

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board

19 July 2024

Agenda Item 6: Financial Update, subscriptions and work programme

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Notes the 2023/24 financial year update**
- b) Agrees to freeze subscription fees for 2024/25**
- c) Agrees priorities for the Partnership's work programme for 2024/25**

1. Context

- 1..1. The East West Rail Consortium/ Main Line Partnership has been making the case for delivery of a railway connecting East Anglia, with central, southern and western England for nearly 30 years, including making the original business case for East West Rail.
- 1..2. In 2016, the government established East West Rail (EWR) Company to deliver and operate the railway from Oxford to Cambridge.
- 1..3. The section of East West Rail between Oxford and Bletchley is currently finalising construction with all track laid and operational testing underway. It is expected that new services will be operating between Oxford and Milton Keynes via Bicester and Winslow in 2025.
- 1..4. East West Rail Company is also responsible for designing and delivering the next stage of the project to Bedford and Cambridge, with statutory consultation on this expected over the next year.
- 1..5. The East West Main Line Partnership is solely reliant on funding from local contributions of its members. The level of subscription is agreed each year by Board members.
- 1..6. Buckinghamshire Council is the accountable body for the Partnership. The England's Economic Heartland business unit (also located within Buckinghamshire Council) is responsible for the day-to-day administration, officer staffing and secretariat functions of the Partnership.

2. 2023/2024 - review

- 2..1. The financial year 2023/ 2024 saw this partnership continuing to make the case for full delivery of East West Rail, including the Aylesbury Link.

- 2..2. The financial year started with the route announcement from the EWR Company, which included details on the preferred route of the line between Bedford and Cambridge, alongside more details on the planned EWR trains service specification and the interventions needed to enable this. The partnership has continued to represent the interests of all local authorities, including around improving community engagement and learning lessons from track construction to date.
- This financial year has seen a significant increase in focus on understanding and planning the legacy of East West Rail. Central to the approach has been a strategic partnership between EEH (on behalf of the Partnership), the Oxford to Cambridge Pan-regional Partnership, the Science Supercluster Board and Arc Universities Group. A strategic alliance of these bodies, with East West Rail Company, is ensuring the East West Rail scheme brings a lasting legacy to as many people along the rail line as possible. In support of the legacy work, the Partnership has heard about the benefits realised from other rail schemes delivered elsewhere in the country, such as the Borders Line. It has also included funding work that supports the case for delivering EWR in full, including the Aylesbury Link, such as technical analysis of economic linkages enabled through EWR.
- 2..1. The Partnership Board core areas of focus include championing the role of East West Rail to deliver full coast to coast connectivity to both the West and East. In 2023/24, the board specifically agreed a contribution towards developing the business case for improving rail services between Oxford and Bristol, alongside contributions from the Western Gateway sub-national transport body, operators and Network Rail. This would be the first stage in enabling western connections off the western part of the core East West Rail route.
- 2..2. Through 2023/24, the Partnership also continued (through the regular Eastern Section Board) to advocate for progress on the Eastern Section to Norfolk and Suffolk. Transport East oversees the Eastern Section Board, with partnership funding ringfenced to assist the Eastern Board's work.
- 2..3. Finally, the Partnership Board meetings continue to give members the opportunity to speak directly with senior representatives from East West Rail Company and East West Rail Alliance – updates from both are standing items on the Partnership's agenda.

3. 2023/24 expenditure

3.1 The East West Main Line Partnership carried over £106,684 into financial year 2023/24. In addition, £50,985 was received in local contributions. This meant that the total income was £157,669, which includes reserves set at £40,000. The EWML partnership spent £41,798 in financial year 2023/24. The below table outlines the spend of the partnership over the financial year.

Expenditure	Actual	Planned	Commentary
Staffing inc Wik management, secretariat and communications support	£30,600	£30,600	This is to pay for EEH secretariat including policy and communications, project management, budget control and work in kind record keeping.
Website, Marketing and Graphics Materials	£990	£3,120	
Making the case for East West Rail – Aylesbury Link	£10,208	£20,000	Joint work with Buckinghamshire Council. The partnership funded 50% of the work (total cost £20,000)
Making the case for East West Rail – Bristol - Oxford	£0	£10,000	Contribution to Network Rail to look at feasibility study for service enhancement. Note this money is committed by Purchase Order but will not be spent until 24/25
Making the case for East West Rail – Eastern section	£0	£12,500	Roll forward to 2024/25
Total	£41,798	£76,220	

4. 2023/24: income and key contributions

- 4..1 As of 31st March 2024, the Partnership's balance stood at £115,871. This includes reserves of £40,000. The full amount of £115, 871 was rolled over into financial year 2024/25.
- 4..2 £50,985 in local contributions were received in financial year 2023/24. This represents the full suite of contributions, reflecting the level of commitment from all members of the Partnership to its values and priorities.
- 4..3 Looking ahead to this financial year, and in recognition of ongoing financial pressures facing local authorities, it is proposed that subscription levels for 2024/25 are frozen at current levels: £1,545 for district authorities and £3,090 for unitary and county authorities.
- 4..4 Assuming subscriptions are secured again from all member authorities during the 2024/25 financial year, this will generate £44,805 of income. 2023/24 local contribution income was higher due to recovered funds from previous late payments.
- 4..5 Prior to setting the work programme for 2024/25, the Partnership is asked to agree continuation of two key principles of the EWMLP contributions:
 - 4..5...1 That £31,212 is paid to EEH to contribute towards its costs of being the Partnership secretariat. This is an increase of 2% on last year, contributing a small additional amount to inflationary staff costs.
 - 4..5...2 £2,900 is budgeted for website and graphics costs, with £900 being spent on the maintenance of the website and a budget of £2000 for graphics.
- 4..6 Taking into account money previously ringfenced for projects, contribution to secretariat, allocated marketing budget and reserves (continued to be held at £40,000), should all local contributions be secured for 2024/25, funds for new projects could be up to £64,064.

5. 2024/25 work programme

- 5..1. The priority for the Partnership during 2023/24 was ensuring that opportunities associated with maximising East West Rail connectivity for the longer-term are realised, including supporting plans for a new Oxford to Bristol service that could link directly onto the core East West Rail in time, alongside continuing to make the case for the Aylesbury Link.
- 5..2. Maximising the opportunities associated with the legacy for the East West Rail project for communities and businesses will continue to be important in the coming financial year, particularly as we move towards delivery of East West Rail to Milton Keynes. However, recognising that the statutory consultation for the next stage of East West Rail to Bedford and Cambridge is expected over the next year, it will also be important that the Board gets the right support and advice to guide partners response to this process.
- 5..3. Taking into account the Partnership's level of funding, it is suggested that the following key areas are the focus for the upcoming financial year:

- 5..3.1. *Continuing to make the case for progressing coast to coast connectivity, enabled through East West Rail:* Progressing the case for a coast-to-coast main line will continue to be important during 2024/25. This will include building on the business case work for a new Oxford to Bristol service (in collaboration with Western Gateway and Network Rail), as well as continuing to make the case for onward eastern connections to Norfolk and Suffolk (led by Eastern Section Board/ Transport East, contributing the £12,500 ringfenced carry forward money as appropriate). It will also include continuing to make the case for the Aylesbury Link building on existing evidence base work to produce a summary brochure which will be shared for review with local authorities along the route.
- 5..3.2. *Supporting the Partnership through the next stage statutory consultation:* This is expected to a key focus over the next financial year as the statutory consultation for EWR comes forward, ensuring that there is a strong regional voice throughout the process and that key points and messages are highlighted for consideration through planning. To support this, it is planned that a EWR project officer is recruited, to be jointly funded from the Board and England's Economic Heartland. They would then be able to bring in specialist support, such as relevant legal advice if required.
- 5..3.3. *Supporting related workstreams that would maximise door to door connectivity with East West Rail:* EEH will continue work on developing the Varsity Way cycle route with further feasibility work, which in parts would link with East West Rail stations.

5..4. Views from the Partnership Board are welcomed on these key work areas.

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