

# Brighton & Hove City Council

**TECC Committee**

**Agenda Item 35**

**Subject: Volk's Railway Accessible Carriage**

**Date of meeting: 3rd November 2022**

**Report of: Executive Director Economy, Environment and Culture**

**Contact Officer Name: Toni Manuel**  
**Email: Toni.Manuel@brighton-hove.gov.uk**

**Ward(s) affected: All**

**For general release**

## **1 Purpose of the report and policy context**

- 1.1 The Volk's Railway is the oldest operating electric railway in the world. The railway attracted around 75,000 visitors per year (pre pandemic) and operates between April and September. Four full-time staff are employed by the Council and during the summer an additional seven and a half full time seasonal jobs are created.
- 1.2 The TECC Committee agreed in June 2021 to progress the project to provide an accessible rail carriage for the Volk's Electric Railway, including a costed design and the identification of full funding for the project. The Committee approved £100,000 and agreed to transfer another £30,000, to total £130,000.
- 1.3 This report provides an update regarding the external funding explored to fund the gap in the costs of the project. It also considers alternative options to building a replica carriage.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Committee notes the cost of a new all-weather carriage was £442,700 as of March 2022.
- 2.2 That Committee notes that there is a funding gap of £312,700 and as external funding has not been found, the carriage cannot be procured at this time.
- 2.3 That Committee requests that officers continue to monitor external sources of finance for a new all-weather accessible carriage in the future.
- 2.4 That the Committee notes, that should funds become available in the future, a new all-weather carriage is the recommended option to further explore.

### 3 Context and background information

- 3.1 At the meeting of the TECC Committee in June 2021 a notice of motion was presented and the following agreed:
- That the Committee agrees as a priority the progression of the project to achieve an accessible carriage, including a costed design and the identification of full funding for the project.
  - That the Committee agrees to £30,000 of the funding of £40,000 previously identified for signage, a shelter and siding is instead allocated to an accessible carriage.
- 3.2 The Volk's Electric Railway (VER) is a heritage railway visitor attraction, which operates during the summer months to transport members of the public along Madeira Drive. As the world's oldest working electric railway, built in 1883, it runs for a mile along the top of the beach from the Aquarium Station near Brighton Palace Pier to Black Rock.
- 3.3 The railway receives support from the enthusiasts of the Volk's Electric Railway Association (VERA), who regularly assist with winter maintenance tasks under the supervision of council staff, together with the operation of occasional evening services over the summer period.
- 3.4 The railway has benefitted from the improvements that the council undertook in recent years primarily funded by a grant of £1.65m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The ongoing high standards of maintenance by the Council and VERA have facilitated the longevity of Volk's Electric Railway as a service, on both the infrastructure and train carriages.

### 4 Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The table below, details the background and timeline to the proposal to build an accessible carriage.

Timeframe	Activity
2015	VERA developed a detailed specification for a fully accessible, weatherproof carriage for operation throughout the year and in all-weathers. Funds were not available at this time.
October 2020	VERA re-submitted the proposal to the TECC Committee in the document: An Accessible Future for Volk's Electric Railway
June 2021	The TECC Committee agreed as a priority the progression of the project to achieve a accessible carriage, including a costed design and the identification of full funding for the project.

- June 2021            The committee allocated £100,000 plus £30,000 previously identified for signage, a shelter and sidings.
- March 2022            A quotation was sought from a British Narrow Gauge Railway Engineering Company, who had previously been involved in repairing and restoring the VER heritage carriages. A detailed quotation indicated the cost, based on a new all-weather carriage, as £442,700.

### Sourcing External Funding

- 4.2    Allocated council funding is £130,000 and the cost of building a replica carriage was £442,700 leaving a gap of £312,700 (as of March 2022.)
- 4.3    An initial funding application was made to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, who can provide grants of over £1m. The application was not successful as the project did not meet their core lending criteria.
- 4.4    Investigations into other heritage railway charities indicated that although there are charities which support heritage railway projects, most were small with maximum annual budgets of circa £100,000. Most of these organisations focus on upgrading or rebuilding heritage artifacts, rather than building replicas.
- 4.5    Corporate or other grant bodies tend to support smaller or medium sized local community or charities projects.
- 4.6    Crowdfunding was investigated but, as it is more suited to start-ups, small businesses, and innovative ideas, it was not considered suitable for this type of project. Crowdfunding requires time, resources and high levels of marketing expertise and, if it fails to reach its target, the monies received may have to be repaid to the donors.
- 4.7    In conclusion, no external funding resources were identified which could meet the funding gap at this time.

### Options

- 4.8    As potential sources of external funding were not available at the level required (circa £312,000), alternatives were sought and evaluated to see if there were other options to provide an accessible carriage at a lower cost : (See Appendix 1 for detailed Options and Costs):
- Option 1 – New All-weather Carriage
  - Option 2 - Rebuild the Southend Train
  - Option 3 – Delay/Monitor until external funds are available
- 4.9    The original proposal from VERA - **Option 1 – New All-weather Carriage** - was to provide a replica carriage with disabled and wheelchair access with

classroom facilities and all-weather capability. This is the recommended build option to explore further, should funds become available in the future.

- 4.10 Upgrading the Southend Train - **Option 2 - Rebuild the Southend Train** - has the benefit of using a genuine heritage carriage. However, it is not only different in design but also has different platform level. The Southend Train was donated to the VER many years ago and was briefly used in service, however, it is not part of the VER original rolling stock. The cost to rebuild and adapt this carriage will not be much different from Option 1. Additional ramps or other means would be required to get both passengers and wheelchairs on board. This option is not recommended, as it does not provide level access from the existing railway platforms.
- 4.11 **Option 3 - To delay/monitor situation until external funds are available** is recommended at this time.
- 4.12 A review was undertaken to consider the possibility of adapting a current VER carriage to be wheelchair accessible. However, this is not a viable option as changes to the heritage carriages are not permissible under the Grade 2 listed status. Any adaptations will detract from the railway's charm and unique heritage character, which is the major appeal for visitors. In addition, changes to the original design, may invalidate the Certificate of Conformity and the Safety Certification which would be difficult and expensive to re-establish.

## **5 Community engagement and consultation**

- 5.1 The original proposal came from Volk's Electric Railway Association , who are a volunteer group who support the railway with their time and expertise. VERA has around 150 members and 20 of those members are active volunteers.

## **6 Conclusion**

- 6.1 In conclusion, no external funding resources could be found that provide the level of funds required for this project.
- 6.2 If external funding was found in the future, Option 1 – New All-weather Carriage is recommended.

## **7 Financial implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report as there is insufficient funds to progress further. Further funding will need to be identified before this project can go ahead

Finance officer consulted: John Lack

Date consulted 21/10/22

## **8 Legal implications**

- 8.1 If the project to provide a accessible carriage can proceed in the future it will need to be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Standing Orders and the procurement regulations. The action proposed is in line with the Council's duty to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Lawyer Consulted: Alice Rowland Date: 14/10/22

## **9 Equalities implications**

- 9.1 The addition of an accessible rail car would greatly enhance the inclusivity of the provision which is a challenge for a heritage railway with the design of the existing carriages.

## **10 Sustainability implications**

- 10.1 The sustainability implications of a accessible carriage would be given due consideration in the detailed design.

## **11 Other Implications**

Public Health Implications:

- 11.1 Visitor attractions can have a positive impact on the health and well-being of users, especially those such as the Volk's Railway which are all part of the experience of a coastal resort.

## **12 Supporting Documentation**

- 12.1 Appendices

**Appendix 1: Detailed Options and Costs**

