

EAST WEST MAIN LINE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC BOARD

Wednesday 7 December 2022

14:00 – 15:30

Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Cllr Henry Batchelor	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Phil Bibby	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Steve Broadbent (Chair)	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Norman Brooks	East Suffolk Council
Cllr Alison Cackett	East Suffolk Council
Cllr Sue Clark (Vice-Chair)	Central Bedfordshire County Council
Cllr Duncan Enright	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Michael Headley	Bedford Borough Council
Cllr Phil Larratt	West Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Liz Leffman	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Peter Martin	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Peter McDonald	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Suzie Morley	Mid Suffolk District Council
Cllr Alexander Nicoll	Suffolk County Council
Cllr Robert Roche	Luton Borough Council
Cllr Katie Thornburrow	Cambridge City Council
Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew	Milton Keynes City Council
Cllr Barry Wood	Cherwell District Council

In Attendance:

David Allatt	Cambridgeshire County Council
Jez Baldock	East West Rail
Luke Barber	Suffolk County Council
Jordi Beascochea	East West Rail
Lewis Boudville	East Suffolk Council
Andrew Bramwell	Suffolk County Council
Trevor Brennan	England's Economic Heartland
Susan Browning	Buckinghamshire Council
Kate Campbell	East West Rail
David Cumming	Norfolk County Council
Katherine Davies	Babergh Mid Suffolk District Council
Hanane El Maarouf	England's Economic Heartland
Lucy Ellis	East West Rail
Fiona Foulkes	England's Economic Heartland
James Gagg	Oxfordshire County Council
Will Gallagher	East West Rail
Naomi Green	England's Economic Heartland
Rebecca Johnson	Central Bedfordshire Council
Tony Jones	Norwich City Council
Adam King	England's Economic Heartland
Edward Leigh	North Hertfordshire District Council



Greg Logan
Melanie Macleod
Michael Newsham
Sara Noonan
Erin Pitcher
James Povey
David Rawson
John Rippon
Jeremy Smith
Andrew Summers
Julian Sykes

Adam Wood
Chris Wragg
Rupert Zierler

Bedford County Council
Bedford Borough Council
Ipswich Borough Council
West Suffolk Council
England's Economic Heartland
Milton Keynes City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire LEP
Cambridgeshire County Council
Transport East
Greater Cambridgeshire Shared Planning
Service
Hertfordshire LEP
North Northamptonshire Council
Buckinghamshire Council

Apologies:

Cllr Ruth Brown
Cllr Colin Clarke
Cllr Susan Glossop
Cllr Tumi Hawkins
Cllr Phil Smart
Cllr Ian Stutely
Cllr Richard Stobart

North Hertfordshire District Council
Cherwell District Council
West Suffolk Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Norwich City Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council

Agenda

1	<p>Introductions and apologies</p> <p>The chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and made it known that the meeting would be recorded for the purpose of minutes Apologies received as above.</p>
2	<p>Minutes of last meeting</p> <p><i>To agree the minutes of the last meeting held on 8 June 2022</i> The minutes were approved, all actions completed.</p>
3	<p>Strategic position</p> <p><i>To receive an update from the Chair regarding Partnership activity during the autumn and Autumn statement:</i></p> <p>Cllr Steven Broadbent (the Chair) covered the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The overwhelming priority of the Partnership is to secure commitment from the government on delivering the next stages of East West Rail (EWR) to Bedford, Cambridge, and the link to Aylesbury. - The Building Better Connections brochure highlighted the business voice for EWR. - At the EWR APPG where the brochure was launched, the Rail Minister Kevin Foster was very positive about EWR and understood the benefits it would bring which was a cause for optimism. His successor Hugh Merriman is an enthusiastic advocate for rail. - Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Autumn Statement identified EWR as one of the three major rail infrastructure projects the government is committed to delivering. The Chancellor told Parliament he wants to grow technology and science sectors and turn Britain into the next Silicon Valley. - The area covered by the Partnership should be pivotal to the government's economic objectives. EWR and East West Main Line should play a crucial role in increasing economic output, productivity, labour supply, collaboration, and innovation. - Advocacy and support from business and local authorities, including the Partnership's Building Better Connections brochure, has played an important role in the government's decision making. - What is now needed is a fuller understanding of what the government's commitment means, particularly with regards to the Aylesbury link. Buckingham MP Greg Smith sought answers to this at the Transport Select Committee earlier on 7 December and the Secretary of State was unable to answer. - As a region the focus is on maximising the opportunities that arise from EWR's delivery – using the delivery of the core section as a catalyst for improving first mile, last mile to stations. - Residents, communities, and businesses along the route where the railway is being constructed require clarity– an update is needed on the consultation feedback asap. - Greg Smith MP is seeking a review into lessons learned on the impact of EWR's construction on communities before the next stages are built – the Partnership should play a key role in this, should it happen. This should be referenced in any communication sent to the Secretary of State.
4	<p>Update from East West Railway Company</p> <p><i>To receive an update from the Strategy Director at the East West Railway Company</i></p> <p>Will Gallagher (WG) provided an update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EWR is a significant priority for this government (one of top three rail infrastructure priorities)- closely linked to strategy around high growth industries and the knowledge intensive clusters across the region. - We are working in a positive political environment in part due to the large amounts of voiced support from Partnership, and from CBI, LEPs, local businesses and science parks. - Focus now on putting needed things in place to progress to next stage. - Also a focus on accessibility with the creation of the Accessibility Advisory Panel. - Stakeholder engagement from the Company included meeting Treasury ministers on site at Bletchley, newsletter, local representative groups (LRGs) meetings and updating website. - More information is wanted than there is to share, the Company will be keeping people updated and moving into a period of progression. - Will said he was unable to set out a timetable for future steps as they are currently working with government on the decision-making process.

- He said an update on the next steps is expected early in the new year. Currently finalising the detail on what the steps are going to be.

Questions/comments

The Chair asked if the newsletter is for digital distribution only?

Will Gallagher said this was correct. It has several thousand recipients with a very high engagement rate. The Company is pushing to increase sign-ups. Will encouraged everyone on the call to sign up. The Chair encouraged members to share the newsletter with their constituents.

Cllr Barry Wood said he endorsed the Chair's statement in item 3. East West Rail is in a good news position. The Chancellor's comments with regards Britain becoming a new Silicon Valley can be used positively for communications purposes.

Will Gallagher said the Chancellor flagged the importance of connecting Oxford and Cambridge. He said that all the conversations they were having with government were very positive.

Cllr Sue Clark said she had attended a Local Representative Group for Marston Vale. The tone and style of communication felt disconnected from the communities which were being addressed. There was a big presentation on freight, the language was on the role that freight could play and the strategic connectivity that the line could bring. This is very worrying for residents. She asked whether East West Rail's position on freight has changed?

Will Gallagher said the agenda for the LRGs is shaped by each group to make them useful. He said there is no change on the position on freight. The primary focus is a passenger railway but they are considering the right provision for freight. In doing this they are looking at the demand, opportunity, the impact on communities, cost of infrastructure, operations and maintenance. The intention was not to alarm anyone or signal a shift in position.

Naomi Green said one of the key things government was looking for in the decision to support EWR was local support and local commitment to deliver the benefits that it brings. Partnership members are here to help get things right for their local communities and the Company should use the Partnership as a key engagement channel. Members represent and understand their communities and can act as an early scrutiny function. They can identify potential challenges and find a way to work them through. It is very important that the Partnership is used to help local communities.

The Chair said he was supportive of this approach. He said if the Company sets the right culture then contractors should follow suit.

Will Gallagher said there was a desire to get into a more co-creative mode of engaging locally. The Company has been in a position where they have not had very much information to communicate. He is talking to his team about how to change this and willing to talk to the Partnership about this.

Cllr Katie Thornburrow said Cambridge is very supportive of East West Rail. However, they want it to be electrified from the beginning. Cllr Thornburrow said East West Rail wasn't just an economic project, it can also fulfil social and environmental objectives.

Will Gallagher said the Company wanted to build a net-zero railway. There are a number of ways to achieve this: electrification, batteries and potentially hydrogen. They are looking at the options because in some areas of route the visual impact of full-overhead line electrification could be concerning to communities. They are mindful of striking the right balance. They are having active discussions with rolling stock manufacturers, understanding what the trajectory of their technology is going to be and looking at battery technology which is being deployed in other areas of the world. He added that there are significant sustainability benefits from EWR in terms of mode shift from cars and relieving congestion.

Cllr Michael Headley said he too was supportive of the importance of the Company engaging with Partnership members. He said for Bedford there are some issues which are not reaching agreement, which are likely to continue and have risk of carrying on into the DCO process.

Will Gallagher said it was important to have richer conversations on the issues that exist along the route where local authorities and local groups have particular interests.

The Chair asked Will Gallagher if the Company was expecting to make any announcements before the Partnership's next meeting in March.

Will Gallagher said they were hoping that early in the new year they will be able to set out a timescale and be able to make decisions, and wish to provide visibility on the content of those decisions for the Board.

5 Maximising the benefits of investment in East West Rail

To discuss how the Partnership, local authorities, STBs, government and others can maximise investment in East West Rail

Naomi Green reflected on the production of the Building Better Connections brochure and its launch at the APPG.

- Naomi highlighted that the brochure was an important part of showing local support and business engagement to the government.
- Naomi recognised that partners may have locally specific issues with EWR that need to be worked through at a local level, however strategic support for EWR remains strong. It is important to get the community engagement correct so it can be shown that when engaging at the strategic level of the Partnership, members can also have levers for their own local issues which the Partnership can help with.
- There was a need to continue to work as local authorities and partners with government to maximise the benefits of the investment in EWR.
- The Partnership needed to make the strongest case for EWR in its entirety including the link to Aylesbury and extended links to the eastern section.
- Improving first last mile connectivity and realising the ambition for seamless interchange within the East West Main Line was vital. This includes how bus services and active travel can be used to create journeys to and from stations and how this can be built in now, so it provides the most benefits the communities.
- She said it was important to ensure that the government is working across departments with regards EWR. Naomi and Will have spent time on engagement from the Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and will continue to do so.
- She said that whilst clarity is currently being sought on the Aylesbury link, the Partnership should plan for the need to update the business case for the Aylesbury link. Planned work will include looking at the link's contribution towards the overall business case for the scheme, improvement of local and regional transport provision, facilitation of economic growth, catalyst for regeneration of Aylesbury town centre, reduction of cars, connectivity from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes, Northampton, High Wycombe, Midlands and the North. Officers are in discussion with EWR Company over scope and scale of work and what work had already been completed. Once clarity is achieved a procurement mechanism can be moved to.

Cllr Thornburrow asked about EWR's economic benefits. Naomi said improved connectivity, giving greater access to labour markets and skills, was an important factor for Cambridge's economy. Will Gallagher said the Company was focussed on EWR unlocking good quality jobs at new and existing businesses.

Andrew Summers said that over the next year there is an opportunity to identify and maximise the investment benefits of EWR. At Crossrail they looked at each station and considered the barriers to people accessing train stations and worked out a way to unblock and unlock connectivity, which added significant value to the business case.

James Gagg said Oxfordshire was supportive of local connectivity from EWR. Important to get public and active transport links correct and look at mobility and transport hubs.

The Board:



- a) Welcomed the government’s commitment to East West Rail.
- b) Discussed how the region can leverage maximum value from the government’s investment in East West Rail for the benefit of the region and UK economic growth.
- c) Noted the update on commissioning work on the case for the Aylesbury link.
- d) Noted publication of EEH’s ‘Introducing the Varsity Way’ report which highlights opportunities to improve active travel to several East West Rail stations.

7 Update from Eastern Section Board

To receive an update from the Partnership’s Eastern Section Board

Andrew Summers reported on the actions and priorities from Transport East’s (TE’s) rail plan and the Parliamentary roundtable. His presentation is available on the EWMLP website.

Cllr Alison Cackett brought the document, ‘East Suffolk Line, a Railway for all purposes’ to the board’s attention.

Cllr Alexander Nicoll said he had been re-elected as national chair of LGA’s Public Transport Consortium (PTC). A few years ago the PTC invited (former director of EEH) Martin Tugwell to present to authorities across England and Wales, which was very well received in terms of promoting what the Partnership is about. Cllr Nicoll said he was happy to reissue an invitation and invite Steve or Naomi to talk to the members. He said local connectivity is crucial to get right.

8 Update from East Rail Alliance

To receive an update on work to construct East West Rail between Bicester and Bletchley. This will include an update on the Alliance’s work on apprenticeships and skills

Jez Baldock outlined progress on the ongoing construction of EWR. This included:

- Main infrastructure ready date of July 2024 is still on target.
- About 45% track laying complete, construction of Bletchley and Winslow stations going well, 8/10 new footbridges open, 5 new bridges open to traffic.
- Challenges: Industrial action impacting train deliveries, unpredictable material and resource shortages, management of mud on the road.
- 33 apprentices will complete apprenticeship during project.
- Engagement in schools with STEM events, trying to create important legacy.

At the previous meeting members had expressed interest in hearing how the Alliance supports apprenticeships. EWR section engineer Lucy Ellis therefore outlined her experience as a former EWR apprentice. This included:

- Through her apprenticeship she attained a degree, gained work experience and got many opportunities.
- Through her 5 years as an apprentice she undertook various job roles, which allowed personal and professional growth.
- She has met with local communities adding to her understanding of their expectations of EWR.
- Role models are important for career guidance and helping get people into the industry.
- She enjoys community engagement and career work- going into schools to discuss the opportunities and the apprenticeship routes for young people who may not be aware of this option and helping them understand what an apprenticeship entails. It is important to make young people aware of the opportunities on their doorstep.

10 Future meetings- Virtual

- 15 March 2023 (11-1.30pm)
- 14 June (11-1.30pm)