

East West Rail Consortium Strategic Board 16th March 2021

Agenda Item 4: Responding to Consultations

Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) Endorse the approach set out in this paper for preparing responses to the expected round of public engagement**
- b) Note that the timing of the Consortium's next meeting will be reviewed once the timings of the engagement are confirmed**

1. Context

- 1.1. The East West Rail Company is expected to undertake a further round of public engagement shortly.
- 1.2. Based on previous statements from the Company it is expected that this will relate to two aspects of the East West Rail project:
 - A non-statutory engagement linked to the delivery of Connection Stage 3 – the delivery of services between Bedford and Cambridge
 - A round of engagement linked to the delivery of Connection Stage 2 – the delivery of services between Oxford and Bedford
- 1.3. As Consortium members will recall, in order to realise the full potential of the rail link, any consideration linked to Connection Stage 3 will need to consider a long-term solution for the London Road Crossing in Bicester: the issue here being one of barrier down-time required in order to enable that potential to be realised.
- 1.4. As part of its 2020/21 programme of work the Consortium made funding available to Oxfordshire County Council to review the issues associated with the London Road Crossing level crossing. An interim report on that work was provided to the Consortium meeting held on 9th December: the final report back on this work is provided later on the agenda for this meeting.

2. Responding to the Consultations

Connection Stage 3

- 2.1. At its meeting held on 20th October, in anticipation of the further round of engagement linked to Connection Stage 3 (at the time referred to as the Central Section), it was agreed that the Consortium would look to develop a strategic response to the engagement.
- 2.2. It was further agreed that the Consortium secretariat would convene a working group of officers representing areas served by the Central Section to develop the draft response. Given the critical importance of taking into account the linkage between the Central and Eastern Sections it was also agreed that the working group would involve officers from the Eastern Section.
- 2.3. As with the previous round of engagement on the Central Section the Consortium's response will focus on issues of strategic importance. It is also expected that individual local authorities will respond to the latest round of engagement in their own right.

- 2.4. An initial meeting of the officer working group was held on 13th January. This meeting reviewed the Consortium's submission to the previous engagement on the Central Section. The group then went on to begin to identify any additional issues that it felt might need to be considered as part of the forthcoming engagement.
- 2.5. Further meetings of the working group will be convened during the engagement period in order to develop a draft response for consideration by the Consortium membership.
- 2.6. In preparing the draft response the officer working group is also likely to need to consider the issue of London Road Crossing, Bicester. If so, it is proposed that officers from Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council be invited to join the working group.
Connection Stage 2
- 2.7. Based on statements made at the time of the announcement confirming the commitment of funding to deliver the Bicester to Bletchley section of Connection Stage 1 it is anticipated that the Company will seek views on the options for ensuring that the Bletchley to Bedford section is able to support the ambition for the East West Rail project as a whole.
- 2.8. In anticipation of this EEH, in its role as the Sub-national Transport Body, commissioned consultants to look at the future First Mile/Last Mile requirements arising from the investment in East West Rail. This work has been jointly commissioned with the Company and is being taken forward in collaboration with Milton Keynes Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council.
- 2.9. The output from this work will be completed before the end of the engagement period thereby enabling all partners to use its output to inform and shape their responses.
- 2.10. As with the engagement on Connection Stage 3 it is proposed that the Consortium secretariat work with officers from the local authorities served by the Bletchley to Bedford section to prepare a draft response to the engagement that can then be considered by the Consortium membership.
Overarching Response
- 2.11. In responding to the latest round of engagement it is proposed that the Consortium use its work on the longer-term ambition for the East West Main Line to form an overarching narrative.

3. Agreeing the Response(s)

- 3.1. The forthcoming engagement by the East West Rail Company is a significant point in time for the overall East West Rail project. It is therefore important that the Consortium responds to the consultation.
- 3.2. The exact timing of the engagement is still to be confirmed. At present the Consortium's next scheduled meeting is 9th June. It is proposed that the Consortium secretariat will liaise with the Chair and Vice-Chair once the end date for the consultation is known and take a view as to whether that meeting requires rescheduling in order to enable full consideration of the draft response to take place.

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