

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board Minutes

30th October 2025

11:00 to 13:00

In Person

Present:

Cllr Katie Thornburrow
Cllr Alexander Nicoll
Cllr Nicola Gribble
Cllr Graham Plant
Cllr Lesley Wagland
Cllr Tom Daly
Cllr David Bradbury
Cllr Alex Beckett
Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr Richard Stobart
Cllr Phil Smart

Cambridge City Council
Suffolk County Council
Bedford Borough Council
Norfolk County Council
Essex County Council
East Suffolk Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Buckinghamshire Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Ipswich Borough Council

Apologies:

Cllr Claire Kidman
Cllr Liz Leffman
Cllr Richard Butler
Cllr Brian Milnes
Cllr Judy Roberts
Cllr Ian Mantle
Cllr Jodie Chillery

Norwich City Council
Oxfordshire County Council
West Northamptonshire Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Oxfordshire County Council
North Herts Council
Central Bedfordshire Council

EEH Team Members Present:

Naomi Green
Adam King
Fiona Foulkes
Mingfei Ma
Hanane Elmaarouf

Managing Director
External Affairs and Policy Manager
Capability, Excellence & Governance Manager
Analysis and Modelling Specialist
Business Operations Assistant

	<p>Cllr Katie Thornburrow (KT) welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p>
2	<p>Minutes of last meeting</p> <p>Board members were content with the minutes of the last meeting.</p>
3	<p>Chair's Update</p> <p>Cllr Katie Thornburrow said the East West Rail integration programme is critical for maximising benefits of new infrastructure and aligning with the forthcoming national transport strategy. She noted the successful launch of the Eastern Section case for investment in September and stressed the need for collaboration to deliver wider economic benefits.</p>
4	<p>East West Railway Company Update</p> <p>Naomi Green welcomed Ed Leach and Tom Wilson from East West Rail Company.</p> <p>Tom Wilson & Ed Leech introduced the item and presented an update on the East West Railway Company.</p> <p>Ed Leech said the past six months had been busy behind the scenes, with work on 6,000 consultation responses, Universal Studios impact, and the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. He said the Bill aims to streamline consenting while maintaining engagement, moving towards iterative engagement rather than single large consultations. He also noted engagement challenges for local authorities and offered tailored approaches.</p> <p>Tom Wilson outlined active travel plans, explaining three categories of interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bucket 1: Within EWR scope and funded by EWR. • Bucket 2: Mitigation measures. • Bucket 3: Wider schemes needing partnership and funding support. <p>Tom Wilson said the goal is a coherent, fundable active travel network to maximise benefits and reduce car dependency.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett asked for assurance that designs address community segregation and capacity issues.</p> <p>Tom Wilson said mitigation for segregation falls under Buckets 1 and 2 and committed to collaboration on design standards.</p> <p>Cllr Judy Roberts asked about level crossings and suggested standardised junction templates and secure bike storage.</p> <p>Tom Wilson said he would take this back to the team.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas Broom asked about the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes and HS2 coordination.</p> <p>Ed Leech said the link is not in the current government scope, so no active discussions are taking place.</p>

	<p>Cllr Peter Martin asked about the Oxford–Milton Keynes service start date.</p> <p>Ed Leech said this is with DfT and Chiltern Railways; unlikely to start in 2025.</p> <p>Cllr Alexander Nicoll said early integration of bus and rail services is essential to avoid costly retrofits.</p>
5	<p>Implications of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill</p> <p>Fiona Foulkes introduced the item and provided an update on the proposed removal of the requirement to undertake a statutory consultation for Development Consent Orders (DCOs) as part of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), such as East West Rail, under the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.</p> <p>Cllr Leslie Wagland said the NSIP regime risked shifting heavy lifting onto local authorities and residents if promoters bring forward insufficiently worked-up schemes, citing experience with large energy projects and highway interfaces.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett said residents often feel unheard and urged genuine listening while balancing the need to deliver infrastructure. He said construction traffic impacts on fragile local roads must be managed.</p> <p>Cllr Judy Roberts said promoters increasingly appear to treat DCO outcomes as assured and said legal changes risk undermining the need for well-prepared projects and robust consultation.</p> <p>Cllr Peter Martin said Buckinghamshire residents were angry that unexpected night-time freight was operating on the line without prior engagement or warning. He urged EWR and Network Rail to communicate directly with impacted communities.</p> <p>Cllr Thomas Broom said recent major projects had not engaged properly with councils or communities and said the system lacks accountability. He said mitigations often fall away through revisions and cost-cutting.</p> <p>Board considered the implications of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill currently going through Parliament, including its removal of the need for a statutory consultation</p>
6	<p>Integration</p> <p>Naomi Green introduced the item and provided an update on EEH’s major workstream considering how East West Rail can be fully integrated into the wider transport system, for the benefit of local communities.</p> <p>Cllr Alex Beckett said a clear user hierarchy (pedestrians, active travel, buses, cars) must underpin all station and interchange designs.</p> <p>Board noted progress on EEH’s East West Rail integration programme.</p>
7	<p>Eastern Section Update</p>

	<p>Cllr Alexander Nicoll and Alastair Southgate presented the item and provided an update on the Eastern Section.</p> <p>Cllr Alexander Nicoll said the Eastern Section case for investment was launched in Newmarket and will inform a Strategic Outline Business Case.</p> <p>Alastair Southgate said work is underway with Network Rail and Arup to scope the SOBC and align with east of Cambridge plans.</p> <p>Cllr Phil Smart said Ely and Haughley are essential for freight, east-west passenger links, and future services east of Cambridge. He said the Treasury should not be overloaded with multiple requests at once but that both schemes strengthen each other.</p> <p>Naomi Green said government understands the case for Ely and Haughley but maintains it cannot afford them. EEH continues developing alternative financing proposals and coordinating advocacy across regions.</p> <p>Cllr Lesley Wagland said changes to the planning system could let major schemes move forward without enough scrutiny. She said the NSIP process is no longer working as intended and that other current projects already show signs of poor preparation and limited consultation.</p> <p>Cllr Alexander Nicoll said he is frustrated at the lack of progress on Ely and Haughley and that the outcomes of national transport workshops have not fed into government decisions. He said both schemes are national priorities and should not be delayed or overshadowed by larger projects, especially as costs rise each year.</p>
8	<p>Future Meeting Dates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26 February 2026 (Virtual) • 23 April 2026 (Virtual) • 09 July 2026 (Virtual) • 22 October 2026 (In Person)