

## East West Rail Consortium Strategic Board 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018

### Agenda Item 7 : Wider Linkages and Future Opportunities

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) **Recognises the significant opportunity that East West Rail infrastructure presents for new and enhanced national and regional service patterns;**
- b) **Agrees to work with the Department for Transport and Emerging EEH Sub-Regional Transport Body to develop proposals further, in order to inform future investment planning and franchise mapping decisions.**

#### 1. Strategic Context

- 1.1 The East West Rail Consortium was formed in 1995 with the objective of promoting and securing a strategic railway connecting East Anglia with Central, Southern and Western England, including a spur to Aylesbury.
- 1.2 The National Infrastructure Commission in its final report noted that delivery of the multi-modal spine (of which the Western and Central Sections of East West Rail represented an integral element) should be viewed in the context of wider connectivity stretching from the North Sea coast (embracing the Eastern Section) all the way across the corridor through to Oxford and beyond towards Swindon, Bath, Bristol and onto South Wales.
- 1.3 The Government's formal response to the National Infrastructure Commission (published alongside the Budget 2018) explicitly recognised the existence of important strategic transport connections (beyond the Oxford to Cambridge corridor) to other parts of East Anglia, to Stansted and the M11 corridor, and to Heathrow and the M4 corridor. Indeed the Government's response highlighted the existence of important links to the north, south, east and west of what the Government considers to be the core of the Oxford to Cambridge corridor.
- 1.4 The Consortium has identified the need to explore the potential of wider linkages as part of this year's work programme. The purpose of this paper is to provide the context for that work being taken forward and to seek an initial steer from the Strategic Board as to the issues that it would like the work to consider.

#### 2 Background

- 2.1 The importance of wider linkages has been inherent to the East West Rail project from the beginning.

- 2.2 The principle of this is illustrated by the original 'core' and 'enhanced' service patterns produced during the development of the Western Section of East West Rail (Annexes 1a and 1b).
- 2.3 The core service pattern is now essentially being progressed, and provides the supporting business case for the Western Section Phase 2 scheme. It should be noted that the enhanced pattern reflected in this work envisaged the operation of the complete East West Rail corridor, with additional potential passenger (notably cross country/longer distance) and enhanced freight services identified.
- 2.4 Building on the Government's response to the National Infrastructure Commission's proposals it is a timely opportunity to explore the wider linkages that the Consortium members might wish to explore, including the following questions and opportunities
- Connections across the Heartland area on a north-south as well as an east- west axis – bringing in growth settlements such as Northampton, and maximising the potential of the corridor down through Aylesbury and Princes Risborough;
  - Aligned with the above, promoting connections to Old Oak Common as an alternative to existing London termini which are either at or close to capacity;
  - The east west rail corridor – or sections of it – as a potential additional/alternative route for cross-country services, which could either be existing, or connect new cities for example Nottingham;
  - Freight and passenger options (particularly for services to/from East of Cambridge, as an alternative to existing freight corridors), in the context of the EEH freight topic paper, considered at the previous meeting of this Board, work on which is now underway;
  - Taking East West Rail beyond Oxford, both to the south west and to access Heathrow via the proposed new Western Rail Access to Heathrow
- 2.5 This paper aims to explore these, in the context of the overall strategic growth agenda across the NIC corridor and EEH area, and seeks initial views from the consortium on the opportunities set out and how these should be explored.
- 2.6 This discussion is also timely given the recently announced Rail Review. England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum – the Sub-national Transport Body for the Heartland – is engaging with the Review over the coming months.
- 2.7 The Forum has indicated that it would welcome the thoughts and considerations of the Consortium as part of that dialogue.

### **3 North South Connections**

- 3.1 East West Rail, as a strategic corridor supporting the wider Heartland region, offers the opportunity to establish connectivity across the area, for example in terms of developing a new north-south strategic axis linking Northampton – Milton Keynes – Aylesbury – High Wycombe and Old Oak Common.
- 3.2 The importance of developing this corridor has previously been identified by Network Rail in the Chilterns Route Strategy published in August 2017. A key driver for identifying it being routes into/out of Marylebone Station being at capacity.
- 3.3 Central to realising this ambition is the opportunity created by the opening of HS2. This will afford an opportunity to assess how capacity on the West Coast Main Line is allocated in the future. England's Economic Heartland as the Sub-national Transport Body is involved in the Network Rail led work to look at the future use of capacity on the West Coast Main Line, work on which is just beginning.
- 3.4 This would also create similar opportunities for longer distance connectivity from the Midlands and the North, bringing in services from cities such as Leeds and Nottingham, as a complement or alternative to existing cross-country routing via Birmingham.
- 3.5 In parallel colleagues in Midlands Connect are exploring options for developing the rail network north of Banbury, in particular the potential benefits of increasing capacity on the Leamington Spa – Coventry corridor which might enable re-routing of existing cross country services.
- 3.6 The work of Midlands Connect is relevant to this discussion given the implications for capacity on the Oxford – Birmingham axis.
- 3.7 Planned and potential strategic rail investment in Old Oak Common (arising from and providing connectivity into) HS2, plus Western Access to Heathrow, mean that there are numerous potential connection opportunities for new / additional services that would use East West Rail infrastructure via either Oxford or Aylesbury, reinforcing the case for current and potential future investment.
- 3.8 This in turn raises the question for the consortium about where the best opportunities lie, for example in terms of developing services to enable or support development and growth.

### **4 East West Connections**

- 4.1 Annex 2 reproduces a slide generated by the Department for Transport which - although a few years old – nevertheless illustrates the point that the East West corridor links many of the UK's fastest growing main settlements, only some of which are currently captured by East West Rail.

- 4.2 At face value, this supports the case for more rapidly progressing the Eastern Section, enabling cities (for example Norwich, which has recently benefitted from a successful 'Transforming Cities' funding bid) to be better connected to growth hubs along the corridor.
- 4.3 The opportunity for seeking enhanced connectivity to the south west is also potentially significant. Some initial work (and exploring partnerships) has been undertaken with Swindon, Wiltshire, Bristol and other authorities to develop a case for (re) connecting Bristol to Oxford. These discussions have also begun to investigate the potential for enhanced infrastructure both to support a new service pattern and create new stations at existing growth hubs including Corsham in Wiltshire and Grove/Wantage in Oxfordshire, which are widely supported by Local Authorities and MPs along the route.
- 4.4 Initial work has suggested that the best opportunity for developing a business case and maximising future connectivity probably lies in developing such a 'regional' service to extend along the east west rail corridor to Cambridge and beyond. This is in part because, given current rail capacity and growth, there is little if any opportunity to develop more services into London (e.g. from new stations) and neither is this necessarily desirable, given future growth opportunity along the corridor. More pertinent is the opportunity to strengthen and extend east west connectivity – West Country to East Anglia.
- 4.5 There are also likely to be significant opportunities for developing East West Rail as a strategic freight corridor, both as part of realising the economic potential of the region and in enabling the London Mayor realise his ambition for routes such as the Gospel Oak to Barking corridor.
- 4.6 The Consortium has consistently highlighted the need for the East West Rail project to consider – and if necessary make provision for – additional freight services that have been diverted from other strategic rail corridors.
- 4.7 However this is conditional upon capacity for the diverted freight services being available on alternative strategic rail corridors. Although East West Rail will not be capable of functioning as an alternative strategic rail corridor until completion of the Central Section, the capability and capacity to accommodate additional freight services needs to be factored in, recognising that this may require some additional investment in the future.
- 4.8 Again, this raises questions for the consortium in terms of where the best opportunities lie, and the balance/priority between development of the network for passengers and freight.

## **5 Other considerations**

- 5.1 In assessing the best opportunities for the future emphasis needs to be placed on wider benefits, in particular the 'GVA uplift' of rail investment, to enable partners to better understand the relative benefits of different rail service patterns and infrastructure requirements, so that investment can be prioritised.

- 5.2 The Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study, now getting underway and with the support of funding from both the EWR Consortium and England's Economic Heartland, provides a potential template and new approach to being able to capture the wider economic and growth benefits of investment in the rail network. The agreed remit for this study includes:
- The strategic rail connectivity context of the study, in terms of supporting growth across the wider NIC Oxford to Cambridge corridor and beyond;
  - The central role that upgrade of capacity and station facilities at (and through) Oxford station will play, in terms of enabling other rail proposals, including extended and enhanced East West Rail services through Oxford to the South West and/or Heathrow.
  - A specific workstream determining at how economic growth and its benefits can be captured to help justify rail investment
- 5.3 A significant consideration will also be how the future rail franchise map for this area –East West Rail, however services are initially operated, provides an opportunity to refresh this - timely given that franchising decisions are coming up for Great Western, Chiltern and Cross Country in the next few years.
- 5.4 Other infrastructure proposals, notably the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and how it could link to the rail corridor, will also be a significant consideration.

## 6 Next Steps

- 6.1 In looking at the future work programme, there is both an opportunity and funding available to commission work to explore and quantify the opportunities raised in this paper in more detail.
- 6.2 This is probably best considered alongside/linked to work being taken forward by England's Economic Heartland (principally covering its Freight, Connectivity Study and Transport Strategy workstreams).
- 6.3 In the meantime, views from the consortium on the questions and opportunities set out in this paper are welcomed. This would allow a more structured proposal to be brought back to a future meeting of this Board for consideration.

**December 2018**