

**Parliamentary launch of**  
***Building Better Connections: The Business Imperative for East West Rail***  
**25 October 2022 in Committee Room 11, House of Commons**  
**Summary Report**

**Key points to note**

- The meeting heard how the delivery of East West Rail (EWR) in full will be transformative for the region, it will help secure inward investment, boost UK economic growth, create new jobs, and support the growth of the UK's world leading science and technology sectors.
- Government's commitment to EWR's next stages to Milton Keynes, Cambridge and Aylesbury in the upcoming Autumn Budget would give confidence to businesses and investors to invest in the region while also provide certainty to the local communities.
- There is a need for the East West Railway Company to continue – and in some cases strengthen – engagement with local authorities and communities, where and when it is possible to do so.

**Note of meeting**

**Co-Chair Iain Stewart MP** introduced the event, highlighting its purpose to launch the Building Better Connections report.

**Cllr Steven Broadbent**, Chair, East West Main Line Partnership, outlined why EWR, delivered in full to Bedford, Cambridge and Aylesbury, is vital to the UK economy. He noted that economic recovery and growth is high on the Government's agenda. His message to the new Prime Minister was: *"EWR is part of the solution. It will help secure inward investment, create new jobs, and support the growth of the UK's world leading science and technology sectors"*.

**Andrew Williams**, Senior Strategy and Policy Consultant, AstraZeneca, said that Cambridge and the wider region did not currently have the critical mass of skills to compete with places such as Silicon Valley and Boston. He said that EWR was a vital part of creating that critical mass by unlocking a large pool of talent from further afield, while also helping to restore Britain's global competitiveness and boost confidence in investing in the UK.

**Steve Salvin**, Chief Executive, AllMI, advised that Milton Keynes – where his business is located – was a natural meeting place between Oxford and Cambridge, and had spoken to many investors who had highlighted how sustainability connectivity was a vital issue for them.

**Beth West**, Chief Executive Officer, East West Railway Company, said EWR was key to overcoming the current constraints which are holding the region's economy back, and stated that transformative change as a result of EWR was already happening in places such as Bicester.

**Kevin Foster MP**, Minister of State for Rail, gave a keynote speech.

- Mr Foster acknowledged that EWR *“is of great importance to the businesses and organisations which have lent their name to the Building Better Connections report”* and that *“it would support economic and housing plans in the region”*. He said: *“With an accelerated programme for this line, we can deliver a powerful platform for innovation and growth... At a national level, EWR brings investment into the region, and this also means supporting manufacturing in the Midlands and the North. But it goes further than this, at a global level, the region represents the UK’s Silicon Valley. A global power with clusters of high skilled, high growth technology and innovation and research businesses, so enhancing rail services here means enhancing UK competitiveness and bringing investment and jobs into our country”*.
- Mr Foster said the next stages of EWR to Bedford and Cambridge are being developed and *“we will be able to say more about next steps for these in the very near future”*, while he also advised: *“My challenge to the East West Railway Company is to find cost-effective, quicker and greener ways to deliver the railway.”* He finished his speech with: *“So let’s keep focussing on the outcome, working together and let’s get building East West Rail”*.

The meeting was then opened for questions and discussion. Topics covered included:

- The opportunity EWR gives to creating mobility hubs and setting a new approach to first mile, last mile connectivity to stations.
- The need for EWR to be electrified – the minister advised that alternative traction powers such as hydrogen or battery were being considered.
- The wider East West Main Line, including the opportunities to extend EWR to Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex to the east; and to Swindon, Bristol, South Wales and Southampton to the west and south.
- The importance of Ely capacity improvements for unlocking the potential for East West Main Line services to the east, alongside increasing freight capacity on the Felixstowe-Peterborough-Midlands corridor.
- The importance of EWR to Northamptonshire and Northampton as well as ensuring sufficient capacity on the West Coast Main Line – the minister said HS2 provided the opportunity for this.
- Attendees reflected on issues around the choice, design and station configuration of the proposed route in areas such as Marston Vale, Bedford and south Cambridgeshire, and the need for better engagement with local communities and local authorities, including on local plans – Beth West stressed that improved engagement was a priority for the Company, while Cllr Steven Broadbent advised that it was important to learn lessons from the section currently under construction in order to build trust with local communities – both those currently impacted and those who may be in the future.
- There was a discussion of how Bedford would benefit from EWR, including the regeneration of the town centre the railway could enable.
- A comment was made about the transformational benefits of a scheme like EWR. Using the A14 improvements as an example, an attending MP stated that there was a need to work together to ensure impacted communities received appropriate levels of engagement and support but that, in the long run, the benefits of having transformational infrastructure such as EWR delivered to communities across the area would be immense.

**Co-Chair, Daniel Zeichner MP**, closed the meeting. He noted that the event had been – given the turnout including many MPs – one of the most successful the East of England APPG had been associated with. He also confirmed the importance of the project to secure continuing success in Cambridge and commented that the Minister’s words and responses to questions had been very positive.