

Dear Secretary of State

**LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR THE DELIVERY OF EAST WEST RAIL PHASE 2**

The East West Rail Consortium (which represents all local authorities within the footprint of East West Rail and beyond) wishes to record its strong support and commitment to the successful delivery of Phase 2 of this critically important national strategic project.

The East West Rail Strategic Board, which I chair, is meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> September. The Consortium will formally consider this response at that meeting: the response is therefore submitted subject to any amendment agreed by that meeting.

East West Rail Phase 2 is part of the overarching East West Rail project, which the National Infrastructure Commission identified as being a key element of the ‘multi-modal spine’ across the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor. The Government has accepted the strategic need for the scheme in its initial response to the National Infrastructure Commission’s report: in addition, England’s Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum – the emerging Sub-National Transport Body for the corridor – has also identified East West Rail as being of strategic importance

Whilst individual Consortium members may make representations on matters of local detail separately where this is necessary, the East West Rail Consortium is strongly supportive of the overall strategic case underpinning East West Rail Phase 2 and the principle of the proposal submitted under the Transport and Works Act. In this context, it is important to recognise that the Consortium sees the delivery of the complete and agreed Phase 2 project as crucial, so this support is conditional upon:

- Continued recognition of the improvements proposed for the section of the route between Bletchley and Bedford as being integral elements of the works for East West Rail Phase 2
- Commitment to the inclusion of the Bletchley Station Eastern Entrance within the works for East West Rail Phase 2
- Continued commitment to deliver improvements to the Claydon Junction to Aylesbury section of the route as an integral element of East West Rail Phase 2
- Commitment to ensure that train services operating over East West Rail Phase 2 support the Consortium’s strategic objective of developing, on the opening of HS2, through services on the Northampton – Milton Keynes – Bletchley – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common axis

- Commitment to ensure that train services operating over East West Rail Phase 2 support the Consortium's strategic objective of services continuing through Oxford Station and onto Didcot Parkway.

As you may be aware, East West Rail was originally inspired by local authorities in Suffolk and Norfolk in recognition of the need for improved strategic rail links westwards. The Consortium was established in 1995 as a collaborative partnership with the explicit objective of re-establishing strategic rail links of national significance in order to support the delivery of economic growth within our region for the benefit of local communities and the wider national economy.

Thus, we are delighted that Phase 1 of EWR was opened for train operations in 2016 and is proving to enjoy considerable success with patronage of the train services exceeding the numbers that were originally forecast. We see this as a blueprint for what successful rail investment looks like and it is already starting to support the delivery of planned Local Plan growth and influence where it is best located. We now look forward to the opening of train services on Phase 2, which has the potential to support planned growth in new jobs and housing across the corridor.

We are fully supportive of the East West Rail Company's plans for the re-opening the central section; the final link through to Cambridge. To complete the picture, the Consortium is also developing a strategic proposition in support of plans to enhance and promote greater rail connectivity between Cambridge, Norwich and Ipswich. This all demonstrates the value of East West Rail as being greater than the sum of its parts.

East West Rail will improve not only local connectivity but will also open up UK-wide travel possibilities with over sixty major centres within one change of train. The delivery of economic growth and housing is dependent upon improved connectivity as set out in the NIC report and that means improved connectivity not just east-west but also north-south. East West Rail Phase 2 will be the catalyst from bringing forth proposals along the Northampton – Milton Keynes – Bletchley – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common axis. **It will also open up opportunities to enable settlements all along the corridor to realise their potential.** Finally, it is also leading to options for improved connectivity westward to Swindon and Bristol being actively explored.

Local Plans across the Western section area are already in place in expectation of Phase 2 of East West Rail being delivered, so this is a real opportunity to demonstrate how rail infrastructure investment can drive sustainable growth; with significant proposals coming through in the following areas:

- Oxford City Council
- Cherwell District Council
- Aylesbury Vale District Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council

- Bedford Borough Council

East West Rail provides an attractive, viable alternative to the car through the restoration of the mothballed section of the railway, enabling fast and frequent scheduled rail services which by improving connectivity, will support the delivery of planned growth. It will encourage people to switch from car to rail which is consistent with the need to deliver growth with reduced environmental impact. Such an outcome underpinned the work of the NIC – for whom realising the economic potential of the corridor in ways that enable a ‘net betterment’ to the corridor as a whole was a key consideration

A further advantage of the proposal is the approach to the design of the track infrastructure which retains the ability to accommodate rail freight. We support the approach within the proposal of East West Rail Phase 2 (of protecting existing freight requirements) but our support is conditional upon a continued commitment to ensuring that the infrastructure delivered under Phase 2 is capable of further investment in support of additional freight. In addition to encouraging people out of their cars and onto trains, this will enable HGV container traffic to transfer to rail, reducing pressure on the strategic highway network.

Finally, this project continues to enjoy consistent strong support from local authorities and local communities, which has been the case throughout its development. This is illustrated by the considerable resource and Work in Kind commitments that Consortium members have put into the project to help it progress and reduce risks to the project.

On behalf of the EWR Consortium, I therefore look forward to a swift conclusion to the Transport and Works Act Order application that will enable delivery of EWR Phase 2 at the very earliest opportunity.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Mark Shaw

Chairman of EWR Consortium Strategic Board  
Cabinet member for Transport Buckinghamshire CC

Members of the Consortium Strategic Board include:

- Cherwell District Council
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Northampton Borough Council
- Aylesbury Vale District Council
- Wycombe District Council
- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- Bedford Borough Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- Luton Borough Council
- South Cambridgeshire District Council
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Stevenage Borough Council
- North Hertfordshire District Council
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Norwich City Council
- Norfolk County Council
- Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council (East Suffolk Council)
- Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council (West Suffolk Councils)
- Suffolk County Council
- Ipswich Borough Council