

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board

12 January 2024

Agenda Item 9: Update from Eastern Section Board

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board:

a) Notes the update from the Eastern Section Board

1. Context

1.1. The East West Rail Eastern Board is the single voice for investment in the Eastern section of East West Rail scheme between Cambridge and Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex.

1.2. The Board comprises local authorities, Network Rail, and our transport operators, including train operating companies and the East's major ports. Meetings are well attended, with 20-30 partners regularly participating. The Board is chaired by Cllr Alexander Nicoll (Suffolk County Council) and serviced by Transport East as Secretariat.

2. Recap on 2023

2.1. The Transport East Partnership, with the support of members of the Eastern Board, progressed several key rail initiatives in 2023:

- **State of Rail Report¹** – A baseline report on the current state of the rail network in the East of England, pulling together all available evidence and setting key issues and challenges for each of the region's main lines, including East West Rail. Launched in the Houses of Parliament with Rail Minister Huw Merriman.
- **Rail Leadership Group** – Transport East formed a regional Parliamentary Rail Leadership Group, comprised of the Chairs of the EWR Eastern Board (Cllr Alexander Nicoll), Great Eastern Main Line (Giles Watling MP) and West Anglia Main Line (Sir Alan Haselhurst), to steer and sponsor the Transport East Partnership's rail programme, and advocate for our investment priorities.
- **Ely and Haughley Advocacy - Keeping Trade on Track²** – Transport East was partner in the England's Economic Heartland / TE joint document which set out the case for investment in Ely Junction. This reflected a wider regional push on Ely, including Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority, Local Authority Leaders, Businesses and our regional MPs (including through the All Party Parliamentary Group) resulting in the Ely / Haughley scheme being included in the Government's Network North announcement in October 2023.

¹ <https://www.transporteast.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Rail-Full-report-WEB.pdf>

² <https://www.transporteast.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Keeping-Trade-on-Track.pdf>

2.2. These have collectively set the groundwork for the Eastern Board's agenda in 2024.

3. 'Live work' programme

3.1. Building on the 2023 Technical Work programme, two deliverables are currently 'live' and due for completion in early 2024:

- **Rail 'Quick Wins'** – Transport East has commissioned Steer to undertake a review of the short-term investment opportunities (0-5 years) to develop improvements on the rail network that could be delivered either within the current network infrastructure or with relatively low cost interventions.

The recommendations due in early 2024 will drive the partnership's engagement with Network Rail, and through our role as regional advisor to Secretary of State for Transport, provide an evidence-based set of rail priorities, in advance of longer-term infrastructure investment.

- **Regional Connectivity Study** – Transport East has commissioned ARUP to deliver a connectivity study by Spring 2024. This utilises the new regional people-based movement model (BERTIE), and within the context of a range of future economic scenarios, identifies and quantifies the major strategic gaps in the transport network connecting our growing towns and cities, international gateways and major UK destinations. This will provide a step-change in our understanding, analysis and evidence at a regional scale, supporting our business case for investment.

4. Making the Case for the Eastern Section

4.1. Making the case for investment in the Eastern Section of East-West Rail will be the key challenge for the Eastern Board in 2024. The Board wants to go into the 2024 public consultation on East West Rail, the General Election, and a potential Spending Review with an enhanced and credible evidence base, with clarity on the investment priorities required to unlock the wider economic benefits of an East West Rail line, from our coast and cities, through Cambridge, and further west.

4.2. Transport's East's Business Plan submission to government for 2024/25 has therefore requested financial support to develop the business case for investment in the region's connectivity.

4.3. The East West Rail Eastern Board intends to focus on enhancing the East West Rail economic narrative for the eastern leg and is currently scoping the preferred course of action. An allocation of £12.5k has been ringfenced by the wider East West Rail Partnership for this purpose. This is very welcome, and vital in supporting the delivery of the work.

5. Next Steps

5.1. Transport East, working with the East West Rail Eastern Board, will continue to report into the East West Rail Partnership in 2024, with completion of the Economic Case the priority piece of work. A scope for the work will be available in early 2024, once confirmation of the DfT's wider funding for Transport East has been received from Government.

Andrew Summers
Chief Executive, Transport East
January 2024