



EAST WEST MAIN LINE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC BOARD

20 March 2024

12:30-15:00 meeting

Virtual meeting held via Microsoft Teams

In attendance

Cllr Alex Beckett	Cambridgeshire County Council
Cllr Phil Bibby	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Steve Broadbent	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Ruth Brown	North Hertfordshire District Council
Cllr Nicola Gribble	Bedford Borough Council
Cllr Phil Larratt	West Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Peter Martin	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Brian Milnes	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Alexander Nicoll	Suffolk County Council
Cllr Tim Register	Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council
Cllr Judy Roberts	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Philip Smart	Ipswich Borough Council
Cllr Richard Stobart	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Katie Thornburrow	Cambridge City Council
Cllr Lesley Wagland	Essex County Council
Cllr Indy Wijenayaka	West Suffolk Council
Cllr Jennifer Wilson-Marklew	Milton Keynes City Council

Attendees

Jez Baldock	East West Rail Alliance
Luke Barber	Suffolk County Council
Jason Beck	East Suffolk Council
Sally Bonnett	East Cambridgeshire District Council
David Bradbury	Mid Suffolk District Council
Andrew Bramwell	Suffolk County Council
Natasha Brockett	West Suffolk Council
Susan Browning	Buckinghamshire Council
Kate Campbell	East West Rail Company
Jodie Chillery	Central Bedfordshire Council
Hilary Chipping	SEMLEP
David Cumming	Norfolk County Council
Katherine Davies	Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council
Hanane Elmaarouf	England's Economic Heartland
James Gagg	England's Economic Heartland

Will Gallagher	East West Rail Company
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 Council
Melanie McGuinness	Bedford Borough Council
Michael Newsham	Ipswich Borough Council
Abigail Nichols	England's Economic Heartland
Erin Pitcher	England's Economic Heartland
James Povey	West Northamptonshire Council
John Rippon	Bucks LEP
Jeremy Smith	Cambridgeshire County Council
Benjamin Smith	Oxfordshire County Council
Alastair Southgate	Essex County Council
Andrew Summers	Transport East
Julian Sykes	Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
James White	Western Gateway
Rupert Zierler	Buckinghamshire Council

Item	Agenda item
1	<p>Introductions and apologies</p> <p>Apologies Cllr Liz Leffman Cllr Tumi Hawkins Declaration of interest from Cllr Phil Smart</p>
2	<p>Minutes of last meeting <i>To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2024 and to receive an update on actions.</i></p> <p>Erin Pitcher gave an update on the previous actions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The action to check the previous minutes and add an agenda item on engagement is complete. • The Scottish Borders slides have been shared and we have asked if there are any further details from Scottish Borders and will share once received. • East West Rail Company (EWR Co) will share an update on their actions. <p>Minutes were accepted.</p>
3	<p>Chair's Update <i>To receive on update from the Chair</i></p> <p>Cllr Steven Broadbent thanked the Partnership for their ongoing support. Cllr Broadbent introduced three key agenda items on track completion, the transport select committee review and engagement with the EWR Co and the statutory consultation.</p> <p>A financial update will be brought to the next meeting which will set out finances and priorities for the next financial year. We are currently expecting all contributions from partners.</p>
4	<p>Update from East West Rail Alliance</p>

To receive an update regarding the work of the EWR Alliance on delivering Bicester to Milton Keynes.

Jezz Baldock gave an update from the EWR Alliance (EWRA).

He said that the EWRA is on track to finish the work as an alliance in quarter three of 2024. They are currently in the signalling, power and comms part of the project. The construction work is now complete, and the track runs end to end from Bicester to Bletchley. Jez gave thanks to the contributions from local authorities who have supported development of the project.

Jez said that the Rail Minister and other key stakeholders recently visited the completed track to celebrate what has been achieved.

The track will have consolidation tamping work later this year which will allow line speeds of 100 miles an hour.

Winslow Station is progressing well; the car park is being constructed which is the last main element of construction. Bletchley Station is progressing towards the final stage where signs, public address systems, CCTV and waiting shelters are going up.

Nine out of eleven main compounds have closed and been reinstated but there are two main compounds still open in Bicester and Winslow which will remain until mid-2024. The final haul roads are to be removed and land plots are being handed back to landowners. Permanent road repairs are substantially complete but there is still highways repair work to be done in Buckinghamshire after the final compound is demobilised.

The social value work has received over £3 million of return on investment. The alliance is still working on social value and engagement, but this has reduced as the project is coming to a close.

Questions/Comments

Cllr Katie Thornburrow asked if there has been any consideration of new public transport and active travel provision around Bletchley station?

Jez Baldock said that there is not any additional infrastructure going in at Bletchley as part of the current EWRA scope of work

Cllr Steve Broadbent said it was important for the Partnership to visit Bletchley station. This site visit is being worked on by the EEH team.

5

NAO Report Follow up

Transport Select Committee & EWR Legacy

To receive an update on the government and regional approach to considering the wider benefits of the EWR project

It is recommended that the board:

- a) Notes the reaction to the NAO report into East West Rail, including from the Transport Select Committee**
- b) Notes the formation of the HM Treasury "Growth Board" for East West Rail and agrees to support early engagement between officers in the first instance.**

c) Notes development of the EWR Legacy Project

Recommendations accepted

Naomi Green said that at the previous meeting the conclusions of the NAO's investigation into EWR were shared. The two key conclusions were that the realisation of the benefits of EWR are dependent on stronger alignment across government and better engagement between central and local government.

The Transport Select Committee conducted an inquiry session on East West Rail on March 6th. This was part of their wider inquiry into strategic transport objectives and used EWR as a case study to evaluate the Department for Transport's (DFT) appraisal methods for large transformative projects. The inquiry probed on how the benefits of the scheme can be best delivered and which departments need to work better together. Often in these schemes the benefit is not just transport alone. The Mayor of Bedford ensured that members of the Committee heard about the live considerations on alternative routes around Bedford and highlighted the need for consistent and reliable engagement from the EWRC.

The Treasury Growth Board has been formed to support the delivery of EWR. Currently there has not been any engagement with the Growth Board and we would want to ensure that members are comfortable with proposed approach before going forward.

The local legacy of EWR is important. Whilst EWR inevitably will deliver economic growth benefits for the region and the wider UK, there should also be a focus on maximising EWR's benefit for communities across the region. This should include looking at how EWR can create a legacy around heritage, culture, access to skills, connecting the regions clusters and institutions and enabling thriving knowledge networks.

Through collaboration the Government will see the different strands of ambition coming together led by the local region.

Questions/Comments

Cllr Alexander Nicoll raised a concern that if the Growth Board does not fully consider local authorities' viewpoints this could lead to communication issues.

Naomi Green said the stronger the voice we create, the clearer we are and the more consistent the messages, the harder it is for the Growth Board to not take into account our viewpoints. We will work with the partnership to ensure the right messages are shared.

Cllr Steve Broadbent asked about the process of the NAO report and what will happen next.

Naomi Green said that the report is with the Department for Transport who have to respond to it. They have six months for an interim report and a year for a full report.

Cllr Katie Thornburrow raised that in their local plan they have been told they cannot rely on EWR for transport as it has not submitted a DCO yet. The local

plan is looking to 2040 and beyond which should have to take account of EWR. Cllr Thornburrow said that having some firm messages that the planning officers can take on board would be very useful.

Naomi Green said that officers are talking to Cambridge planning service to identify solutions for this.

Cllr Phil Smart said we could benefit from shifting away from using language around 'this region' as the legacy should be pan regional, it is about linking regions, as well as linking the region together.

Cllr Lesley Wagland provided support for point made by Cllr Philip Smart and Cllr Katie Thornburrow. Raised issues with strategic planning and highlighted her concern that there needs to be better government guidance for the planning process.

Robert Jones said that EWRC are planning to meet with the Combined Authority, and that the Combined Authority are keen to make sure that onward connectivity is embedded.

Cllr Judy Roberts said that EWR has an ability to solve road freight capacity issues.

Naomi Green said that we have spoken to EWRC about managing freight and getting the balance right. The freight needs to be on the right routes as some routes pass close to residential areas and local communities.

Cllr Alexander Nicoll raised that Parliamentarians tend to be more interested in passenger rail rather than freight, and education needs to be provided on freight's importance.

Naomi Green said that EEH have formed a wider South East Freight Partnership with other sub-national transport bodies and we are working cross boundary on freight issues.

Cllr Alex Beckett raised Cambridgeshire's multiple forms of governance and how important it is that these link together.

Naomi Green said that we are having conversations with all the bodies about what we can do to support Cambridge.

6

EWR Company Update- overview and community engagement

To discuss progress and emerging issues/opportunities with East West Railway Company, including D2D and LOPs.

To receive an update on the programme of community engagement, including in the run-up to statutory consultation

Will Gallagher provided an update from the company about what has happened following the previous meeting.

Will Gallagher said that following the March Budget they have secured an accelerated £240 million from the government. This will allow the Oxford to Bedford service to be run and to start upgrading the Marston Vale line with the view that services will run by the end of the decade.

East West Railway Company spoke at the EEH board on first mile, last mile, and active travel. EWRC have published research which focused on attitudes to EWR in Bedford, the results of which showed 3/4 local residents supported the railway. The survey showed that people saw EWR as a benefit for a variety of reasons including improved access to public services for like education and healthcare as well as boosting access to job markets.

Kate Campbell provided an update on EWRC engagement.

Kate Campbell said the EWRC Community newsletter was distributed in February to approximately 9,000 subscribers, with the next issue scheduled for release next week. There is still an aspiration to develop the Community Charter, however it will be postponed until after the second statutory consultation to avoid confusion.

In May, the second round of community conversations will take place. Following feedback each session will be focusing on a single topic to allow more in-depth discussions. The session in May will focus on 'Preparing for DCO'. The first round was well-received, and similar engagement is expected. The latest round of local representative groups started in February. The revised group boundaries based on geography as well as common interests are being trialled. The groups have been well attended and feedback will be collated.

EWRC have sent out 3,600 Land Interest Questionnaires (LIQs) to identify stakeholders with an interest and with land potentially impacted by the project. Responses are being collected, with more questionnaires to be distributed soon. To assist stakeholders, an FAQ document will be published on the website and in the next newsletter, and further inquiries can be addressed through the organization's correspondence channels.

The DfT approved the Door-to-Door Connectivity Strategy. The Local Opportunity Plans involve collaboration with authorities to drive community-led strategic economic growth using the £15million budget that was allocated last spring. Funding will also support a legacy project across the region that focuses on enhancing regional connectivity and service opportunities.

Kate Campbell outlined what EWRC is doing to engage with businesses and authorities. Engagement with authorities includes strategic discussions with LAs' senior leadership and engagement with planning, environmental and technical officers.

Questions/Comments

Cllr Judy Roberts raised concerns around the London Road crossing in Bicester and said the silence around this is worrying.

Will Gallagher said the statutory consultation will have more detail on what the proposals are. Recognised that where there is silence people will be concerned. He said that where they are able to have informal conversations they are. More information will be shared in the statutory consultation.

Cllr Steve Broadbent raised the community charter and asked about timescales.

	<p>Will Gallagher said they have delayed the community charter as they did not want it to get confused with the statement of Community Consultation, it will be progressed after consultation, most likely end of year or next beginning of next year.</p> <p>Cllr Nicola Gribble asked if there is a statutory consultation date and how long the consultation will last?</p> <p>Will Gallagher said there is not a precise launch date as it is still going through DfT approval, the closest date that can be indicated is June/July. Before it goes live there is a 2 week notice period. They are still working on how long the consultation will last, proposing that the first phase is 8 week and second phase 12- 20 weeks total.</p> <p>Cllr Nicola Gribble raised that that some people in her community have received Land Interest Questionnaires (LIQs) when they were previously unaware that they would be affected.</p> <p>Will Gallagher said that as part of the statutory process EWRC are required to write to people, this stage of communication is to ensure the information that is currently held is accurate. EWRC had written to local authorities ahead of these letters but however recognises that for some people this is unexpected which is why this week we will be communicating FAQs.</p> <p>Cllr Steve Broadbent said that it would have been useful to include the FAQs with the LIQs to help with concerns.</p> <p>Cllr Nicola Gribble questioned the validity of the survey Will Gallagher quoted.</p> <p>Will Gallagher said that 1000 is a statistically significant sample and the survey was carried out by an independent polling company.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett asked about the geography of the LIQs, and asked if there is a map of what properties have been given LIQs.</p> <p>Will Gallagher said that they have included over double the number of landowners who would be directly affected as they have considered things like noise for example.</p> <p>Cllr Steve Broadbent asked about local representative groups engagement and who they are aimed at.</p> <p>Kate Campbell said they are for communities and are open to anyone who wishes to attend.</p>
7	<p>EWR Company- community engagement</p>
8	<p>Varsity Way <i>To receive a presentation on proposals for the Varsity Way Active Travel Route</i></p> <p>It is recommended that the board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Notes the update given on progress on the Varsity Way project, and supports the proposed further work as outlined below b) Supports consideration of the work in other relevant East West Rail workstreams, including further development of the door-to-door strategy c) Agrees to support and advocate for Varsity Way being identified as a core priority for door-to-door connectivity improvements related to East West Rail

Recommendations approved

Abi Nichols gave an overview of the Varsity Way scheme. She highlighted that the route is already an existing travel path linking Oxford and Cambridge. The route mirrors the EWR line over some of the route and it is close to some of the stations. It is a mixture of off and on road sections.

The condition of the route varies in standard- the sections closer to urban areas tended to be in better condition whereas rural areas tended to be worse. The initial report was a high-level assessment, noting section by section what is required to improve the route, but much more feasibility work would be needed to understand the condition on the ground.

There is a specific opportunity for the Varsity Way to help improve first mile/last mile active travel along the route of EWR in the Marston vale area. Abi Nichols said that working with the LAs, we would like to undertake further feasibility work related to maximising the potential of the Varsity Way in this area. Alongside this feasibility work, EEH will also be advocating the case for varsity way in the upcoming investment brochures.

Questions/Comments

Cllr Steve Broadbent asked about coordination with different authorities.
Abi Nichols said there is quarterly forum which provides support for active travel officers.

Jeremy Smith said the Greater Cambridge Partnership is looking at the Cambridge to Cambourne scheme which unfortunately leaves a gap between Cambourne and St. Neots. Would welcome support for looking at the Cambridge to Cambourne to St. Neots stretch.

Cllr Alex Beckett said it is crucial to have active travel along the route to allow communities access. He asked if it is possible to consider Varsity Way going along the EWR route alignment.

Abi Nicols said there have been a number of route suggestions and it is important to encapsulate as much as we can but also work with our local partners where we can't facilitate a link.

Cllr Tim Regester asked if Abi Nichols had considered connecting with the Cycling UK's cycling advocacy network and if there is a role for Active Travel England (ATE).

Abi Nichols said that Cycling UK was invited to the stakeholder groups during the development of the report. The Varsity Way scheme has been raised multiple times with ATE and she meets monthly with them.

Cllr Richard Stobart raised the importance of connectivity with already existing active travel routes

9

Digital potential of EWR

To receive an update on progress of the 5G innovation project and its linkage to delivery of EWR

Craig Bowers presented on 5G digital infrastructure potential on East West Rail.

The project aims to resolve poor adoption rates of private 5G networks and even more widely advanced wireless services. The programme has two core projects which is the 5G rail project and the Harwell plan. The Harwell plan aims to provide a private 5G network to the advanced manufacturing sector at Harwell science park.

The 5G project is focused on the section of track between Bicester and Bletchley. It is looking to try and find a way of making it a commercially viable undertaking to install otherwise extremely expensive infrastructure that cannot ordinarily be funded by one use case. The project is trying to demonstrate stacked vertical use cases. This includes passenger rail connectivity and providing infrastructure to service rural land surrounding the rail network.

The project has had extensive engagement with different stakeholders including members of the railway industry and the National Farmers Union (NFU) to understand how viable the reality of the project is.

Questions/Comments

Cllr Steven Broadbent said this is an exciting prospect and would welcome an update in the future. Cllr Broadbent asked how the economic benefit will be quantified.

Craig Bower said there is work being done on benefits and benefit analysis.

Cllr Judy Roberts said it was very interesting that the project has the potential to link into services like health and universities.

Craig Bower said there are opportunities to integrate these services and they are going to pursue them.

Cllr Richard Stobart asked about the potential from Bedford to Cambridge or even Bletchley to Cambridge. He said maybe we could come back to this when the rest of the route is confirmed.

Andrew Summers said deploying the infrastructure across the entire route is fundamental, we are building a worldclass railway and it requires world class communications.

Cllr Lesley Wagland highlighted the work done by the digital innovation zone at Epping Forest.

10

Update from Eastern Section Board

To receive any updates regarding the work of the East West Main Line Partnership's Eastern Section Board

Cllr Alexander Nicoll provided an update from the last Eastern Section Board meeting. He said that there has been positive engagement with local authorities and stakeholders and there has been a strong focus on rail.

Andrew Summers said that at the Eastern Section board meeting four key issues came through. Firstly, a focus on the need for integration and the importance of

	<p>ensuring joined up thinking is promoted and taking place. Next is the continued need to advocate the Ely and Haughley schemes to ensure they are progressed.</p> <p>Thirdly a point around the case for investment going forward into the general election. There is a need to communicate the future benefits and share strong use cases from the region of how investment in rail brings wider positive outcomes. The plan is to collate examples and use them as part of the case for investment.</p> <p>Finally, the identification of short term opportunities to incrementally make better use of the railway in advance of the longer term infrastructure coming in.</p> <p>Questions / Comments</p> <p>Cllr Phil Smart raised Ely and Haughley scheme and said that their full potential cannot be realised unless the line is doubled to Soham. Echoed the need for continued advocacy.</p> <p>Andrew Summers said the this will be picked up by the Ely Taskforce forum.</p> <p>Cllr Richard Stobart said it was essential for the success of the scheme that the track eastern approach to Cambridge from Newmarket are doubled and the junctions improved.</p> <p>Naomi Green said that she has raised the line East of Cambridge towards Newmarket with DfT, DLUHC and Network Rail.</p>
11	<p>Future Meeting Dates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 June 2024 (in-person site visit to EWR western section currently being delivered- 11 am to 3 pm)- <i>(note: this was subsequently postponed due to the election)</i> • 23rd October 2024 (1.30 pm to 3.30 pm, virtual) <i>(note: this has now changed to 17th October, 10:30 to 12:30)</i>
	<p>AOB</p> <p>Cllr Steve Broadbent provided thanks to the efforts and the work of the LEPs on this partnership board.</p>