

The door is open for more talks, Government tells Hunstanton rail revival campaigners

The campaign to re-open the King's Lynn-Hunstanton railway has been given a major boost this week with an invitation from the government to submit further details to strengthen the case for funding.

Norfolk County Council, which supports the scheme short-listed in Transport Minister Grant Shapps' £500m pot for reversing the swingeing 'Beeching Cuts' of the 1960s, has been invited to a workshop with sponsors and promoters to assist the planning process.

A large proportion of the money in the latest round of £50,000 kick-start awards, announced on Friday November 27 has gone to 'oven ready' schemes such as individual station openings and increasing services on existing routes.

In the latest 15 awards, there also appears to be a clear emphasis on projects in the North of England and Midlands, where the Government have promised to focus their 'levelling up' agenda. No schemes have been successful in East Anglia or in the whole of the South East.

In a letter to West Norfolk MP James Wild, Transport Minister Chris Heaton-Harris says: "The case needs strengthening, but it is great that the proposal has potential." He has also offered talks and help from his officers to do this in the coming weeks.

Norfolk County Council's Strategic Transport Team Manager David Cumming, who formulated the bid to the Department of Transport said: "It is encouraging that government recognises the potential of the proposal. We look forward to participating in workshop sessions that it is arranging. These will help us to understand our next steps."

The government wants to know more about what specific benefits a 'new' railway will bring to King's Lynn and Hunstanton, communities along the line such as North and West Lynn, Dersingham and Heacham, and also nearby towns such as Fakenham, Swaffham and Wells.

It also asks for more data on overcrowding of the present road network, how many level crossings would be needed, and any risks to coastal flooding.

Talks are also needed with Network Rail and train operator Greater Anglia to assess what impact any extra trains would have on the present service from King's Lynn to Cambridge and London.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson accepted in a House of Commons speech in the summer that North West Norfolk has slumped into his 'left behind communities' category since the once highly profitable Hunstanton railway was closed in May 1969. British Rail was accused of deliberately cooking the figures to turn the line into a loss-maker.

Norfolk County Councilor Andrew Jamieson has welcomed the revival news as “something that will completely turn the local economy round with access to jobs, retaining our young people, increasing tourism, and getting to hospitals faster and easier.

He says: “Opening up the employment market in Cambridge, and maybe as far as London, will be one of the biggest game changers in our area in a generation”.

Other appealing benefits for the proposed scheme could include a new ‘park and ride’ station on the outskirts of Lynn to avoid using the over-stretched town centre station and car parks, and a possible station close to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

At busy tourist times, a railway will ease mounting congestion on the main A149 road to Hunstanton, and avoid the likely environmental impacts and cost of continually widening roads.