

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board

15 March 2023

Agenda Item 3: Clarity on East West Rail and the Aylesbury link

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Notes the latest position recorded from Secretary of State for Transport on East West Rail and the Aylesbury link**
- b) Notes and agrees the proposal for work in support of the Aylesbury link**

1. Context

- 1.1. At the 2022 Autumn Statement the Chancellor 're-committed' the government to East West Rail. This decision was welcomed by the East West Main Line Partnership, following its earlier campaign and launch of the 'Building Better Connections' document in Parliament in October 2022.
- 1.2. At the Partnership's Board meeting on 7 December, members discussed the importance of seeking clarity on what the announcement in the Autumn Statement meant for East West Rail.
- 1.3. In particular, it was agreed there was a need for confirmation that the Chancellor's commitment to East West Rail included delivery of the link in full to Cambridge, and urgent clarity over the future of the Aylesbury link.

2. Secretary of State's response to Transport Committee

- 2.1. Following his appearance before the Transport Select Committee on 7 December 2022, the Secretary of State for Transport subsequently wrote to the Chair of the Committee to provide clarity over a number of issues covered during the discussion. Questions relating to East West Rail had been raised by Buckingham MP Greg Smith.
- 2.2. The Secretary of State's response to the Transport Select Committee, once published, clarified that connection stages 1 (Bicester-Bletchley), 2 (Bletchley to Bedford) and 3 (Bedford to Cambridge) are included within the scope of East West Rail and government's re-commitment to the scheme. Subsequent statements made by the Secretary of State and Minister for Rail have also confirmed the scope of government's commitment on East West Rail as being to Cambridge.
- 2.3. With reference to the link to Aylesbury, he said: "In relation to the Aylesbury Spur, known as Connection Stage 2.5 of EWR, this is not currently funded for delivery of passenger services. However, funding is being provided for work on the existing Marylebone-Claydon Junction line for the construction of civil engineering assets which make passive provision for EWR services in the future. Network Rail is also considering the feasibility of undertaking additional small enhancements to allow for the extension of existing Chiltern operated passenger services beyond their current terminus of Aylesbury Vale Parkway. This is due to report by the end of January 2023, with next steps to be set out in due course."
- 2.4. The Secretary of State also provided answers to queries regarding electrification and impact of construction. His responses can be read in the annex below.

3. Aylesbury link

- 3.1. 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.
- 3.2. Aylesbury Station and Aylesbury Vale Parkway Station were included within what was previously named the 'western section' of the route, proposals which also included Bicester to Bedford. 'The Transport and Works Act Order for the western section was approved by the Secretary of State in February 2020, including in it the Aylesbury link.
- 3.3. However, East West Rail capital funding announced in January 2021 only covered parts of the original Western Section Phase Two – the section between Bicester and Bletchley.
- 3.4. Last year the Board agreed that the Partnership commission work which would support the case for the Aylesbury link.
- 3.5. Officers have been in discussion with EWR Company to agree the scope and scale of the commission and to ensure it doesn't duplicate work the Company may have carried out.
- 3.6. Through these discussions it has become clear that a focussed strategic economic narrative which highlights the opportunities of better rail connectivity to Aylesbury Partnership would add the most value at this stage.
- 3.7. It is therefore proposed that the East West Main Line Partnership carries out this work in partnership with Buckinghamshire Council, with a substantive update being ready by the time the Board next meets in June.

Naomi Green

**(on behalf of) East West Main Line Partnership Secretariat
March 2023**

Annex

Extract from letter from Secretary of State for Transport to Chair of the Transport Committee, dated 20 December 2022.

Current specifications of the project including Aylesbury Spur

The Autumn Statement re-committed to the government's transformative growth plans for our railways including East West Rail (EWR). Connection Stage 1 of EWR is currently in construction and, when completed, is set to create a direct twice-hourly rail service from Oxford to Bletchley and Milton Keynes. Connection Stage 2 (Bletchley to Bedford) and Connection Stage 3 (Bedford to Cambridge) are at development stage and options for these sections were consulted on as part of a wide-ranging non statutory consultation from March-June 2021. In relation to the Aylesbury Spur, known as Connection Stage 2.5 of EWR, this is not currently funded for delivery of passenger services. However, funding is being provided for work on the existing Marylebone-Claydon Junction line for the construction of civil engineering assets which make passive provision for EWR services in the future. Network Rail is also considering the feasibility of undertaking additional small enhancements to allow for the extension of existing Chiltern operated passenger services beyond their current terminus of Aylesbury Vale Parkway. This is due to report by the end of January 2023, with next steps to be set out in due course.

Diesel rolling stock

Diesel rolling stock will be used for the start of services for Connection Stage 1 of EWR whilst a decision on decarbonisation options for the full route are taken. This will allow the earliest possible start of services between Oxford and Milton Keynes, bringing wider transport benefits and encouraging modal shift away from cars. East West Rail Company and DfT are working to review non-diesel traction options including full electrification along the whole route as well as various options for partial electrification and using battery / electric hybrid rolling stock. CS1 has been built with passive provision being made for electrification where appropriate.

Community engagement

In relation to community engagement for Connection Stage 1 of EWR, the East West Rail Alliance identified all potentially impacted businesses along the line of route and have engaged with them directly, ensuring that local businesses are included in mitigation strategies and kept up to date via a mailing list, hand delivered notifications or face to face discussions. They have listened carefully to local residents' feedback throughout, via meetings, drop-ins, social value projects and open days across the whole line of route. They have also engaged extensively with local political representatives including regular meetings with Buckinghamshire Council and Oxfordshire County Council. This feedback will be considered further in the evaluation of CS1 works, and lessons fed through into the planning for future connections as part of ongoing project delivery. HGV movements and road closures associated with the works have been carefully managed to minimise the impact on affected communities, with prior approval by the local authorities to ensure access to businesses and residents is maintained. Where diversions are in place, signs are placed in the area to signpost the general public to the fact that businesses are open as usual.