

Agenda Item No:	9	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	23 February 2026	
Report Title:	Fenland Transport Economic Assessment including Wisbech to March Rail	

1 Purpose / Summary

1.1 This report relates to the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment project including Wisbech to March Rail. Subject to final confirmation of the third-party funding from CPCA Members are requested to:

- Confirm the acceptance of £500,000 between April 2026 and March 2028 from CPCA for FDC to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Project.
- Appoint a Project Board including setting its remit, its terms of reference and membership
- Note the procurement exercise to select a contractor to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Project. Approval of delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and S151 Officer is requested to award the contract following completion of the procurement
- Subject to final confirmation, third party funding being approved from CPCA. A Grant Funding Agreement between CPCA and FDC is required. Delegated approval to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and S151 Officer is requested to approve and sign the agreement on behalf of FDC.

2 Key Issues

2.1 Subject to final confirmation, FDC has been awarded £500,000 by CPCA to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment project including Wisbech to March Railway Line.

2.2 There are larger scale essential transport projects desperately needed in Fenland which struggle to demonstrate significant benefits due to cost, ground conditions, lower land values and the need for regeneration. This infrastructure is pivotal to support the delivery of new homes and jobs within Fenland that are a requirement of the Local Plan (2014). The transport challenges in Fenland need to be addressed to deliver the new homes and jobs. This includes demonstrating value for money and unlocking wider economic benefits to support transport scheme delivery. Projects such as March to Wisbech Rail Line have not demonstrated this in accordance with Government business case models to date. This is significant for unlocking the barriers, and secure funding to enable these transport schemes to be constructed.

- 2.3 This project aims to identify what is required to help facilitate the delivery of the Wisbech to March railway scheme and other essential transport infrastructure for Fenland. By developing and testing a range of scenarios around the economic viability of the Wisbech to March railway scheme, it is hoped to engage decision makers in conversation, about delivering the growth to finance this scheme and other major transport infrastructure in Fenland. Options for testing will include the Wisbech railway proposal as the core transport infrastructure needed, whilst setting this in the context of wider transport infrastructure as a network, major development and the growth needs of the district. Other specific schemes include A47 dualling, Wisbech Access Strategy, March Area Transport Strategy, Whittlesey Relief Road and the Fens Reservoir. A range of economic proposals will be developed for discussion with decision makers. A scoping paper setting out more details about the proposed project can be found in appendix 1 of this report.
- 2.4 It is proposed to set up a Project Board to oversee the governance and delivery of this project. The approach being suggested is already in operation for several CPCA funded projects in Fenland District including Fenland Stations Regeneration (Whittlesea Stn OBC) and Whittlesey Relief Road. Draft terms of reference are attached at appendix 2 for Cabinet discussion and approval.
- 2.5 A procurement exercise will be required to appoint a contractor to complete the economic assessment project. This will be managed and overseen by the Project Board.
- 2.6 A Grant funding agreement will be required between CPCA and FDC for the funding. Delegate authority is requested to approve and sign the agreement on behalf of FDC.
- 2.7 The project is expected to complete by March 2028.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are requested to:
- Subject to the final confirmation from CPCA, confirm the acceptance of £500,000 between 2026 and 2028 from CPCA for FDC to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Project.
 - Confirm the establishment of the Project Board to oversee the business case project, confirm the boards remit including its terms of reference and membership
 - Note the procurement exercise to select a contractor to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment project. Give approval for delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and the S151 Officer to award the contract
 - Subject to final confirmation from CPCA, third party funding has been approved for this work. A Grant Funding Agreement between CPCA and FDC is required. Delegate approval to the Portfolio Holder for Transport, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and S151 Officer to sign the agreement

on behalf of FDC and complete all other documentation necessary to bring this arrangement in to effect.

Wards Affected	All Fenland wards
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/19DEC25/02
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Christy - Portfolio Holder for Transport
Report Originator(s)	Wendy Otter (Transport Development Manager)
Contact Officer(s)	<p>Wendy Otter (Transport Development Manager) Email: wotter@fenland.gov.uk</p> <p>Belinda Pedler (Senior Transport Officer) Email: bpedler@fenland.gov.uk</p> <p>Anna Goodall (Assistant Director) Email: agoodall@fenland.gov.uk</p>
Background Papers	<p>CPCA Board Meeting – 30 November 2022 353.pdf</p> <p>CPCA Transport and Infrastructure Committee – November 2024 Agenda for Transport Committee on Monday, 4th November, 2024, 10.00 am</p> <p>Cambs CC Fenland Transport Strategy (2023) Fenland Transport Strategy Cambridgeshire County Council</p> <p>Local Transport & Connectivity Plan (2023) CPCA-LTCP-Strategic-Document.pdf</p> <p>Local Growth Plan (2025) C220817 CPCA Prospectus</p>

4 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The railway from March to Wisbech was originally opened in 1847 under the Eastern Counties Railway, later becoming part of the Great Eastern Railway in 1862. Constructed as a double-track railway, it was designed primarily to serve the Port of Wisbech, with the line eventually extending to Watlington Junction, linking it to the Ely to King's Lynn route. Officially known as the Wisbech Goods Branch (Engineer's Line Reference WIG), the line runs from March East Junction to its nominal terminus at Wisbech.
- 4.2 Passenger services on this line were discontinued in 1968, and significant portions of the track, particularly beyond Weasenham Lane level crossing, have since been removed. However, the remaining section of the rail corridor is still under the ownership of Network Rail.
- 4.3 Originally built as a twin-track railway, the line was reduced to a single track in 1972. From that point until 2000, it was used exclusively for freight, serving key industrial sites such as Metal Box and Purina, located south of Wisbech. The section closer to March continues to be operational, primarily supporting shunting activities and providing access to Whitemoor Yard via the chord line from March West Junction.
- 4.4 Operations on the line were conducted under the "One Train" principle (OTS), meaning only a single train could operate on the line at any given time. Since 2000, the line has been classified as "Out of Use (temporarily)" in Network Rail's Sectional Appendix. Despite its inactive status, the line has not been formally closed nor removed from the National Rail network through a Network Change process, leaving open the possibility of future reactivation.
- 4.5 The Combined Authority previously commissioned Mott MacDonald to explore options for establishing a transport link between March and Wisbech. This resulted in the production of numerous documents designed to inform the development of the proposed transport link. In 2020, key documents were updated and reissued to reflect the latest findings and insights.
- 4.6 From 2021 to 2022, Network Rail's Design Delivery team conducted a comprehensive feasibility review of the proposals developed by Mott MacDonald on behalf of the Combined Authority. This review drew on nine essential documents and other relevant supporting information. The Network Rail Light Rail Knowledge team evaluated various options for implementing suitable light rail technology and operational solutions, working without the constraints of current national rail design and operating standards, except where interfacing with the existing rail network.
- 4.7 In alignment with previous representations made to the Combined Authority, they engaged Network Rail to conduct an Options Assessment Report. This report evaluated all available on-rail modal options, focusing on the potential introduction of a shuttle passenger service between March and Wisbech. This initiative aimed to enhance transport connectivity and improve access to local commuting markets, supporting job opportunities and fostering economic regeneration in the region. The primary objective was to achieve an appraisal of the four potential rail options that would facilitate a passenger service centred on a shuttle service.

4.8 A key output of the Network Rail study was the Overview of Modal Options. Comparison Cost Advice & Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) is summarised in the table below

Modal Option	Key Considerations	Cost Advice Range AFC (Based on 1Q 2024)	BCR (Core Results)	Unassured cost estimates sensitivity test	BCR (using unassured costs)
Option 1 - Provision of Heavy Rail System	Delivers a service between March and Wisbech. Provides opportunity for future connection to the main line, should capacity become available. There are significant risks with the highways interfaces such as at the A47 crossing that require mitigation by complex, high-cost infrastructure.	£189-230m	0.10	189-230m	0.10
Option 2 – Provision of Tram/Train (Hybrid Heavy Rail/Light Rail) System	Delivers a service between March and Wisbech. Provides opportunity for future connection to the main line, should capacity become available. Plus, the potential for an on-street section to Wisbech's Horsefair bus station. The cost-effective management of the rail / highway interfaces is enabled by the application of light rail operating principles which minimises infrastructure requirements.	£147-179m	0.18	£122-148m	0.22
Option 3 – Provision of Light Rail System	Delivers a service between March and Wisbech only. Plus, the potential for an on-street section to Wisbech's Horsefair bus station. The cost-effective management of the rail / highway interfaces is enabled by the application of light rail operating principles which minimises infrastructure requirements.	£149-182m	0.19	£108-132m	0.23
Option 4 – Provision of Very Light Rail System	Delivers a service between March and Wisbech only. Utilising the lowest cost infrastructure and rolling stock solution of all the options. The cost-effective management of the rail / highway interfaces is enabled by the application of light rail operating principles which minimises infrastructure requirements. The comparative low start-up and operating costs of this option may be an opportunity to establish demand in the shortest time scale.	£142-173m	0.22	£105-129m	0.27

4.9 In light of the BCR analysis for the proposed scheme, it is evident that the project has a very low BCR of between 0.10 and 0.27, dependant on the preferred option. This figure falls well below the threshold typically required to justify investment in transport infrastructure, where schemes with a BCR of 1.5 or higher are generally considered more viable. To put this into context, other rail projects, such as the Northern Powerhouse Rail scheme has a BCR of around 1.3, reflecting a much stronger economic case for funding. Similarly, the Thameslink Programme, which had a BCR of approximately 2.0, demonstrates the level of economic return expected for rail infrastructure projects of this scale.

4.10 Given this significant disparity, it was clear that the then current proposal was unlikely to be supported through standard funding channels. There was a need to be realistic about the position and reconsider the approach, whether by exploring alternative funding sources, revisiting the scope of the scheme, or redirecting efforts towards projects with stronger economic justifications. Any further investment in the scheme without a clear path to improving its BCR would be challenging to defend in the face of competing priorities for rail infrastructure funding.

4.11 Ahead of the November 2024 CPCA TIC meeting, officers from the Combined Authority and Network Rail presented the key findings to members of FDC on 1st October 2024. This engagement ensured that locally elected members had the opportunity to review the findings and provide considered feedback. Below is a summary of the key points raised by FDC members:

- Preference for Train-Tram and Conventional Rail Solutions: The majority of members expressed a preference for train-tram and train options, with several noting that while the BCR is an important consideration, it should not be viewed as the sole determining factor. Additionally, some members raised concerns over the financial inefficiency of the train option, advocating for the train-tram alternative to be prioritised.
- Service Extension Proposals: Members suggested that the service should be extended to Ely and Cambridge, with strong opposition to a shuttle service as a viable option. There was also some discussion around the potential for further extending the service to King's Lynn.
- Station Location Considerations: It was recommended that the station be situated in the centre of Wisbech, despite the additional costs this would incur over Option 1. There was consensus that a station located at Horsefair would offer greater advantages than one within Wisbech's existing train station footprint.
- Funding and Strategic Commitment: Funding for the project has been identified within the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), and members emphasised the need to maintain this allocation to support continued development of the Wisbech to March scheme.
- Support for EACE Initiative: The Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE) received unanimous support from members, who acknowledged its significance in contributing to the wider rail network and driving improvements across the region.
- Consideration of Housing Growth and Economic Benefits: The Chief Executive highlighted that the District Council may wish to reassess housing growth figures to enhance the project's economic feasibility, possibly leveraging land value capture. Furthermore, the committee was urged to consider the broader economic benefits, particularly if commercial and industrial land in Wisbech could be unlocked through enhanced east-west connectivity.

5 Fenland Transport Economic Assessment including Wisbech to March Rail

- 5.1 In November 2024, CPCA Transport and Infrastructure Committee, considered the above-mentioned Network Rail Strategic Option Appraisal Report. This included the feedback of FDC Members from the 1 October 2024 meeting. The CPCA Committee noted the report and confirmed the next steps based on the meeting discussion. This discussion was as follows:
- A. There was a collective disappointment that the November 2024 report did not offer a definitive "yes" to proceed. However, Members acknowledged that the report's scope should be considered more broadly, with a willingness to explore additional significant connections beyond the immediate recommendations such as a potential extension to Chatteris.
 - B. It was highlighted that ongoing discussions with Anglian Water and other stakeholders, including connectivity benefits, were essential for ensuring the integration of transport infrastructure with future developments

- C. Several members stressed that the proposed rail link should not merely be viewed as a shuttle service between two towns. Instead, it should be seen as a critical part of a connected transportation network.
 - D. The committee supported keeping options for a heavy rail solution and a tram-train (hybrid heavy/light rail) transport system, open for further evaluation. It also supported exploring interim measures, such as additional bus services, to improve current connectivity, particularly in the short term, whilst longer-term solutions were being discussed
- 5.2 Further information about this study including a copy of the report can be found on the CPCA website as follows: [Agenda for Transport Committee on Monday, 4th November, 2024, 10.00 am](#)
- 5.3 In November 2025, CPCA approved its Local Growth Plan. This includes a commitment to new transport infrastructure to help deliver new homes and jobs. A series of opportunity zones have been established including South Wisbech, Peterborough Science and Technology Park at Whittlesey, advanced manufacturing at Chatteris and Fens Reservoir visitor experience. This zone has the title Fenland Growth Triangle. A copy of the Local Growth Plan can be found from the link here: [C220817 CPCA Prospectus](#)
- 5.4 In February 2026 CPCA are in the process of finalising the approval of £500,000 funding to FDC to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment. The approval will be in accordance with the previous study work and the information from the CPCA Transport and Infrastructure Committee from November 2024 and the Local Growth Plan (2025).
- 5.5 A scoping paper setting out further details of what is proposed for this project can be found in appendix 1 of this paper.

6 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 FDC has an integrated transport strategy as set out in the current Adopted Local Plan (2014). The Council has worked in partnership with the CPCA, the County Council and others to progress study work and complete schemes such as Fenland Stations and Whittlesey Relief Road to support its transport strategy. The Council provided its comments to CPCA in October 2024 to guide the decision making of its Transport Committee in November 2024 and this Economic Assessment project provides an opportunity for FDC to further influence and shape this project moving forward. CPCA has awarded FDC £500,000 to complete this Fenland Transport Economic Assessment in line with the above. It is therefore considered that this approach and the funding should be approved by Cabinet along with related governance processes.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 In November 2025 the Wisbech Town Board published its public consultation findings about the regeneration of Wisbech. Transport and connectivity were considered essential for the regeneration of the town including the restoration of the Wisbech railway link that is considered critical for the town. The results

of this public consultation can be found from the following link: [Wisbech Online Regeneration Plan Public Consultation Survey Results 2025](#)

8 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 Alternative options have not been considered; this project is part of long-standing ongoing work to deliver a railway scheme for Wisbech and to address the transport infrastructure deficit across all modes within Fenland. FDC has a commitment in its Fenland Rail Development Strategy 2011 – 2031 approved by Cabinet in April 2012. Equally, Cambridgeshire County Council as the Local Highway Authority and CPCA as the Local Transport Authority have programmes to develop transport proposals across all modes of transport. A new Transport Strategy for Fenland District was developed by CCC in February and March 2023 and has since been adopted into the Local Transport Plan and covers all modes of transport. Fenland District Council is also working with CPCA and other partner organisations to deliver a multi modal approach to address transport issues in Fenland. This Fenland Transport Economic Appraisal Project therefore already has in place a sound policy basis.

9 IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Legal Implications

- 9.2 A legal grant funding agreement will be put in place between CPCA and FDC for the £500,000 funding. FDC will be required to regularly report delivery and performance that will be monitored by the Project Board and CPCA.
- 9.3 A procurement exercise will take place to appoint a contractor to complete the Fenland Transport Economic project. This process will be in accordance with FDC procurement regulations. The work and progress of the contractor will be directed and monitored by FDC and the Fenland Transport Economic Study Project Board.

9.4 Financial Implications

- 9.5 As stated above, subject to final confirmation £500,000 third party funding has been awarded to FDC by the CPCA to complete the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment project. This funding is expected to deliver the study work and related FDC staff costs. The funding will be managed through FDC financial management processes along with CPCA and Project Board approval.

9.6 Equality Implications

- 9.7 This project is one component of the transport strategy for Fenland which has a multi modal approach. This project has a strong policy basis linked to the Fenland Local Plan (2014), CCC Fenland Transport Strategy (2023), Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (2023) and Local Growth Plan (2025). This

policy basis includes proposals for transport projects to assist all members of the community. It is being taken forward and considered as part of a wide range of policies and strategies.

APPENDIX 1 – Fenland Transport Economic Assessment including March to Wisbech Rail Scoping Paper

Wisbech to March Rail (Fenland) Economic Assessment - Scoping Document V5 December 2025

1. Purpose

This project aims to identify what is required to help facilitate the delivery of the Wisbech to March railway scheme. By developing and testing a range of scenarios around the economic viability of the Wisbech to March railway scheme, it is hoped to engage decision makers in conversation, about delivering the growth to finance this scheme and other major transport infrastructure in Fenland. Options for testing will include the Wisbech railway proposal as the core transport infrastructure needed, whilst setting this in the context of wider transport infrastructure as a network, major development and the growth needs of the district. Other specific scheme includes A47 dualling, Whittlesey Relief Road and the Fens Reservoir. A range of economic proposals will be developed for discussion with decision makers.

2. Background

Previous Wisbech to March Railway Study Work

Several studies and technical assessments have been completed over recent years for the Wisbech to March Railway Project. Initial studies taken forward by Cambridgeshire County Council were followed by more recent projects through Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA). The Combined Authority commissioned Mott MacDonald to explore options for establishing a transport link between Wisbech and March. This resulted in the production of numerous technical documents designed to inform the development of the proposed transport link. In 2020, key reports were updated and reissued to reflect the latest findings and insights.

From 2021 to 2022, Network Rail's Design Delivery Team conducted a comprehensive feasibility review of the proposals developed by Mott MacDonald on behalf of the Combined Authority. This review drew on nine essential documents and other relevant supporting information. The Network Rail Light Rail Knowledge Team evaluated various options for implementing suitable light rail technology and operational solutions, working without the constraints of current national rail design and operating standards, except where interfacing with the existing rail network.

A Network Rail Options Assessment was completed from 2023 to 2024. The outcome of which was reported to the Combined Authority Transport Committee in November 2024 (please see the link below). This study tested a range of options for all railway models focusing on a shuttle service between Wisbech and March. A second phase of the assessment focused on cost planning and economic analysis for each option. An overview of the options with the costs and the Benefit to Cost Ratios (BCRs) were provided and made available to Combined Authority Transport Committee. This showed that all options had a very low BCR of between 0.10 and

0.27. These figures fall well below the threshold typically required to justify investment in transport infrastructure, where schemes with a BCR of 1.5 or higher are generally considered more viable.

[Agenda for Transport Committee on Monday, 4th November 2024, 10.00 am](#)

Feedback from Combined Authority Transport Committee November 2024

The Members of the Committee were disappointed with the Network Rail Options Assessment in that it did not give a yes response to proceed to the next stage.

Members advised that several key elements should be considered for future work as follows:

- Future scope should be considered more broadly, with a willingness to explore additional significant connections beyond the immediate recommendations such as a potential extension to Chatteris.
- Ongoing discussions with Anglian Water (The Fens Reservoir) and other stakeholders, including connectivity benefits, are essential for ensuring the integration of transport infrastructure with future developments.
- The proposed rail link should not merely be viewed as a shuttle service between two towns. Instead, it should be seen as a critical part of a connected and integrated transportation network.

3. Relationship to wider growth plans, strategies and transport schemes

Major transport infrastructure should not be considered in isolation but instead as part of a wider transport network to enable journeys to key destinations and other places. Transport is also an enabler and its potential for facilitating growth and economic opportunities needs to be realised. This project will therefore also consider the Wisbech to March railway project against the following:

Growth Plans and Strategies

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Growth Plan
- Fenland Local Plan

Nationally significant and Major Infrastructure Delivery

- Anglia Water Fens Reservoir project at Chatteris
- The Great Grid Upgrade – Grimsby to Walpole and Eastern Green Links 3 & 4
- Whittlesey Science and Technology Park

Major Transport Infrastructure

- Possible railway line/transport proposals linking Wisbech/March rail to Chatteris. A possible extension to St Ives linking to the guided busway.
- A47 Dualling
- Wisbech Access Strategy
- March Area Transport Strategy

- Whittlesey Relief Road
- Fenland Stations Regeneration

Local Growth Plan and Fenland Growth Triangle

At the CPCA Extraordinary Board meeting held on 22 October 2025, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Growth Plan was adopted. Please see the link below. The Local Growth Plan sets out opportunity zones for growth. Through a cluster of identified opportunities in Wisbech, Whittlesey and Chatteris, there is an ambition to deliver a Fenland Growth Triangle approach. Key infrastructure needed to deliver these opportunities relate to the transport projects set out below.

[C220817 CPCA Prospectus](#)

The Strategic Place Partnership between CPCA and Homes England exists to drive growth and support place making. With the adoption of the Local Growth Plan, the partnership wanted to support the Fenland Opportunity Zone. Their focus being the delivery of key infrastructure interventions which will contribute to unlocking housing and economic growth.

Between November 2025 and March 2026, a study was therefore taken forward to explore how key infrastructure schemes within Fenland District, could generate more economic value within business case development, and ultimately achieve value for money funding propositions for these schemes.

The project developed further understanding of the issues and approached to address the specific barriers preventing schemes being delivered, there was a specific focus on Wisbech Rail Link, Wisbech Access Strategy, March Area Transport Study and Whittlesey Relief Road. This work included evaluating how alternative funding sources and broader definitions of value (e.g., social, environmental, and placemaking benefits) could be used to raise the BCR or justify alternative and innovative delivery models. Social and environmental benefits were also be considered alongside economic matters.

The deliverables from this project were:

- A comprehensive and refined Economic Case, incorporating robust scenario testing and sensitivity analysis to evaluate how coordinated and phased delivery of linked interventions, both road and rail, can enhance benefit-cost ratios (BCRs) by optimizing sequencing, integration, and cumulative impacts.
- A Funding Strategy, outlining feasible and innovative options including Homes England, DfT, and private capital where possible.
- A prioritized Delivery Strategy, setting out short- and long-term pathways for implementing Wisbech Rail, Wisbech Access, MATS, and Whittlesey schemes, accounting for planning, design, funding, and delivery risks.
- Clear mapping of dependencies, identifying where housing growth or other regeneration activities can support transport scheme progression.
- An Engagement Plan, tailored to developers, national agencies, and local communities to build consensus and momentum.

This project will need to consider the outputs and recommendations from the Fenland Growth Triangle study and build on this work to develop a more comprehensive approach. This is particularly the case for the larger scale transport interventions identified for this work.

A link to the study can be found here:

[Add link when the study is available](#)

Fenland Local Plan

In December 2025, Fenland District Council Cabinet decided to withdraw the emerging Fenland Local Plan 2021 – 2040. This decision related to uncertainty created by ongoing national planning reforms, Covid 19, updated flood-risk data, resourcing and procurement challenges, and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Council wanted to rethink its approach to ensure Fenland continues to have a strong voice after LGR.

The Council approved the delivery of a new Local Plan under the new plan making system introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. Much of the work completed for the previous Local Plan can be updated and carried forward into this new process.

The new Plan will provide a more streamlined, responsive, and forward-looking framework that reflects local priorities and clearly articulates the district's ambitions. It will place people and place at its core—ensuring future development supports quality homes, good jobs, town centres, services, and resilient communities. It will also have a facilitative and inward investment focus which is increasingly important given the sluggish national economic context.

The new style Local Plan will consider the plan period 2025-2050, proactively addressing current and emerging place issues including the proposed Anglian Water Fens Reservoir, overconcentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation and the need to bring forward more supporting infrastructure like health, community and education centres, addressing those issues considered important to Members.

Below is a link to the Cabinet Report about the new Local Plan:

[Agenda for Cabinet on Monday, 15th December, 2025, 2.00 pm - Fenland District Council](#)

Tourism

In November 2024, Rail Delivery Group with WPI Economics published research around the crucial role of railways in unlocking economic growth including the tourism sector. The value of the railways to the UK Economy, Environment and Society exceeds £26billion in benefits delivered each year. Customers spend almost £100billion a year whilst travelling by train. The tourism economic benefits of reintroducing the Wisbech to March Railway Line and other major transport infrastructure need to be more fully understood. Projects such as Wisbech to March Railway and the introduction of the Fens Reservoir have potential to be game

changers for the Fenland visitor economy. These wider economic benefits need to be better understood in the Fenland and wider area context.

Whilst all the above-mentioned projects are important for the economic growth and vitality of Fenland, some of the schemes are more significant priorities due to the far-reaching potential of their enabling role for the Fenland area. They reflect the comments from the CPCA Committee held in November 2024, referred to above. There projects are as follows:

A47 Dualling

The A47 provides east – west connectivity and is strategically important for Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, through its role providing access to and from the East Coast ports along wider connectivity to the rest of the UK from the East of England. Large numbers of communities and businesses are supported through this road, with limited or no alternative strategic routes. Many years of under investment in A47 along with increasing levels of congestion damage its potential and the growth of the economic in the north of the region. FDC and CPCA support the dualling of the A47.

Both organisations are members of the A47 Alliance. The A47 Alliance is a partnership of local authorities, politicians, business leaders and others who share the aim of achieving the full dualling of A47 from Peterborough to Lowestoft, to unlock the full potential for growth. In October 2025, the CPCA Mayor, Paul Bristow was elected as the Chairman of A47 Alliance. During this meeting, Mayor Bristow stated his commitment to the full dualling of A47. You can read more about the Alliance from its website.

[A47 Alliance - The Campaign to Dual the A47](#)

In July 2019, CPCA completed an A47 Strategic Outline Case Dualling Study. This confirmed the need for strategic invention on the road. Based on several route options, economic assessment work showed that some could offer value for money. Since 2019 the scheme has not been taken forward by National Highway through its Roads Investment Strategy leaving the project stagnant, save for some assessment work on A47/Elm High Road at Wisbech which is ongoing. A copy of the study can be found below

[A47 SOBC](#)

Whittlesey Relief Road

The A605 is a strategic route from Thrapston in Northamptonshire (close to A14) through to Guyhirn in Cambridgeshire. It offers alternative travel options west to east from A47. The route is located directly through the town of Whittlesey, causing congestion, severance, damage to the historic fabric of the town and is limiting the growth potential of the area.

In May 2025, FDC published the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Case. The report demonstrates the need for intervention to address traffic and transport issues within the town. Initial assessment work demonstrated significant cost of any proposed scheme with recommendations of further work to address the gaps between the benefits costed and the scale of the scheme. The recommendations need to:

- Assess the scale of the scheme to understand if the cost could be reduced or the scheme could be shorter
- Undertake a wider assessment of the benefits to Whittlesey and the surrounding area including use of the new Cambridgeshire and Peterborough model
- Further appraise non-monetised benefits
- Consider the potential to unlock benefits through development

A copy of the SOC report can be found from the link below.

[Whittlesey Relief Road feasibility study published as Council approves next steps for further work - Fenland District Council](#)

Fens Reservoir, Chatteris

Anglian Water and Cambridge Water are proposing a new reservoir in the Fens, just outside Chatteris to meet growing demands on water supply in the East of England. Along with addressing water needs the completed scheme will offer wider potential for business and tourism, generating an improved visitor economy into Fenland. Increases in employment are also expected from around 2029/30 when the scheme is expected to commence construction.

This project is a national significant infrastructure project and is expected to be open in 2036. Further details are available on Anglian Water, Fens Reservoir website from the following link: <https://fensreservoir.co.uk/>

CPCA and FDC are providing significant support and local technical input to this project to ensure that opportunities are maximised, and the local potential is achieved.

4. Proposal and Methodology

This project aims to identify what is required to assist decision makers in finding a way forward to successfully deliver the Wisbech to March railway line, and other major transport infrastructure in Fenland. This infrastructure is essential for growth and to maximise the opportunities within Fenland District.

The first phase will understand and research the existing context. It will set out key issues that need to be addressed to deliver major transport infrastructure such as Wisbech to March railway. Phase two will focus on the opportunities and a range of scenarios to show how this railway scheme and other key transport infrastructure may be delivered.

The aim is to complete a study that unlocks conversations aimed at identifying the level of growth that needs to be achieved in Fenland. This is in order that value for money can be addressed to deliver the Wisbech to March railway project and other major transport infrastructure projects in Fenland.

Phase 1 – Context and Benchmarking

This chapter will be seeking to understand and research the current dynamics and situation around why projects like Wisbech to March railway and other key transport

infrastructure, are so challenging to deliver benefits and Cost Benefit Ratios that enable scheme delivery.

This research aims to identify the key barriers and challenges, formally setting out what we might need to achieve the successful implementation of projects like Wisbech to March railway in the future. Social and environmental factors will also be considered alongside economic matters.

The current context within Fenland District will also be benchmarked against other rural areas elsewhere in England e.g. Cumbria. This is to understand if there are similar circumstances and issues with delivering major transport infrastructure including railway schemes. The tourism sector and economic potential that can also be generated through railway projects and schemes such as Fens Reservoir will also be taken into consideration. The benchmarking work aims to take account of key learning from the experiences of major railway and transport scheme delivery, along with tourism and visitor economic potential in these areas.

Councillor and Stakeholder engagement will be undertaken towards the end of phase 1 to seek wider views on the Fenland context and their opinions on the benchmarking results. The outcome of this engagement will form part of the final version of the phase 1 stage of this study.

This stage should have regard to the Fenland Economic Triangle Project in terms of its outputs and recommendations.

Phase 2 – Scenarios development and assessment testing

Phase two will be broken down into four sections:

- Identification of growth and development opportunities including tourism within the Fenland area.
- Consideration of Wisbech to March railway and other major transport schemes in Fenland that are needed to facilitate growth and new opportunities.
- Identification of scenarios.
- Scenario testing and results.

Identification of growth and development opportunities in Fenland

This stage of the study will focus on growth opportunities that the Wisbech to March railway project can help to enable. Due regard should be given to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Growth Plan, the Fenland Growth Triangle project and the new emerging Fenland Local Plan 20225 – 2050. The project will consider development in the wider Fenland area that is likely to be a key trip generator to and from Wisbech, also where new transport infrastructure is expected to be needed to facilitate development.

Wisbech to March railway and other Fenland major transport schemes

In addition to Wisbech to March Rail a list of transport schemes in Fenland, needed to facilitate growth will be identified. These schemes will then be assessed as follows:

- to understand why they are needed,

- their likely cost,
- other key circumstances for each proposal,
- how they help with facilitating travel to and from the proposed Wisbech railway line
- the level of growth they will help to facilitate
- their impact and contribution to the visitor economy and tourism

The above sections need to consider what investing in Fenland might look like in future? Consideration of why this is so important is another critical factor to take account of. What do FDC and the Combined Authority need to make happen to maximise growth and deliver critical schemes such as Wisbech to March rail.

Identification of scenarios

Using the growth and transport proposals identified earlier in this stage of the project, a range of scenarios (between 3 and 5) will be identified. The status quo situation and a do-minimum approach will also be established to enable a comparison with the do something situation.

Councillor and stakeholder engagement will take place at this stage to agree and confirm the scenarios that will be tested.

Scenario Testing

Following the development of the testing approach, each option, including the status quo and do minimum will be assessed using the same methodology. The results and key information from this testing will be presented and shared with stakeholders. Engagement with Councillors will then take place to seek their views on the way forward. All the feedback will then be discussed with the Combined Authority.

5. Outputs

This project is expected to deliver the following:

- A background and context paper.
- A bench marking paper.
- A paper setting out, growth, development and tourism opportunities along with transport schemes needed to support the development including the Wisbech railway scheme.
- A scenario and scenario testing report.
- A results report.
- A final report including all the individual papers mentioned in the bullet points above e.g. Background and benchmarking work set out above.
- Slides and meeting information for at least 15 project board meetings.
- Development of four stakeholder engagement sessions including the design of the event, note taking and report and any slides or other materials in preparation.
- Attendance and support to Councillor seminar meetings.
- Attendance and reporting at Project Board Meetings

6. Timetable and Actions

A high-level approach to this Economic Assessment setting out the key tasks and a timeline is below. This is expected to be an 18-month study.

<u>Timeline</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Who</u>
Jul - Oct 2025	Scoping and early project development	CPCA & FDC
Dec 2025 – Feb 2026	Expected CPCA Funding approval and final confirmation	CPCA & FDC
Feb 2026	FDC Cabinet	FDC
Feb/March 2026	Grant Funding Agreement signed	CPCA & FDC
Apr - June 2026	Procurement	FDC & CPCA
July – October 2026	Phase 1 study – context	Consultants and FDC to lead the delivery with assistance from CPCA
Oct 2026 – Sept 2027	Phase 2 study – scenario development and testing	Consultants & FDC to lead the delivery with assistance from CPCA
October 2026 – December 2027	CPCA Transport Committee & FDC Cabinet	FDC & CPCA

7. Key Stakeholders

The Combined Authority (CPCA) as the Local Transport Authority.

CCC as the Local Highway Authority for Cambridgeshire.

FDC as the Local Planning Authority.

Network Rail/GBR, railway infrastructure owner.

Greater Anglia, local railway station asset manager in the Fenland area.

National Highways, responsible for the A47.

PCC as the Local Highway Authority for Peterborough adjoining Whittlesey.

Stakeholder meetings and input are expected to be provided throughout the project. It is expected that there will be specific stakeholder workshops/engagement sessions at the start of the project, at the end of Phase 1, midway through Phase 2 and the end of the project.

8. Governance

A Project Board will be confirmed and established prior to the commencement of the project. This board will oversee the project and its deliverables including the project plan, communications and engagement, the technical content and all key decision making.

The core membership of the project board is expected to include:

FDC Representative on the Combined Authority Transport Committee
FDC Cabinet Member – Portfolio Holder for Transport
FDC Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance
FDC Cabinet Member – Portfolio holder for Planning
CCC Transport and highways representative

Key stakeholders as identified in section 7 above will also be invited to the Project Board for the whole project or specific stages as considered relevant.

The board would be expected to meet bi-monthly and a minimum of quarterly.

APPENDIX 2 – Fenland Transport Economic Assessment including March to Wisbech Rail Project Board Draft Terms of Reference

1. Background – What is the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Study?

Introduction and background

FDC and our partners have been working to address the transport challenges and transport infrastructure deficit in Fenland. The programme has delivered schemes such as improvements at Manea and March Railway Stations, an upgrade to the A47 Guyhirn roundabout and improved public realm and road layout in March Broad Street. There are several larger scale transport projects, desperately needed in Fenland which struggle to demonstrate significant benefits due to cost, ground conditions and the need for regeneration. This infrastructure is needed to support the delivery of new homes and jobs within Fenland that are a requirement as per of the Local Plan (2014). The transport challenges in Fenland need to be addressed to deliver the new homes and jobs. It is essential to unlocking the barriers to enable these transport schemes to be constructed.

Wisbech to March Railway Line

Wisbech to March Rail is one of the major transport projects struggling to progress beyond early business case stage due to scheme costs and poor value for money being demonstrated in accordance with the government five case business case model.

In November 2024, CPCA Transport and Infrastructure Committee reviewed the Network Rail Strategic Option Appraisal Report (please see the link to the study report below). This was noted to be disappointed due to its demonstration of the scheme being poor value for money. The CPCA Committee agreed that further evaluation was needed of heavy rail and light rail hybrid scheme options. Shorter term responses should be considered to improve connectivity between Wisbech, March and beyond. Connections from any scheme should continue to Chatteris and beyond. They should be part of a wider transport scheme approached linked to new homes and jobs. There should also be connections to major projects and developments such as the Anglian Water Fens Reservoir project.

[Appendix A - Strategic Option Appraisal Report.pdf](#)

In November 2025, CPCA approved its Local Growth Plan. This includes a commitment to new transport infrastructure to help deliver new homes and jobs. A series of opportunity zones have been established including South Wisbech, Peterborough Science and Technology Park at Whittlesey, advanced manufacturing at Chatteris and Fens Reservoir visitor experience. This zone has the title Fenland Growth Triangle.

[C220817 CPCA Prospectus](#)

Subject to confirmation CPCA will approve £500,000 funding to FDC to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment in accordance with the above.

2. Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Study Project Board

Objective:

The Project Board will provide oversight for the continued development and delivery of the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Study. It will provide a forum for key issues to be

considered and key decisions to be made. It is the vehicle by which the key strategic issues (including financial and legal) can be acknowledged, recorded, and monitored.

Responsibilities:

The remit of the Project Board relates to the design, delivery and implementation of the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment project. Responsibilities include but are not limited to the following:

- Approval of the project brief including its specific aims.
- The project programme from its inception to its conclusion
- Discuss and agree action regarding specific project constraints
- Review and approval of the procurement strategy
- To receive progress reports from the project team, review & confirm achievements at each major project milestone (or end of stage) and approve commencement of the next stage
- Provide direction and support to help resolve key project risks and issues
- To provide input and representation to the defined projects for their respective organisations
- To provide advice on local issues
- To provide their respective organisations' positions on all elements of the project
- To agree community engagement and public consultation strategy.
- Authorise project closure and send project closure notification

Membership:

The core membership of the project board will be as follows:

FDC Cabinet Member – Portfolio holder for Transport (Chairperson)

FDC Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance

FDC Cabinet Member – Portfolio holder for Planning

FDC representative on CPCA Transport and Infrastructure Committee

A vice-chairperson should be elected from the membership of the group at the first Project Board meeting. This vice-chairperson is expected to deputise for the Chairperson.

It should be noted that only members listed above, or their nominated substitutes will have voting powers. No other member or attendee at Project Board meetings will have voting rights.

It is envisaged that the project board may also make recommendations to Fenland District Council's Cabinet, which would in turn make recommendations to the CPCA Board, the ultimate decision-making body regarding funding.

Officer and Project Support Staff:

The Project Board will be supported by officers from Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (CPCA) Combined Authority. Additional officer support will be brought into meetings as required. E.g., communications officer or specialist consultant. The appointed consultants delivering the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Study will also attend all the Project Board meetings and help as required. It is also expected that other specialist staff may attend some meetings as necessary such as Network Rail and the lead local flood authority team related to known challenges that will need to be overcome to deliver any project in the future.

Meetings

The Project Board will meet or hold a meeting or conference call at least bi-monthly but a minimum of every 3 months and at other times as necessary and at key stages of the project.

Each party may substitute attendees on an occasional basis; however, substitutes should be briefed and empowered with the same authority as the usual attendee.

Communications

A Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Study Project Board Communications Strategy will also support the terms of reference document. This Strategy will set out protocols for communication in respect of the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Study. Members have a role to adhere to the communications strategy to enable effective implementation of the programme. An initial draft of the strategy will be tabled at the first meeting of the Project Board for approval.