External Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Public Transport Working Group

Meeting held on Wednesday, 29th January, 2003 at 3.00 pm at the Midge Hall Public House, Leyland

Present:-

County Councillors

C Waite (Chairman)
Mrs W B Dwyer
R H Shepherd
D Yates
K A Young

Officers

Mr C Anslow	-	Environment Directorate
Ms C Young	-	Environment Directorate
Ms S Halstead	-	Office of the Chief Executive
Mrs L M Wilson	-	Office of the Chief Executive

County Councillor Mrs A Brown attended the meeting under the provisions of Standing Order No. 39.

Disclosure of Personal/Prejudicial Interests

There were no disclosures of personal or prejudicial interests.

Note of the Previous Meeting

The Note of the Meeting held on the 18th December, 2002 was noted.

Presentation on the possible reinstatement of Midge Hall Station, Leyland

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, there had been opportunity to tour the former Midge Hall Station site. Three members of the Ormskirk, Preston and Southport Travellers' Association (OPSTA) had been invited to join the tour.

Members of OPSTA made a presentation stating the case for the reinstatement of the station.

Mr Blinkhorn, Chairman of OPSTA, commenced by reading out a statement of facts and figures in favour of reopening the station.

In conclusion Mr Blinkhorn welcomed the inclusion of the opening of the station in the Structure Plan 2001-2016, but felt that the implementation

needed to be brought forward to assist the Community Rail Partnership in furtherance of its aims and suggested that the re-opening of Midge Hall be included in the Local Transport Plan for 2006 to 2011.

OPSTA saw the re-opening of Midge Hall Station as satisfying a clear need of the communities around it, and as part of ensuring the future of the Preston to Ormskirk service in its role as part of an important rail route between Preston and Liverpool.

At this point their Chairman circulated an Information Pack containing, inter alia,

i) information about OPSTA
ii) research from the South Ribble Electoral Roll
iii) support for Midge Hall Station from OPSTA's study and from petitions
iv) the case for Midge Hall 1997 and 1998 Combined Report
v) correspondence of interest
vi) public and institutional support for Midge Hall Station
vii) OPSTA's summary of the Midge Hall Transport Needs Assessment
viii) OPSTA's analysis of the Midge Hall Transport Needs Assessment
ix) miscellaneous OPSTA Newsletter items on Midge Hall
x) the case for the re-opening of Midge Hall Station.

Mr Clarkson, resident of Midge Hall village and member of OPSTA also spoke in favour of the Station's reopening by reading out a statement of support.

Mr Anslow of the Environment Directorate then presented an officer view.

Mr Anslow mentioned that the case for the station reopening had been studied in detail in 1991 as part of a comprehensive assessment undertaken by Leeds University Institute for Transport studies of 31 potential sites. Mr Anslow accepted that that was now twelve years old but it had not proved the case for value for money by comparing the forecast revenue to a rough estimate of the cost of construction.

The Station had ranked 21 out of 31. The study had forecast that 7,500 journeys per annum would be generated per year if the Station were to re-open with £15,000 of revenue at an average fare of £2 per journey.

The top ranking station (Euxton Balshaw Lane) had re-opened with 57,000 journeys per year forecast; this had in reality reduced to 40,000 journeys per year.

Mr Anslow also spoke of the Transport Needs Assessment 2002 which had been designed to assess unmet transport needs. The general conclusion had been that there were few unmet needs that a railway station would provide for in Midge Hall but that some improvement to bus provision could be beneficial. This study had not been designed to calculate demand for a station in itself but it was felt that usage of the Station was likely to be low.

The likely indicative cost of construction was felt to be in the order of £500,000 with car parking being approximately £1,500 per space in addition. Added to this there would be annual maintenance costs in the order of £15,000 per annum and finance charges of approximately £7,000 per £100,000 over twenty years.

Given these costs, the project was not considered to be value for money at the present time. Given the limitations on financial and staff resources, there were many other rail projects which offered better value and were felt to be of higher priority.

Mr Anslow outlined many current rail projects which the County Council were funding.

Mr Anslow spoke of the Community Rail Partnership which had been set up by the County Council to look for realistic ways of improving the rail product and access to rail in West Lancashire. Caroline Young, present at the meeting was the Partnership Officer, funded by the Countryside Agency and the County Council. Partnership projects ongoing were outlined.

Mr Anslow spoke of a railway station which had been opened at Beauly in the Highlands of Scotland; this had a short platform and had been built at much reduced costs but had not yet received full approval from the Health and Safety Executive and was operating under a temporary dispensation.

This station would be monitored as would the possible redevelopment of the former Leyland Test site. These factors could affect the value for money angle and could afford the Station a higher priority in the County Council's rail schemes.

County Councillor Mrs Anne Brown, as local Councillor, spoke with the consent of the Working Group. It had been accepted that the Study from 1991 was dated; Mrs Brown outlined the growth and the change in socio-economic terms since that time in Midge Hall and the surrounding area.

Mrs Brown also felt that the Transport Needs Assessment 2002 was flawed. It stated that it was half a mile from Midge Hall to the A59; in actual fact it was two miles. Mrs Brown believed that Midge Hall Station would serve a larger area.

Mrs Brown claimed that New Longton had not been included in the assessment.

It was felt that the wrong questions had been asked of the wrong people.

Mrs Brown spoke of bus travel and mentioned that the Blue buses did not travel as far as Midge Hall and that the other bus service was very irregular. She had no knowledge of a new bus service.

The Chairman then opened the meeting up to members of the public.

Mr Barker, OPSTA member spoke of the many flaws in the Needs Assessment questionnaire.

Mr Asmay, resident of Moss Side spoke of there being no public transport from the area in the evenings and the resultant inability to partake of cultural and educational opportunities.

Mr Cuerden, a resident of Midge Hall for some 27 years spoke of all newcomers except for one, wishing to use the Midge Hall Station if possible.

The need for the Station reopening to cost £500,000 in capital was questioned.

OPSTA felt that 33,000 single journeys could be made from the Station in a year as opposed to the 1991 study of 7,500. Chris Anslow accepted that 7,500 would be out of date but could not agree that there might be 33,000, pointing out that many people would say yes if questioned but would not actually use it in practice. He felt that the figure might be 10,000.

County Councillors asked questions of both sides, and spoke, amongst other things, of the need to explore local services with the bus operators and of the need to await possible housing development in the area of the former Test Site.

Resolved:- 1) That OPSTA members be thanked for their presentations and documentation and be asked to forward any relevant developments in the future.

2) That Mr Anslow be thanked for his presentation.

3) That discussions take place with local bus operators to explore improved bus services in the Midge Hall and Moss Side area.

4) That discussions take place with South Ribble Borough Council in relation to the possible new housing on the former Test Site.

5) That recommendations be made to the External Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the Midge Hall Station once all these discussions referred to above have taken place.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and participation and feedback forms on this first meeting of its kind were given out.

Alan Gregory
Head of Democratic Services

County Hall
PRESTON