

## **East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board**

**22 January 2025**

### **Agenda Item 6: Programme update, including Lessons Learnt project, Spending Review, maximising wider service opportunities and finances**

**It is recommended that the Board:**

- a) Agrees to allocate up to £10,000 from the partnership budget to fund the proposed Learning Lessons project (jointly funded with England's Economic Heartland), as per the scope set out in this paper**
- b) Notes progress on the current programme of work underway on behalf of the Board, including the completed Northampton-Old Oak Common brochure**
- c) Agrees the themes which will form the basis of the Partnership's submission to the Spending Review call for evidence**
- d) Notes the finance year to date update and agrees to allocate up to £24,680 of the budget towards support for reviewing the EWR non-statutory consultation in line with the programme priority principles, as agreed by the Board in June 2024.**
- e) Agrees to ensure local contributions from partners are paid as soon as possible.**

#### **1. Lessons Learnt Project**

- 1.1. As the first connection stage of the East West Rail scheme nears operation, this presents an opportunity to reflect on how the scheme has progressed over what has been a 30 year campaign for improved east-west rail connectivity. A core part of the East West Rail "story" is the convening of local authorities to support the scheme and demonstrating our commitment to government.
- 1.2. It is proposed to commission a report on lessons learnt by local authorities, given their experiences of East West Rail scheme during the planning and construction phases, using this information to inform recommendations for future stages of East West Rail and nationally around major infrastructure schemes.
- 1.3. This work would reflect upon the Western Section of East West Rail scheme from its initial conception by the East West Rail Consortium through to running test trains (planning and construction phases) – CS1. This will be explored through the lens of the local authorities directly impacted, as well as the wider East West Main Line Partnership, and other relevant stakeholders.
- 1.4. The resulting report would:

- Support better outcomes during the upcoming planning, engagement and construction stages of the next phases of East West Rail
- Act as a knowledge resource/ 'corporate memory' for local and national government
- Be a fitting way to mark the Partnership/ Consortium's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary – ensuring that the role of local authorities in developing and promoting East West Rail from the 'bottom-up' over many decades is fully understood

1.5. It is envisioned that the basis of this work would be a number of qualitative interviews around key topics and questions, including:

- The role of local authorities in facilitating the delivery of East West Rail Western Section (in planning and construction phases), and the role they continue to play.
- What went well and what could have been improved in the planning and construction phases of Oxford to Milton Keynes, including impact on residents, businesses/local economy, projected timescales, project scope, impact on local roads, level crossing closures, noise
- How the engagement worked on the project and its ability to be scaled up as the project progressed – including with the public and with the project delivery team
- Identifying any secondary or additional benefits of the scheme, and how these opportunities were optimised e.g. social value of the scheme, EWR fibre/5G, economic impacts of construction on local businesses/communities
- How door-to-door connectivity, including station access, was considered as part of integration of the new infrastructure with the existing wider transport network – what has been the role of local authorities in station design and station access considerations?
- Changes from the original scope and their repercussions, particularly around certainty and assumptions within local plans and community buy-in e.g. Aylesbury link, electrification
- The commitment to biodiversity, habitat restoration and ecological compensation sites
- Reflections on managing EWR disruption alongside HS2 disruption (or other major infrastructure construction schemes)
- How lessons learned from other major infrastructure projects have been considered within the planning and construction stages of EWR e.g. Borders Railway

1.6. It is recognised that there have been a number of reviews into East West Rail, which this project does not seek to replicate. By putting the local authority experience at the heart of this work, we seek to highlight the wider impacts and opportunity that major strategic infrastructure schemes present. This is a lens that other investigations have not fully explored (for example the National Audit Office's review was through the prism of national government).

1.7. To conduct this review, the Secretariat is seeking £10,000 from the East West Main Line Partnership budget towards a total cost for the work of £20,000. The remainder the budget would be allocated from EEH. The project would be overseen by members of the EEH team (who also act as the EWMLP secretariat), but the main part of the work, including interviews would be undertaken by consultants.

- 1.8. This work would be procured through EEH as the secretariat for the Board. Subject to confirmation of funding this piece of work could commence within the 2024/25 financial year for feedback to the Board later this year. It is expected that the final report will be able to help inform the board response to the EWR statutory consultation (expected later in 2025/ early 2026).

## 2. Spending Review

- 2.1. It is proposed that the East West Main Line Partnership makes a submission to the multiyear Spending Review call for evidence, the deadline for which is 9 February 2025.
- 2.2. Subject to any Board member comments it is proposed that the response will welcome the Chancellor's commitment to East West Rail's delivery to Bedford and Cambridge, made at the Autumn Budget. It will highlight how the value of East West Rail can be maximised, including by:
- Realising coast to coast connectivity to the East West Main Line, through improving connectivity from Bristol/ Swindon and Worcester to Oxford; and from Ipswich and Norwich to Cambridge (for which improvements to Ely Junction are vital).
  - The opportunity for the Northampton-Milton Keynes-Aylesbury-High Wycombe-Old Oak Common corridor, including the need for the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link.
  - The necessity for improvements to connectivity to and from stations (door-to-door connectivity) to be adequately funded by Government.
  - The opportunity for digital infrastructure to be installed along the next stages of East West Rail, in line with the Bicester-Bletchley section.
  - The need for the region to receive continued multiyear funding to plan how to maximise the 'legacy' of East West Rail, including in terms of door-to-door improvements, tourism, nature and for communities near to but not on the route.

## 3. Maximising the wider service opportunities from East West Rail

- 3.1. The Board was updated in October 2024 on the wider work being undertaken to continue to make the case for improved connectivity and services beyond the core East West Rail route. Much of this work is being progressed by the EEH secretariat with wider partners, in particular Network Rail, Western Gateway STB and Transport East. In summary this includes the following work at present:
- a) **Proposed Bristol to Oxford service:** Supporting development and production of an economic narrative/ advocacy document which will set out the key aspects of the strategic and economic business case work undertaken. This brochure is now nearing completion and has utilised mapping and economic data from Cambridge Econometrics.
  - b) **Northampton- Old Oak Common corridor development:** Developing a 'Global Britain Rail' investment brochure setting out the benefits of developing rail linkages along this corridor. This brochure has now been produced and was agreed by EEH's Strategic Transport Leadership Board in December. It is available in the annex.

- c) **Eastern Section:** Updating the strategic business case for development of new rail services to the East linking with the EWR service at Cambridge. The Chair of the Eastern Section may wish to update on the progress which has been made.

3.2. The Board will be further updated on progress of this work, including circulation of relevant documents, as they are produced.

#### 4. Finance update

4.1. 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. In June 2024, it was agreed by members that local contribution would continue and that the level of contribution would remain the same as 23/24:

- £1,545 for district authorities
- £3,090 for unitary and county authorities

4.2. Payment of contributions in a timely manner ensures that the partnership is able to undertake both its core functions, as well as commission and support wider work. This enables opportunities that help deliver against its key areas of interest.

4.3. If all 24/25 contributions were received, the partnership would have an income of £46,350, adding to the carried forward funds of £111,236 to enable support for core board functions and project in the 2024/25 year. Currently £26,265 has been received in local contributions, amounting to roughly half of local contributions.

4.4. This means the 'income' for the partnership for the financial year to date, including the 23/24 roll forward, is currently £137,501. If all contributions were received the total income for the year would be £157,586. The current planned spend in 2024/25 is £99,770.

4.5. As a reminder, the outline of the board programme that funds are required to take forward was agreed at our meeting in July 2024. This included:

- a) **Continuing to make the case for progressing coast to coast connectivity, enabled through East West Rail:** This includes continuing to support development of a new Oxford to Bristol service, updating the strategic case for eastern rail linkages, and continuing to make the case for the Aylesbury Link.
- b) **Supporting the Partnership through the next stage consultation process:** The exact scope of this work has needed to be confirmed in response to decisions by government and EWR Company in light of the general election and new government. It is proposed that £24,680 of the Board budget is allocated for this work, which includes the commissioning of expert consultants, in line with the programme priorities previously agreed.
- c) **Supporting related workstreams that would maximise door to door connectivity with East West Rail:** It was previously thought that funds may need to be allocated to support further development of Varsity way feasibility. However, this will now be progressed directly through the EEH programme of work.

4.6. To deliver the full programme and secretariat function, as well as ensure financial stability for the Partnership entering into the next financial year, we ask that the remaining contributions from partners are paid as soon as is possible. The Board secretariat is happy to re-send further details to members' authorities if required.

**James Gagg and Fiona Foulkes  
East West Main Line Partnership Secretariat  
January 2025**