

MIDDLEWICH RAILWAY STEERING GROUP

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PLAN TO RE-OPEN THE SANDBACH TO NORTHWICH RAILWAY LINE FOR PASSENGERS WITH A NEW MIDDLEWICH STATION COMES A STEP NEARER

The Middlewich Railway Steering Group, a partnership of several local authorities, Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance, rail interest groups and other public organisations appointed The Railway Consultancy Ltd to carry out a study to assess the potential for upgrading the Sandbach to Northwich branch railway line for passenger services which would include the provision of a new station to serve the Cheshire market town of Middlewich.

The Consultants have now submitted their detailed report which shows that re-opening the line to passengers is potentially viable.

Welcoming the report, Steering Group Chairman Vernon Perkins said “We asked the Consultants to investigate different options and the option which provides for a service from Northwich to Crewe via Middlewich far exceeded our expectations, providing a benefit/cost ratio which is **substantially higher than the industry threshold** required to take the project further.”

Nigel Harris from The Railway Consultancy said “We were delighted last year to have won the tender to examine options for improving public transport in this part of Cheshire. We are now glad to have been able to develop a proposal with the client group which our analysis shows is a strong candidate for progressing further.”

David Horstead, Director of Strategy & Intelligence at Cheshire & Warrington Economic Alliance said: “We were delighted to be involved with the study into re-opening the Sandbach to Northwich railway line for passenger use, with a station at Middlewich. There is an enormous volume of commuting by car in this part of Cheshire and poor public transport connections to Manchester and Chester. As the impact of climate change and increased fuel costs grow over the next 10-20 years, it’s vitally important that we improve transport options for our residents. Reopening this line would be a great contribution”

Councillor David Brickhill, Cheshire East Council Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, said: “Middlewich is the largest town in Cheshire without a railway station. We are very pleased with the outcomes of this report, one of several necessary stages in making this plan become a reality.

“The aim of this project is to restore much-needed rail links between Northwich, Middlewich, Sandbach and Crewe. The next step is to liaise with Network Rail and Northern Trains to determine figures such as costs, passenger benefits and timescales.”

Cheshire West and Chester Council's Environment Portfolio Holder Councillor Neil Ritchie said "a new direct rail service between Northwich and Crewe via Middlewich would be of great benefit to our residents. We are therefore very pleased with the study's initial positive findings. This now paves the way for taking the scheme to the next stage, including getting the all important backing for the scheme from the rail industry"