

EastWestMainLine



Partnership

Championing the ambition for East West Rail

Response to Network Rail's East West Main Line Strategic Statement

Introduction

The East West Main Line Partnership welcomes the publication of Network Rail's East West Main Line Strategic Statement.

Realisation of a line from East Anglia across central and southern England has been the Partnership's ambition from the moment it was established as the East West Rail Consortium by Ipswich Borough Council in 1995. Our campaigning and early-stage business case development laid the foundations for the work currently ongoing to design and construct the scheme from Oxford to Cambridge. We continue to work on the business case for direct East West Main Line services from Ipswich, Norwich and potentially beyond. During 2021 the Partnership was also joined by the Western Gateway STB, which covers the area west of Swindon, including Bristol, ensuring the Partnership has representation on our Board from across the proposed main line.

The importance attached by the region to realising the full potential of the main line is demonstrated by the relaunching of the East West Rail Consortium as the East West Main Line Partnership in September 2021.

This paper outlines the Partnership's response to the Strategic Statement. In so doing, we hope Network Rail, Department for Transport and other partners find it a useful reference for where the region stands on a number of items contained within the Strategic Statement.

This response makes some general observations about the Strategic Statement, before focussing on the 'principles' section of the document. It should be noted that our local authority partners may have specific views with regards East West Rail's interfacing areas, design and routing, and we encourage Network Rail to engage with them, at the earliest opportunity, to understand these (our strategic response to the East West Railway Company's Making Meaningful Connections consultation is available here <https://www.eastwestrail.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EWR-Consultation-June-2021-Response-of-East-West-Rail-Consortium.pdf>).

General observations

The core message outlined in the Strategic Statement on the benefits of 'extending' East West Rail beyond Oxford-Cambridge aligns with the Partnership's ambitions, as set out in our 'Introducing the East West Main Line Partnership' document. This support is on the basis that the Strategic Statement acts as an initial evidence base which leads to further work on the main line by Network Rail.

The importance of the main line in unlocking benefits beyond Oxford-Cambridge is recognised in the transport strategies of both England's Economic Heartland and Transport East sub-national transport bodies, and improved rail connectivity to Oxford is an ambition of Western Gateway STB.

For the Partnership, the core focus for the East West Main Line is to achieve a step-change in east-west connectivity, linking Ipswich and Norwich with Cambridge, Bedford, Milton Keynes, Aylesbury, Oxford and beyond that to Swindon and onwards to Bristol and South Wales.

However, the benefit of the East West Main Line lies not just in the improved connectivity between those areas it directly serves, but also in the opportunity created where the route crosses the radial main lines centred on north south movements into and out of London.

The Partnership is disappointed not to have been engaged on the Strategic Statement prior to its publication as we feel this would have benefitted the document and prevented a number of factual errors. However, we welcome the decision to put the document in the public domain and we encourage Network Rail to continue with this practice in the future.

In order for the Strategic Statement to have its full impact, the Partnership urges Network Rail to publish an amended version of the document to correct and update a number of passages, particularly within the opening chapters. This includes commentary on the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway (p14) - reflecting that the project (between Oxford and Milton Keynes) has been cancelled rather than postponed. While we welcome recognition of the East West Rail Consortium's work over the years (p17), the document should reflect that we relaunched as the East West Main Line Partnership in September 2021. The list of our member authorities should be updated to reflect local government reorganisation.

Strategic Principles

The following sets out the Partnership's response to the seven principles set out in the Strategic Statement.

Passenger services which cover a wider geographic area than currently remitted and thereby remove the requirement for passengers to interchange, either entirely or by bringing more locations within reach of a single interchange.

This principle strongly aligns with the core ambition of the East West Main Line Partnership. The main line offers not only the opportunity for transformational improvements in east-west connectivity, but also in north-south connectivity too.

The Statement's analysis of how journey times from different towns and cities in the region will be impacted by the Oxford-Cambridge section, provides compelling evidence on the benefits of extending the line to the eastwards and westwards.

However, the analysis underplays the benefits of the core Oxford-Cambridge section by suggesting that (in the absence of the main line) for longer distance journeys beyond Oxford and Cambridge, travelling via London would still be the preferred option (based solely on generalised journey times). In the interim term, through delivery of East West Rail stations as strategic interchange hubs, it is our view that the Oxford-Cambridge section would in many cases provide a preferential travel experience: offering greater convenience and potentially cheaper fares than travelling into London.

Ensuring that infrastructure changes made as part of the East West Rail programme do not preclude the service of additional locations which may provide an improved service for passengers and freight users over the long-term

The Statement's emphasis on future-proofing the main line is welcomed.

It is also important that decisions on infrastructure which may not currently be within the scope of the East West Rail programme – but which may in future play an important role in realising the ambitions of the main line – are taken with East West Rail in mind. A good example of this is the decision regarding the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement.

An appropriate service frequency and pattern which best realises reductions in Generalised Journey Times and distributes that reduction over a wider geographic area

The indicative main line map on p50 of the Strategic Statement aligns closely with our own vision for the main line.

In particular, the indicative map highlights the potential for north-south connectivity to Luton (and Luton airport), Northampton, Peterborough, High Wycombe, Reading and Southampton which is welcomed.

We welcome recognition in Network Rail's map of the link to Aylesbury (in red) being a core part of the East West Rail scheme between Oxford and Cambridge. The delivery of an East West Rail link to Aylesbury has been an integral part of the East West Rail scheme for over a decade. Its delivery has been a longstanding priority for the East West Main Line Partnership, England's Economic Heartland and Buckinghamshire Council. The link would unlock economic opportunities and support sustainable growth in the town, while also providing strategic benefits for the wider region, including improved north-south rail connectivity from Northampton to Old Oak Common.

Going forwards, work being carried out by England's Economic Heartland on re-emphasising the strategic narrative of East West Rail suggests it may be helpful in future to consider the impact and value of East West Rail on towns and cities north of the Midland Main Line, including Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby and on to cities such as Leicester, Sheffield and the East Midlands Parkway interchange with HS2.

Equally, ongoing work currently being carried out by the East West Main Line Partnership (in collaboration with Transport East) on the eastern section business case suggests there is a case for direct East West Rail services to Colchester in Essex.

To the west, Swindon is a major hub for connectivity, providing access to the Western Gateway 'powerhouse' region and its £107 billion economy. East West Main Line services to Reading would potentially open up journeys to Heathrow Airport, particularly if the Western Rail Link goes ahead.

Ensuring that infrastructure changes made as part of the East West Rail programme do not preclude exploration of new national routing options for freight that could accommodate anticipated growth, serve existing or new distribution hubs, and improve freight access from major ports to the rest of the nation

The principle of modal shift for freight from road to rail is broadly supported by all three sub-national transport bodies covering the Partnership's geography. In due course Great British Railways will have a statutory duty to consider the needs of rail freight and to take those needs into account in planning the future of the rail network.

The Partnership is clear that the overriding investment opportunity for rail freight is through the Felixstowe-Ely-Peterborough-Midlands corridor and specifically the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement. This must be delivered in full at the earliest opportunity. The line in the Statement which states that freight interventions along East West Rail 'could

reduce the level of intervention required on the route via Ely' could not be supported if this led to a weakening or downgrading of the business case for the Ely scheme.

The Partnership would welcome further analysis on the potential opportunities, and implications, of the role of East West Rail in supporting modal shift to freight. This is particularly in the context of the role of supporting other east west routes, such as Felixstowe to the Midlands where investment in capacity for freight is crucial. Further work around East West Rail should compare to what extent the intervention would relieve the impact of HGVs on local and strategically-important roads and particularly the suitability of all parts of the line (in the context of the communities it passes through and serves) to carry freight. Minimising the impact of rail freight movements on local communities should be prioritised, and assessed, managed or mitigated as appropriate.

Provision of a strategic route for service re-routing, planned diversions, and operational flexibility in times of perturbation

The Main Line's potential role to increase the resilience of the wider rail network is significant. Removing the need for rail users to travel through London will additionally provide peak time relief to rail services on the radial main lines to/from the capital.

Electrification of the route which offers better rolling stock performance, aligns fully with the Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy (TDNS), and more fully contributes to net reduction in carbon emissions through reduced use of diesel traction, the promotion of modal shift, especially in the freight sector

The imperative to decarbonise our transport system is front and centre of transport policy at national, regional and local level. With the West Anglian Main Line, East Coast Main Line, Midland Main Line and West Coast Main Line all electrified, the case for electrification is heightened from an operational perspective. Experience shows that the cost of retrofitting infrastructure for electrification once a rail link is operational will be significantly higher than if the investment is made at the same time as the initial construction works. In developing detailed proposals to deliver East West Rail as an electrified route the importance of high quality and environmentally sensitive design must be applied as a key principle underpinning all work.

Provision for European Traffic Control System (ETCS) digital signalling which enhances future capacity and is integrated with the intended national roll-out.

Network Rail's vision for the main line should also incorporate a broader ambition for delivering it as a digitally enabled corridor, one that provides improved digital connectivity for both passengers and communities close to the rail corridor. The East West Main Line Partnership and England's Economic Heartland have worked closely with the East West Railway Company and government departments to enable the section between Bicester and Bletchley to be delivered as a digitally enabled infrastructure corridor, providing access to high quality broadband and 5G for nearby rural communities. Future stages of the East West Main Line should be specified as digitally enabled infrastructure from the start, with the cost of that provision included within the overall cost of the scheme. The cost of providing enhanced digital connectivity as a percentage of the overall scheme cost is marginal. However, unless it is included within the specification of the works from the outset it can be difficult to secure the provision.

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