

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board

25 February 2025

Agenda Item 4: Maximising East West Rail's benefits

It is recommended that the Board:

a) Notes the work to maximise the benefits of East West Rail, including that which is being led by England's Economic Heartland

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To update the Board on the East West Rail Door to Door connectivity programme and EEH's work to maximise the legacy of the East West Rail (EWR) scheme.

2. Key points to note

- 2.1. It is important that the benefits of East West Rail are maximised for local places.
- 2.2. DfT has supported the programme developed by regional partners, including Supercluster Board, Universities Group and EEH, of thematic work that takes forward opportunities to unlock the wider benefits of East West Rail for the region as a whole.
- 2.3. With support of this partnership, EEH's work programme includes integration (including door-to-door connectivity) and 'quality of life' (including tourism and biodiversity).
- 2.4. The legacy work programme is designed complement existing activities underway in the region and in support of East West Rail. This includes EWR Company's Door to Door programme.
- 2.5. EEH is working on a prospectus which brings together all the elements which will maximise East West Rail, including for example, the realisation of the East West Main Line and Aylesbury link.

3. Context

- 3.1. In January the Chancellor highlighted the opportunities of the 'Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor' in fuelling UK economic growth during a major policy speech in Oxfordshire. During this she signalled the importance of East West Rail to achieving this.
- 3.2. As one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the country, it is essential that the benefits of East West Rail are maximised for the UK, region and local communities. The best way of ensuring this is through a locally-led approach.
- 3.3. For around 18 months England's Economic Heartland has been working with Science Supercluster Board, Universities group, Pan Regional Partnership and East West Railway Company, to ensure the government's commitment to East West Rail is focused on its legacy for the region.

4. Context – East West Rail Door to Door Programme

- 4.1. East West Railway Company is embedding a place-based approach in how it plans and delivers the line.
- 4.2. Of fundamental importance to this approach is the Door to Door Connectivity (D2DC) programme, which focuses on connectivity to and from East West Rail stations.

- 4.3. EWR Co has been developing and testing emerging station designs against key drivers for economic growth, focusing on four areas: development context, station sizing, how people access the railway, and station facilities. The designs have been informed by door to door connectivity workshops with local authority officers during 2024 and are focused around seven targeted localities: Oxford to Winslow, Bletchley, Marston Vale Line, Bedford, Cambourne, Tempsford, and Cambridge.
- 4.4. The purpose of the 2024 workshops was to collaborate across the route to inform the development of EWR's proposals for D2DC interventions. These interventions spanned both the direct station area, within the red line boundary and within the Development Consent Order, as well as connectivity to the stations, from outside of the red line boundary and DCO area. Looking broader than the interventions that would be required solely within the red line boundary is beneficial for all parties.
- 4.5. This engagement enabled a shortlist of proposed interventions to be developed. As EWR continues to develop its design response, it will draw on this list of interventions to help determine how communities will access the railway.
- 4.6. Working in partnership with EEH, EWR Co is now re-engaging with local authorities to discuss the emerging designs and proposals for each area and to help with drawing out and testing some of the underpinning assumptions of how people will access the railway in the future.
- 4.7. The engagement starts in March/April 2025, with EEH supporting local authorities through facilitated workshops with EWR Co in each of the seven localities. EEH has also invited bus operators to join these discussions, given the regional priority for bus/rail integration.
- 4.8. As part of these sessions, EWR Company will talk through some of the emerging station related interventions which are within the red line boundary. However, it is also intended to inform interventions outside of the red line boundary, which would feed into the Integration Project legacy workstream (below).
- 4.9. Interventions outside of the red line boundary would not be part of the EWR funded activity. However, EEH will work with EWR, local authorities and bus operators to identify these priorities and seek additional funding to enable them to be delivered, particularly where there is an evidence base for these schemes promoting wider connectivity, modal shift and most of all integration in light of EWR. It remains inconceivable that a scheme of this size would not be developed in line with the emerging principles of the Integrated National Transport Strategy.

5. The East West Rail legacy programme

- 5.1. The East West Rail Legacy Programme, supported by the Department for Transport, has four themes: Business Investment and Knowledge; Skills and Learning; Quality of Life, Place, Heritage and Culture; and Integration.
 - *Business Investment and Knowledge (led by Science Supercluster)* – using a spatial understanding of the innovation ecosystem in the region, identifying where investment will be most useful and where knowledge clusters or gaps exist.
 - *Skills and Learning (led by Universities Group)* – ensuring East West Rail is part of the solution to enable better collaboration so the region has the talent pipeline and upskilling needs to meet future regional and industry needs.
 - *Quality of Life, Place, Heritage and Culture (led by EEH)*– mapping 'quality of life' across the region and identifying where to prioritise incentives in response to local community and business needs. This will consider social infrastructure provision; heritage and culture; leisure and retail; green space and the natural environment.
 - *Integration (led by EEH)* - acting as a catalyst for excellent door-to-door connectivity with the railway, increasing access to jobs alongside leisure, health and educational facilities. Making our existing places more sustainable and liveable.

- 5.2. Details on the projects EEH is leading on – Integration and Quality of Life – for which the Department for Transport has allocated £225,000 of funding for EEH to deliver, are given below.

6. Integration Legacy workstream

- 6.1. The Integration Legacy workstream will build on the Company’s D2DC work (see above), aiming to identify how East West Rail can be a catalyst for establishing a legacy of a regional integrated transport network for the whole region, not just the last mile connectivity around station locations.
- 6.2. This will include maximising the use of interventions, such as new cycling infrastructure or public transport routes, which might be brought forward through the D2DC workstream. It will also consider how to improve journey planning and bring about the travel behaviour change needed.
- 6.3. This work will also create a consistent narrative around East West Rail stations that gives local authorities the driver to improve D2DC within their locality. This work will be linked with the Local Opportunity Plans’ areas.
- 6.4. In early February 2025, EEH held an inception meeting with senior East West Rail officers and the Department for Transport, to start to scope the Integration Legacy Project. The three focus areas that emerged were: Place making (including all of the related activity of local authorities and the EWR Local Opportunity Plans); behaviour change and the integration of bus and rail transport.

7. Quality of Life Legacy workstream

- 7.1. The East West Rail scheme has the potential to have a significant impact on improving quality of life in the region.
- 7.2. The Quality of Life (QoL) workstream will create a narrative around what makes the region a desirable place to live and work, now and into the future, and what the conditions for future success are, and how the benefits of East West Rail can be maximised to have a positive impact on all factors.
- 7.3. The workstream has the following themes:
- Biodiversity and Access to Green Space
 - Tourism and Cultural Heritage
 - Thriving Diverse and Inclusive Communities
- 7.4. *Biodiversity and Access to Green Space*: EEH is working in partnership with the Pan Regional Partnership (PRP) to establish how work can progress the Pan-Regional Environmental Principles¹.
- 7.5. The planned activity will focus on how to work across the scheme and in alignment with the Company’s environmental programme, to demonstrate how the scheme can enhance biodiversity and provide improved access to green space for communities, including those not directly on the line.
- 7.6. *Tourism and Cultural Heritage* – EEH is working in partnership with Michelle Sacks, CEO of Huntingdonshire District Council to explore how the region is working in this area and establish high impact regional priorities. This may include a baseline identifying assets, alongside marketing materials.
- 7.7. *Thriving Diverse and Inclusive Communities* – EEH is working with academics at Oxford Brookes and Anglia Ruskin University on a research project which will focus on the local contexts of towns near to, but not directly connected to, East West Rail, and assessing how stakeholders and residents perceive the regeneration and development potential of the scheme for their locality.

¹ <https://www.oxford-cambridge-partnership.info/>

8. Broader ambitions for East West Rail

- 8.1. It is recognised that the above workstreams are not the totality of the work needed to maximise the value of East West Rail. For example, EEH and the East West Main Line Partnership have been clear on the opportunity of a coast-to-coast main line between Bristol and Norfolk/ Suffolk, the importance of the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link; and of including digital infrastructure within future phases of the line (these featured in the Partnership's Spending Review submission).
- 8.2. Equally, if we are to ensure East West Rail benefits communities, then it is important that the impact of construction on local businesses and residents is minimised – here, the Partnership's work on 'lessons learnt' as discussed at its previous meeting is vital.
- 8.3. EEH is therefore producing a document which brings together a more complete set of elements which our local authorities and evidence suggest are needed to maximise East West Rail: tying everything together in one short, simple prospectus.
- 8.4. This will be available for the next EEH and Partnership boards.

Naomi Green
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