

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board Minutes

Extraordinary meeting to discuss 'You Said We Did' East West Railway Company consultation response

19th November 2025

16:00 to 16:30

Virtual

Present:

CLlr Katie Thornburrow
CLlr Alexander Nicoll
CLlr Nicola Gribble
CLlr David Bradbury
CLlr Alex Beckett
CLlr Judy Roberts
CLlr Thomas Broom
CLlr Liz Leffman
CLlr Richard Butler
CLlr Tom Daly
CLlr Cliff Waterman

Cambridge City Council
Suffolk County Council
Bedford Borough Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Oxfordshire County Council
West Northamptonshire Council
East Suffolk Council
West Suffolk Council

Apologies:

CLlr Claire Kidman
CLlr Ian Mantle
CLlr Jodie Chillery
CLlr Graham Plant
CLlr Peter Martin
CLlr Russel Goodchild
CLlr Lesley Wagland
CLlr Brian Milnes
CLlr Phil Smart
CLlr Richard Stobart

Norwich City Council
North Herts Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Norfolk County Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Central Bedfordshire Council
Essex County Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Ipswich Borough Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council

EEH Team Members Present:

Naomi Green
James Golding-Graham
Suzanne Winkels
Hanane Elmaarouf
Fiona Foulkes
James West

Managing Director
Head of Decarbonisation and Innovation
Head of Transport Planning
Business Unit Co-Ordinator
Capability, Excellence & Governance Manager
EEH Project Lead

1	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Cllr Katie Thornburrow (KT) welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p>
2	<p>East West Railway Company</p> <p>Naomi Green welcomed Ed Leach and Natalie Wheble from East West Rail Company and thanked attendees for joining at short notice.</p> <p>Natalie Wheble & Ed Leech introduced the item and presented an update on the East West Railway Company.</p> <p>Natalie Wheble said that the published document, referred to as the “You Said, We Did” report, is based on feedback from the non-statutory consultation held between November and January. Since then, the team has engaged with statutory stakeholders and shared emerging plans to refine design proposals. Alongside this report, a consultation feedback summary has also been released, collating over 6,000 pieces of feedback.</p> <p>Key updates shaped by community feedback were presented, focusing on ten major areas of interest. These include the introduction of an option for a motorised underpass at Bicester London Road level crossing, an eastern entrance at Bletchley Station, and the selection of Stewartby station’s location to align with the proposed Universal theme park and community input. Other significant changes include adjustments to Bedford St. John station car park, relocation of Cambourne Station, a tunnel design change at Bourne Airfield, and proposals for an eastern entrance and new station at Cambridge East.</p> <p>The report also outlines ambitions to increase East West Rail’s capacity to run more and longer trains, ensuring the railway continues to serve its core purpose of connecting communities while supporting new developments such as Universal. An interactive map has been launched on the website to help stakeholders explore details relevant to their local areas. Also, safeguarding directions have been updated to reflect the latest proposals, and affected landowners have been notified. Engagement with these landowners has been ongoing and contact points have been provided for further discussions. Engagement and consultation will continue into 2026.</p> <p>Natalie Wheble said that while the “You Said, We Did” document is extensive, it does not cover every piece of feedback or every section of the route. Some elements remain under review, particularly those affected by changes following the Universal theme park announcement. These components will be addressed through engagement and consultation next year. She also said the anticipated impact of the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill, expected to be passed in the coming months, which will shape future engagement and consultation principles.</p> <p>Plans for early 2026 include design update sessions in January focusing on Bicester London Road level crossing, followed by sessions on Bedford Station and surrounding areas in February. These activities will lead into a lighter-touch eight-week consultation in spring, before submitting the Development Consent Order. The consultation will be targeted and localised, ensuring communities can discuss issues most relevant to them.</p>

Ed Leech provided feedback on reactions received since the morning’s announcements, noting that responses have been constructive and stakeholders recognise their input has influenced design changes. Highlights included strong cross-party support in Cambridge for East West Rail improvements, such as a new station to the east, and adjustments to tunnel designs based on community feedback. Similarly, engagement in Bicester has led to alternative solutions for the level crossing. Ed said the team is committed to continued collaboration and offered to provide one-to-one briefings or attend Cabinet meetings as plans progress.

Cllr Katie Thornburrow asked whether there would be a dedicated consultation for residents and businesses regarding the proposed East Cambridge station.

Natalie Wheble confirmed that Cambridge East is among the priority areas for engagement, though feasibility work is still ongoing, and the timeline for consultation will be clarified later.

Ed Leech said that opportunities for the City Council to provide input will be available.

Cllr Alexander Nicoll welcomed progress on plans east of Cambridge, and mentioned the importance of delivering Ely and Haughley improvements to realise the broader East West Rail vision. He noted that the positive outlook for developments east of Cambridge was encouraging.

Cllr Liz Leffman welcomed the plan for London Road underpass, which will require funding from multiple sources. She referenced the approval of the OxRAIL 2040 plan for Oxfordshire, including improvements to Oxford Station and funding for the Cowley branch line, which are expected to complement East West Rail’s future plans.

Cllr Judy Roberts asked about delays to the timetable for the Chiltern passenger service and raised concerns about the importance of progressing this work.

Natalie Wheble said that details on this issue would need to come from Chiltern and the Department for Transport, but the feedback would be passed on.

Naomi Green responded to the point raised by Councillor Roberts, confirming that the issue would be discussed at the upcoming EEH Board meeting on the 4th December. She proposed drafting a letter for Cllr Katie Thornburrow to sign, expressing the Board’s disappointment to the Department for Transport and Chiltern. Board members supported this approach.

Cllr Katie Thornburrow agreed and reinforced the need to keep future agendas focused on progressing the eastern section of the route, including dualling the track to Newmarket and improving services to Ipswich.

Naomi Green said that integration work across the EEH region is ongoing to improve connectivity, including links to Northampton and the Midland Main Line, ensuring seamless travel even for areas not directly on the East West Rail route.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 26 February 2026 (Virtual)• 23 April 2026 (Virtual)• 09 July 2026 (Virtual)• 22 October 2026 (In Person)
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