at the same speed."* [page 7]
- *"To reduce the permitted track twist to levels tolerated by trams would require a significantly higher standard of track maintenance than would otherwise be afforded if the track were to be restored and maintained at an acceptable level for a train operation".* [page 19]
- *"UK Tram are currently quoting the average cost of building a tram track as between £12.2m and £26m per kilometre."* [page 10]
- *"I suspect that in the event of Island Line becoming a tramway the DfT would seek to have it removed from the National Rail Network with the associated loss of network benefits such as through tickets etc... It would remove the ability of mainland passengers to book through to Island Line destinations."* [page 23]

- *“With regard to the rolling stock on Island Line, it is the writer’s considered technical opinion that the existing rolling stock could be kept operational until the end of the next franchise period (7-10 years). However it will require some investment in the vehicles to achieve this. Given that the next franchise period could end in 2024 to 2027 then then would be the time to consider replacing the rolling stock with something more modern. It also gives time for decisions regarding improvement of the infrastructure to be made and implemented and some return on the investment in the existing rolling stock.”* [pages 16-17]
- He provides a detailed analysis in relation to the potential use of alternative Tube Stock, dismissing Mr Garnett’s conclusion that there are no options available on this front [pages 6 to 7] before going to say that *“it is likely that an extensive (and expensive) scope of work would be necessary to make redundant tram vehicles fit to operate on the Island”*. [page 8]
- Mr Brinton sets out a possible alternative long-term option on page 26 onwards which we encourage members to read in full.

Wider franchise vs separate franchise

- *“If Island Line continued to be part of a much larger franchise, as now, then these benefits [through ticketing, timetabling, information etc] are available at no additional cost, as they are part of SWT’s overheads”*. [page 9]
- *“When Island Line did operate as a stand-alone business (1996-2007) it was rumoured within the industry that Island Line was costing between £5m and £8m to run, although no meaningful figures were ever published... Costs of this sort of magnitude were probably the main driver for the inclusion of Island Line within a larger franchise so as to enable these overall costs to be absorbed by the larger franchise and thereby reduce the total cost of operation.”* [page 15]
- *“On the basis of experience of Island Line in the 1996 to 2007 period, the stand-alone organisational model is not financially sustainable. Island Line gains very significant benefits from being part of a similar much larger operation in areas such as management and technical staffing, and overhead costs. However, Island Line does not necessarily have to be part of SWT, it could be part of the GW or GTR franchises, but from an historical and geographic perspective, SWT would be the best franchise for it to be an integral part of.”* [page 24]
- *“Island Line receives significant benefits from being part of a larger organisation, such as back-office and overhead support, also operational, engineering and contract management services as well as other headquarters support services such as finance and human resources.”* [page 23]
- *“If Island Line were to be a standalone franchise the cost of a performance bond and insurance would be significant additional cost burdens that would be incurred by Island Line.”* [page 23]

We consider that Mr Brinton has raised serious questions about the validity of the analysis provided (and resulting conclusions reached) by Mr Garnett, to the extent that we do not believe that Full Council should be endorsing the latter’s report. We are therefore concerned that the DfT has already been provided with a copy of Mr Garnett’s report (before Full Council has even debated it) and we hope that following Full Council’s deliberations the agreed position of elected members can be made clear to the DfT as they continue their preparations on the ITT.

In light of all the above – and Mr Brinton’s paper – I (Ray) am submitting a proposed resolution for consideration by elected members next Wednesday, which would be brought forward under Option 5: to agree an alternative approach. My proposed motion / amendment is enclosed with this letter, to enable you to consider it ahead of next Wednesday’s Full Council meeting.

We would strongly encourage you to read Mr Brinton’s paper, and in doing so recognise the outstanding contribution which this highly knowledgeable Island resident has made to the debate on Island Line. We believe that Mr Brinton’s paper should be submitted to the DfT with the IW Council’s endorsement, and the wording of the proposed resolution supports this proposed step.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters ahead of next Wednesday.

Kind regards,

Cllr Ray Bloomfield
IW Councillor for Lake South & Shanklin North
Shanklin Town Councillor for Shanklin South

Cllr Chris Quirk
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