

EAST WEST MAIN LINE PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC BOARD

17 October 2024
10:30 to 12:30 meeting

In Person
Milton Keynes Council,
Council Chamber, 1 Saxon Gate East, MK9 3EJ

In attendance

Cllr Steven Broadbent
Cllr Nicola Gribble
Cllr Claire Kidman
Cllr Phil Larratt
Cllr Liz Leffman
Cllr Brian Milnes
Cllr Alexander Nicoll
Cllr Graham Plant
Cllr Judy Roberts
Cllr Neil Shailer
Cllr Phil Smart
Cllr Katie Thornburrow
Cllr Lesley Wagland

Buckinghamshire Council
Bedford Borough Council
Norwich City Council
West Northamptonshire Council
Oxfordshire County Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Suffolk County Council
Norfolk County Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Cambridge City Council
Essex County Council

Item	Agenda Item
1	<p>Introductions and apologies Cllr David Bradbury Cllr Phil Bibby Cllr Alex Beckett Cllr Tom Daly Cllr Richard Stobart Cllr Jim Thorndyke</p> <p>Declaration of interest Phil Smart, Rail Freight Group</p>
2	<p>Minutes of the last meeting <i>To agree the minutes of the meeting and to receive an update on actions</i></p> <p><i>Minutes agreed</i></p> <p>The actions from the previous meeting have been completed.</p>
3	<p>Statement from outgoing Chair <i>To receive an update from the outgoing Chair</i></p> <p>Cllr Steve Broadbent reflected on his time as Chair of the Partnership board, giving thanks to the partners he worked alongside. Cllr Broadbent expressed pride in the achievements across the past three years, highlighting the rebranding from East West Rail Consortium to East West Main Line Partnership and the publication of the "Building Better Connections" brochure. These efforts have emphasised the project's national significance and secured government support.</p> <p>Cllr Broadbent said he looks forward to the future with next year being the 30th anniversary of the Partnership, having the first services run from Oxford to Bletchley and the opening of the new Winslow station. However, he stressed the need for continued advocacy and strong leadership to ensure the scheme is delivered in full.</p> <p>Questions / Statements Cllr Alexander Nicoll gave thanks to Cllr Broadbent and his balanced and fair work as Chair of the partnership.</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman provided her thanks on behalf of EEH for his work as Chair.</p>
4	<p>Election of new Board Chair</p>

	<p><i>To consider nominations and vote the new Chair for the East West Mainline Partnership Board</i></p> <p>Board members elected Councillor Katie Thornburrow as the Chair of the Main Line Partnership Board, with Councillor Alexander Nicoll agreeing to continue as Vice Chair.</p>
5	<p>Network Rail- Western stage update <i>To receive an update regarding delivery of the next stage of East West Rail (EWR) between Oxford and Milton Keynes</i></p> <p>Pip Hoskins provided an update from Network Rail on East West Rail. She said that railway infrastructure works are ready to be handed over to Network Rail for dynamic testing of track, signalling and communications. The dynamic testing with test trains will commence from 21 October 2024.</p> <p>The East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) are continuing to finish works outside of the railway corridor including highway works. The communications in relation to the line of the route are now being handed over fully to Network Rail.</p> <p>Questions / Statements Cllr Steve Broadbent asked what the window for testing the trains is. Pip Hoskins said the window is between 07:00 and 19:00.</p> <p>Cllr Judy Roberts asked what the expected date for passenger services to start running is. Pip Hoskins said there is no confirmed date but it will be in 2025.</p> <p>Pip Hoskins said they are working with East West Railway Company (EWRC) to look at first and last mile connectivity.</p>
6	<p>EWR Company Update- overview <i>To receive an update regarding the work of the EWR Company, including engagement activities, and next steps on the project.</i></p> <p>Will Gallagher said that EWRC are in active engagement with the government and there is an encouraging response in the understanding of the contributions and economic opportunities that EWR can bring.</p> <p>EWRC are working with Ministers to consider choices and options ahead of the consultation which should be launched in November. In preparation for the consultation, EWRC have been contacting landowners whose land is proposed to be impacted in some way by East West Rail. There have been over 650 land information questionnaires since July 2024.</p>

EWRC confirmed they would be publishing draft order limits, which sets out where the line will go and the land it will cover. The design is still being developed but by the consultation it will reach a level of maturity where the information will be reliably shared. This will include more granular detail for example heights of embankments and viaducts or the depth of cuttings.

The statutory consultation will be in the winter of 2025 / early 2026. This will be the proposed scheme for the DCO.

Will Gallagher said that EWRC recognises that putting the information into the public domain with a new level of detail could affect the public and local authorities, therefore EWRC are mobilising their engagement teams and investing more of their resources to be able to answer people's questions.

David Hughes, EWRC Chief Executive, has been having meetings with the host local authorities and MPs and this will continue. EWRC have completed the first tranche of local authority briefings for officers and will move on to further meetings ahead of the consultation where more details such as some of the design work will be shared.

Questions / Comments

Cllr Steve Broadbent asked:

1. If the land identified in the consultation in the draft order limits will make the distinction between land that will be permanently retained, and which will be handed back.
2. If there still plans for a two stage consultation.
3. And, if more information will be provided on rolling stock and how the line will be powered.

Will Gallagher said:

1. When the line is published there will be indications of what the land will be used for, temporary or not, however being completely definitive on the land will wait until the design, construction and logistics plans are more developed. This detail will come in the statutory consultation.
2. EWRC are no longer doing the two-stage statutory consultation and instead are proceeding with a non-statutory consultation and a statutory consultation.
3. Options on how the trains will be powered have been put into government and more clarity will be given when the consultation is launched.

	<p>Cllr Katie Thornburrow suggested holding an interim meeting for a detailed briefing on the final layout of the consultation.</p> <p>Will Gallagher said EWRC have been working with local authorities and with EEH to make progress on discussions on door-to-door connectivity.</p> <p>Cllr Brian Milnes said previously there were questions about the size of Cambourne in terms of population figures and if this has been adjusted.</p> <p>Will Gallagher said he will ensure the answer is sent to Cllr Milnes.</p>
7	<p>Maximising the wider service opportunities from East West Rail</p> <p><i>To receive an update on work to make the case for wider service opportunities, including the Oxford to Bristol Business Case work and new services related to the Aylesbury Link</i></p> <p>It is recommended that the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Notes the wider work being undertaken to continue to make the case for improved connectivity and services following delivery of the core East West Rail route b) Notes the update on planning for a new Oxford to Bristol service, including the business case work undertaken to date, which the Partnership part-funded c) Agrees a budget allocation contribution of up to £10,000 to continue to support progress of this proposal, in particular development of the case for investment d) Notes development of an 'investment brochure' setting out the case for delivery of the Northampton-Old Oak Common rail corridor (including the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link) e) Notes that the Eastern Section Board is also making progress on making the case for connections to Norfolk and Suffolk – the Board Chair will provide an update later in the meeting. <p>Agreed</p> <p>Matt Haywood provided an update on the opportunity for wider services to enhance EWR connectivity.</p> <p>Matt Haywood said that there is now a trial service between Oxford and Bristol with two trains per day on a Saturday which has been very well received and provides great evidence for the case of a daily hourly direct connection. It has cost no capital</p>

	<p>investment to introduce the service however following the trial it has been confirmed that the service would need new rolling stock.</p> <p>The work will result in a case for change document which will set out the strategic and economic benefits of this service and options for future rolling stock.</p> <p>The service offers a 30% improvement in generalised journey time and strengthens the links between and in between Oxford to Bristol and Swindon.</p> <p>Network Rail have looked at a possible future direct service from Milton Keynes to Swindon and Bristol, this has a positive economic case but is not as implementable immediately as the Oxford to Bristol service.</p> <p>Matt Haywood discussed options for freeing up rolling stock for the services, including short- and longer-term possibilities and the potential for an incremental solution.</p> <p>The project has demonstrated the strong economic and strategic case for direct services between Oxford and Bristol and recommends that the direct linkage with EWR services remain secondary to promoting the core service and championing the need to securing rolling stock.</p> <p>The case for change document will be produced by the end of March 2025 and will deliver a short high impact report summarising the benefits which members can use to promote the value of the new service to stakeholders.</p> <p>Questions/ Statements</p> <p>Cllr Liz Leffman highlighted how the service takes traffic off the roads and onto rail in Oxfordshire.</p> <p>Cllr Phil Larratt raised that if the service could be extended to Northampton it would create even more benefits and reduce the traffic greatly on the roads. Cllr Larratt praised the work on Northampton to Old Oak Common rail corridor.</p>
8	<p>Eastern Board Update <i>To receive an update on Eastern Board workstreams</i></p> <p>Andrew Summers provided an update from the Eastern Board and discussed the work they are progressing. He highlighted the high level of attendance that the Eastern Section Board enjoys, including from both the private and public sector.</p>

Andrew Summers highlighted four key priorities from the Eastern Board:

- The continued ongoing support for the Bletchley to Cambridge section
- Transformative connectivity eastward of Cambridge to realise the 'coast-to-coast' benefits of EWR
- Board support for the commissioned study to identify wider business benefits of investment on the eastern section and economic benefits
- Full support for the acceleration of the Ely and Haughley schemes, continuing to make the case to ensure the scheme is delivered.

Andrew Summers provided an update on the economic study work that was supported by the Main Line Partnership Board. The study is to understand the wider benefits that investment in the eastern section would provide to the East's economy. This study will complement the Opportunity East report by the East of England Local Government Association that sets out the important economic role of the East.

Arup have been commissioned to produce the report. In the coming months there will be engagement particularly with the business sector to understand the economic benefits that could be derived from investment in the eastern section. The importance of engaging with MPs and local authorities will also be considered. The draft report is aiming to be ready for December and the final report from January which will be used to feed into the spending review.

Cllr Alexander Nicoll stressed the importance of engaging with cross party MPs to ensure they are informed on these priorities.

Questions / Statements

Cllr Phil Smart raised the updated Keeping Trade on Track brochure and the importance for the continued advocacy for Ely and Haughley junction.

Naomi Green discussed the Keeping Trade on Track brochure, saying that it has been updated following the general election with a new suite of quotes and endorsements. She highlighted that it has been sent to the new Rail Minister.

Cllr Lesley Wagland questioned how to ensure that MPs read our work as there are a lot of competing priorities.

	<p>Cllr Alexander Nicoll said we must ensure that we carve out time to brief and engage with MPs as sending brochures alone will not work.</p> <p>Andrew Summers said that both EEH and Transport East are completing a full suite of MP engagement and have supported a letter to Treasury from the East of England APPG.</p> <p>Cllr Neil Shailer raised the importance of connectivity to rural and smaller communities.</p> <p>Cllr Brian Milnes raised that South Cambridgeshire has scheduled meetings with new MPs in their area.</p>
9	<p>Update on 'Connected Heartland' project <i>To receive an update regarding the work for delivering improved digital connectivity along the next stage of EWR</i></p> <p>Craig Bower discussed the work done on the Connected Heartland project. The project has a partnership with Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.</p> <p>The project was to address the governments problem statement that the UK is falling behind on private 5G networks. It is working to deploy a 5G rail project along the EWR line as well as a private 5G network at the Harwell Science and Innovation Campus.</p> <p>The EWR line presents a good opportunity to develop a different commercial approach which is to put mobile infrastructure outside of the red zone so it can service the passengers on board the trains but also the communities and businesses alongside the track, particularly agritech. Additionally good connectivity will not just benefit the passengers on the trains but also help operational services such as CCTV monitoring.</p> <p>There is a lot of interest in this project from the Department for Transport and from Rail Operating companies.</p> <p>Infrastructure will be built in places where poor coverage has been identified. The existing 4G network will be augmented using a 5G Private Network that provides dedicated additional capacity to the train and surrounding areas.</p>