



South Fylde Line Strategic Outline Business Case

SOBC Report

On behalf of **Fylde Council**



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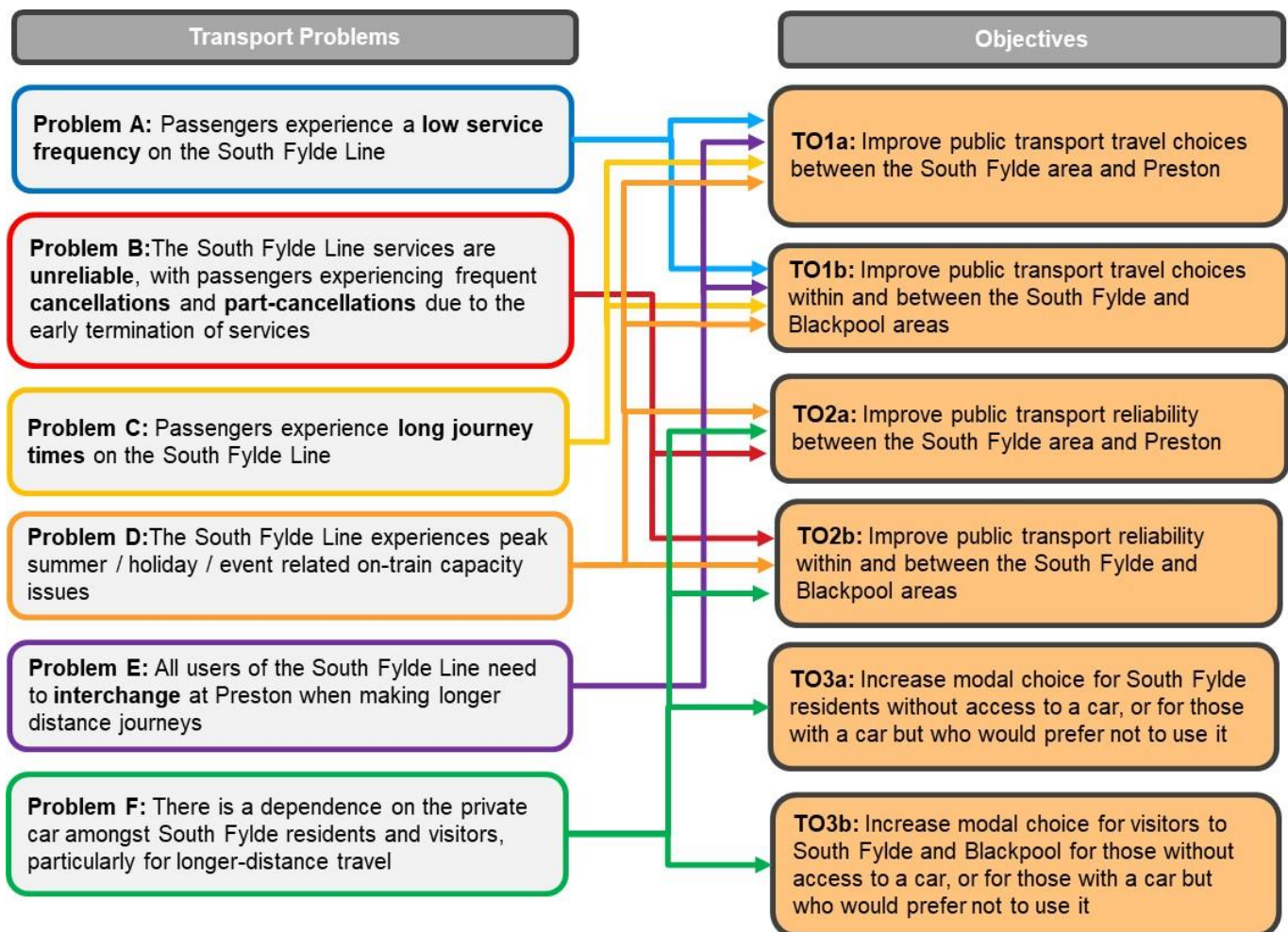
Executive Summary

Overview

Mark Menzies, MP for Fylde, and Scott Benton, MP for Blackpool South, were successful in obtaining funding from Round 2 of the UK Government’s *Restoring Your Railway Ideas Fund* to explore the case for the construction of a passing loop on the South Fylde Line, which runs from the junction with the Blackpool North Line at Kirkham & Wesham to Blackpool South. If realised, the loop would allow the doubling of services from one train per hour (tph) to 2tph, providing a half-hourly service frequency. Fylde Council was nominated as scheme promoter and subsequently commissioned Stantec UK Ltd and our partner AllanRail to develop a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) to objectively consider both the passing loop proposition and other options for improving public transport provision in, to and from the South Fylde area. Through the adoption of a bespoke appraisal framework, this SOBC summarises the rationale for investment in public transport in South Fylde and identifies a package of options to be progressed to Outline Business Case (OBC) or equivalent.

What are the transport problems and objectives?

The SOBC identified six **transport problems** in the South Fylde and neighbouring South Blackpool areas. This provided the basis for setting **Transport Objectives** to be used to test options to address these problems. The problems and Transport Objectives are summarised in the figure below:



Which options are being progressed to Outline Business Case?

Whilst an SOBC does not define a preferred option, this study has shaped a phased package of improvements to public transport in the South Blackpool and South Fylde areas which can be refined at OBC (the next step) or equivalent stage, as follows:

■ Phase 1

- Short-term measures to improve reliability and punctuality, including changing calls at **Moss Side** station to **request stops** and **upgrading the level crossings** in the Moss Side area. This will build on the recent replacement of Pacer trains with Sprinters and the new December 2022 timetable emerging from the Manchester Recovery Task Force, which will create a free-standing Preston to Blackpool South service which will improve the operational performance and capacity of the line.
- Constructing a **passing loop** on the South Fylde Line to facilitate a regular and reliable half-hourly service.
- Considering using the South Fylde Line as a **test bed to demonstrate the low-cost electrification of secondary lines**, which will also deliver journey time reductions, reliability improvements and the decarbonisation of the whole of the Fylde railway network.
- Supporting Blackpool Council's **BSIP submission**, and in particular the provision of a bus lane on the Promenade, which would support the main Fylde bus services.

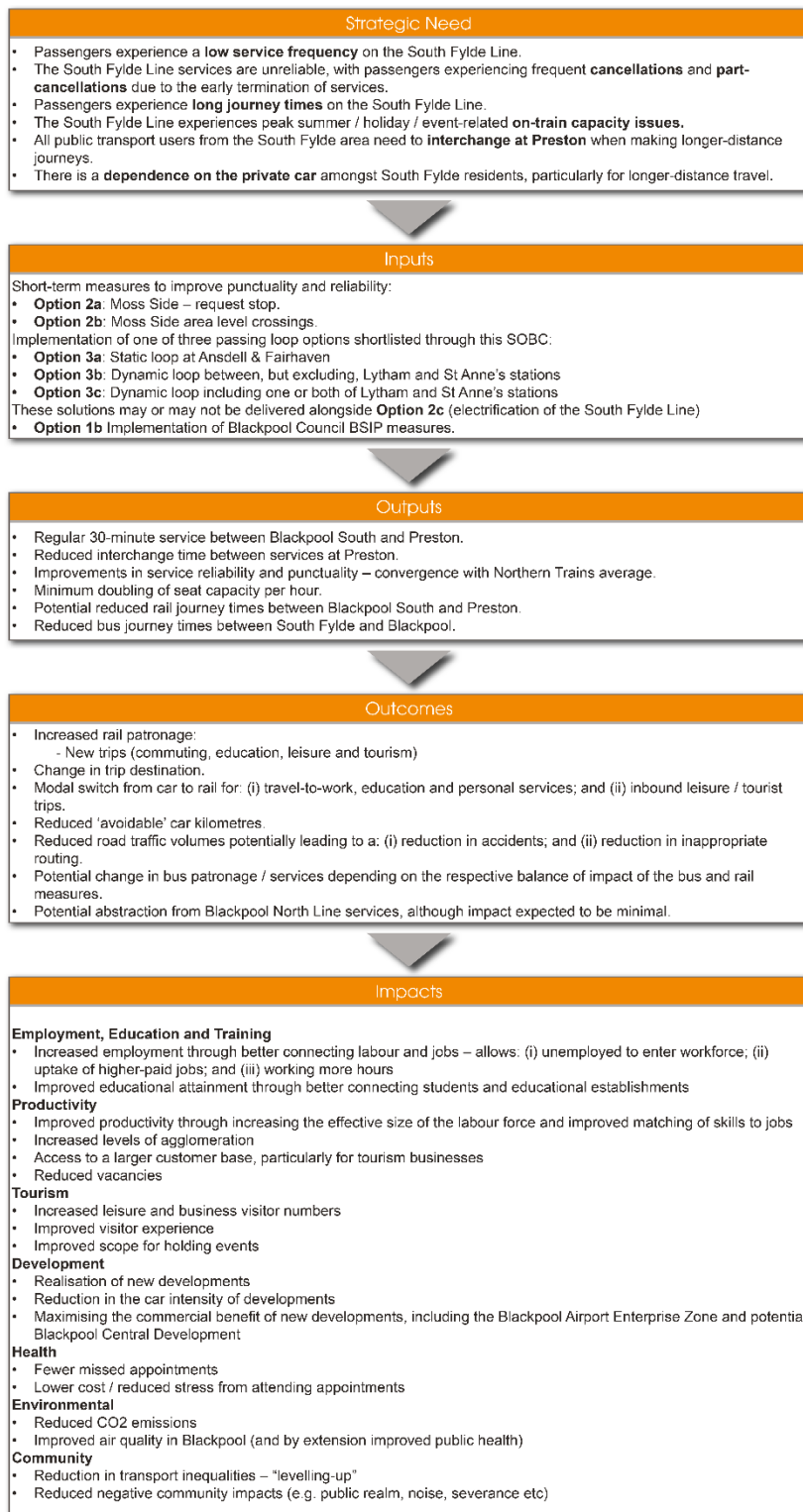


■ Phase 2

- In the event that the Phase 1 measures address the operational problems on the South Fylde Line, the **second phase would involve connecting the line to the Blackpool Tramway**.
- This connection could either be at Blackpool Pleasure Beach / Burlington Road West (the most likely option) or through extending the current South Fylde Line towards central Blackpool (there are various options in this respect). An interim stage may be to extend the tramway to one or both of these stations.
- The scope and scale of any future light rail connection should be subject to an appropriate OBC led by the local transport authorities and ideally progressed in conjunction with the Fleetwood – Poulton-le-Fylde work to provide a holistic Fylde Peninsula position on future rail connections.
- A future light rail connection could either take the form of extending the Blackpool Tramway to Lytham and running it alongside a half-hourly Northern Trains service or operating a TramTrain to Lytham in addition to the Northern Trains service, or completely supplanting the Northern Trains service with a longer-distance TramTrain service to Preston. This will in part depend on the Fleetwood solution.
- An intermediate step in progressing Phase 2 could be the commissioning of research to understand the potential market for light rail services in the South Fylde area, which would also inform the selection of a preferred option in Phase 1.

What are the benefits of improving public transport in the South Blackpool and South Fylde areas?

The logic map below sets out the potential **travel behaviour outcomes** and **societal impacts** which could emerge from the delivery of the Phase 1 proposals. These benefits would be further enhanced if Phase 2 works connecting the Blackpool Tramway to the South Fylde Line are ultimately delivered.



The logic map suggests that investment to deliver the **outputs** will generate a range of desirable travel behaviour **outcomes**, including increased rail patronage, mode switch from the private car to public transport and reduced impacts of road-based travel, including congestion, accidents and inappropriate routing. These outcomes will in turn generate positive **societal impacts**. The type of impacts would be the same across all option permutations, but their scale would of course be greater where a more significant investment is made. For example, the scale of impacts associated with a dynamic loop including one or both of Lytham and St Annes-on-the-Sea stations plus electrification would be much greater than a static loop at Ansdell & Fairhaven station only.

The logic map identifies the following anticipated **impacts** from the delivery of the outputs and subsequent outcomes:

- From an **employment** perspective, the resident survey and stakeholder engagement highlighted that the current South Fylde Line service is leading to people missing out on opportunities for employment. The proposed improvements would strengthen established commuting links between South Blackpool / South Fylde and Preston and beyond (and vice versa), increasing the number and range of jobs available to residents of all three areas. Indeed, from a study area perspective, an improved rail service to Preston would open-up wider opportunities across the north-west, in Manchester for example. There are three potential benefits of this – supporting: (i) **unemployed people to enter the workforce**; (ii) uptake of **higher-paid jobs**; and (iii) **people working more hours** – this also contributes to the ‘**levelling-up**’ agenda through strengthening connections between major settlements in the north and tackling **deprivation**.
- The resident survey also highlighted latent demand for travel to **education and training**. The provision of a regular half-hourly service on the South Fylde Line in particular would provide increased opportunities for daily access to Higher and Further Education in Preston and beyond – this could be particularly important in South Fylde which is demographically imbalanced and would benefit from the retention of younger people – particularly in terms of filling ‘student’ jobs – even if only for the duration of their studies. It would also reduce the cost of living for any student who chooses to remain at home rather than move into accommodation.
- There would also be a benefit in terms of **productivity**. Fylde and Preston have more jobs than population, whilst the opposite is true for Blackpool and Lancashire overall. High quality transport connections are essential in matching labour demand and supply and minimising unfilled vacancies – provision of a reliable half-hourly service on the South Fylde Line together with bus service improvements would support this. By working towards an improved balance between jobs and labour, the employment benefits set out above – i.e. (i) unemployed people entering the workforce; (ii) uptake of higher-paid jobs; (iii) and people working more hours – would translate into improved local, regional and national productivity and hence increased GDP.
- Whilst much of this SOBC is focused on ‘**levelling-up**’, it is essential that investment is also made in **strengthening successful markets** in the UK. Blackpool and Fylde attract over 21.5 million visitors per annum combined for a combination of leisure day-trip, holiday, business and event-based tourism. There is also a vibrant local leisure market in the Fylde Peninsula in terms of shopping, leisure etc. However, it is a predominantly car-based destination which can lead to problems around parking, traffic management, road safety and air quality. Evidence obtained through the stakeholder engagement and resident survey clearly identified that the low frequency and poor reliability of services on the South Fylde Line means that it is underperforming in terms of its contribution to the tourism and leisure market. A reliable half-hourly service on this line would assist in: (i) **increasing the number of visitors to Blackpool and Fylde**; (ii) promoting **increased rail mode share**; (iii) improving the **attractiveness of the destination**; and (iv) improving the scope for **attracting business tourism and holding events in the area**.
- There are significant **residential and commercial development** aspirations for South Blackpool and Fylde, not least the Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone site, which would be supported by an improved rail service, serving the adjacent Squires Gate station. In addition, a 2tph service on the South Fylde Line together with additional calls at Cottam Parkway would support the successful build-out of this development. At present, development in the south of the Fylde Peninsula is heavily car-orientated and large-scale development has typically required road infrastructure upgrades to be consentable. Whilst such road-based investment has been essential in promoting the economic development of the peninsula, given the current emissions reduction targets, public transport must feature more prominently in supporting development, providing effective links to major trip attractors such as Preston. A reliable half-hourly service on the South Fylde Line offers the opportunity to reduce the car-dependency of developments, with consequential impacts in terms of reduced emissions, improved road safety and reduced congestion.
- An improved South Fylde Line service would also provide local residents with increased confidence in taking the train to **health appointments**. It would reduce the risk of missed appointments currently being experienced, reduce ‘avoidable car kilometres’ to hospitals and reduce both the cost and stress of travelling to hospital by car, finding a parking space etc.
- From an **environmental** and **community** perspective, a reliable half-hourly service combined with improved bus services would help to address some of the negative transport impacts (known as ‘externalities’) imposed by the dominance of the private car in the area, including areas of poor-quality public realm, severance, noise, poor air quality, road safety risks, ‘rat running’ etc. From an **equalities** perspective, it is also important to note that, in heavily car dependent areas, the extent of social exclusion for those without access to a car / second car or those who do not wish to own a car can be higher. Moreover, some households feel compelled to own a car – i.e., ‘**forced car ownership**’ - because public transport services do not meet their needs. Improvements in the frequency and reliability of services on the South Fylde Line combined with improved bus services would help to reduce these inequalities.

The above narrative highlights the range of potentially **positive societal impacts that could stem from the provision of a reliable half-hourly service on the South Fylde Line combined with improved bus services**. It is also important to bear in mind that improvements to the current line in 'Phase 1' are effectively focusing on developing the market, growing rail market share in the Fylde Peninsula and more fully integrating rail into the wider transport mix in the area. Should this be achieved, longer-term and potentially more significant impacts could be delivered through the future connection of the South Fylde Line to the Blackpool Tramway, particularly when aligned with wider transport, commercial and public sector investment in the Fylde Peninsula, and Blackpool specifically.

What are the next steps?

The immediate next step in the process is to progress this SOBC to an **OBC or equivalent for Phase 1**. There are two key issues to be resolved in the OBC or equivalent:

- The **length and location of the passing loop**.
 - The working assumption in this SOBC is that it will be a dynamic loop encompassing Ansdell & Fairhaven station, the exact location and design of which would be finalised at OBC.
 - An important part of the OBC work would be clearly setting out the potential implications of the heavy rail solution for future interactions with the Blackpool Tramway and future-proofing the solution as far as practically possible.
- Whether **low-cost electrification** of the South Fylde Line should form part of the preferred option.

In parallel to these business case activities:

- The December 2022 timetable should change the calls at **Moss Side station to request stops**.
- The case for **upgrading the Moss Side area level crossings** should be pursued as a business-as-usual activity to improve performance, safety and journey times.

In parallel, the case for better integrating South Fylde Line services with the Blackpool Tramway should be considered as part of a separate OBC led by the local transport authorities, and ideally in conjunction with the proposed Fleetwood – Poulton-le-Fylde reopening business case, to ensure a holistic and / or future proofed solution in this respect.

