

## **East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board**

**8 June 2022**

### **Agenda Item 6: Network Rail Strategic Statement**

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

- a) Receives a presentation from Network Rail on its East West Main Line Strategic Statement**
- b) Notes and welcomes the document as advancing the Partnership's ambition for the main line**
- c) Provides feedback to Network Rail on the contents of the strategic statement.**

#### **1. Context**

- 1.1. In March 2022 Network Rail published the East West Main Line Strategic Statement.
- 1.2. The document presents Network Rail's position on the long-term opportunity to expand the scope of the East West Rail programme - as currently remitted - to more fully integrate with the wider rail network.
- 1.3. The statement outlines a vision for an East West Main Line (EWML) which is aimed at gaining the most from the investment made in the new infrastructure.
- 1.4. It suggests areas for further exploration and development work, highlighting the benefits that could be accrued from adoption of a number of East West Main Line principles.
- 1.5. The statement complements the East West Rail programme as currently remitted, recognising the major improvement in connectivity that will be made by the introduction of new train services between Oxford, Cambridge, Aylesbury and Milton Keynes.
- 1.6. The Board will receive a presentation on the statement from Network Rail.

#### **2. The Strategic Statement- Purpose**

- 2.1. The statement is not a request for funding for specific interventions, nor does it request any changes to the interventions planned as part of the East West Rail programme.
- 2.2. The statement instead focuses on how the rail network can maximise the benefits of East West Rail. It identifies the role of East West Rail in maximising journey times to places beyond Oxford-Cambridge (and Aylesbury-Milton Keynes).
- 2.3. The statement shows how the best way to maximise the impact of East West Rail is by removing or reducing the 'interchange penalty' which would still exist on these journeys and by ensuring the right frequency of services. Addressing these two issues will ensure that changing in London does not remain the preferred options in many cases.
- 2.4. By removing the gaps in connectivity, and assessing the value and cost of providing enhanced onward connectivity as part an East West Main Line, the statement says that we could significantly increase the benefits arising from the investment made in the East West Rail programme to date. Addressing the constraints and placing the new infrastructure as the central core of a route that will ensure it is comprehensively integrated into the national network.

- 2.5. The statement says 'these additions could be incorporated in to a wider programme as one overarching improvement, or could be instigated in an incremental manner; the important element is that investigation into the possible provision of changed infrastructure is done now so that where appropriate, nothing is done now that precludes options remaining open in the future'.
- 2.6. The document says the East West Main Line could be oriented around 'core' stopping services which serve all stations between Oxford, High Wycombe, Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, and fast services which operate using the infrastructure as a core section between Bristol, Southampton and Cardiff, and Northampton, Peterborough, Norwich and Ipswich, with Milton Keynes acting as a hub for both stopping and fast services.
- 2.7. A secondary raft of extended services between Oxford and Aylesbury, and Northampton and Luton could be explored to improve connectivity between those key hubs and, in the case of the latter, Luton Airport.
- 2.8. A further section of the report details Network Rail's position on the interfacing areas which would be required to realise the East West Main Line. For example, this confirms the importance of capacity at Ely and Haughley junctions to extending the line east of Cambridge; and of enhancements at Oxford and Didcot to extend the line west towards Swindon, Bristol and South Wales.



### 3. For consideration

- 3.1. The document broadly aligns with the Partnership's strategic vision and is therefore welcomed as a valuable contribution to advancing the case for an East West Main Line from Norfolk and Suffolk to South Wales and Southampton.
- 3.2. Similarly, the principles outlined in the report also align well with the Partnership's objectives and six areas of interest. These include:
  - Extending passenger services beyond that of the current East West Rail scheme (ie, beyond Oxford and Cambridge, and Aylesbury and Milton Keynes)

- 'Ensuring that infrastructure changes made as part of the East West Rail programme do not preclude the potential future service of additional locations'
  - Electrification of the route
- 3.3. Network Rail's indicative map of the East West Main Line aligns well with the Partnership's own vision for the line.
  - 3.4. The document recognises that the proposal for the East West Main Line is 'made on the basis that an expanded scope will deliver greater value from the investment over the long term'. The call for these issues to be looked at now so as to future-proof the main line is welcomed, as is the summary of improvements to interfacing areas which need to be considered.
  - 3.5. It is disappointing that parts of the document appear out of date. For example, reference is made to the East West Rail Consortium rather than the East West Main Line Partnership and it has not taken account of the unitary restructuring in Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire. Network Rail has been asked to amend these errors.
  - 3.6. The document would also benefit from incorporating the Partnership's work which has already been undertaken on the eastern section.
  - 3.7. Members may wish to raise other comments to Network Rail regarding the strategic statement.

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