

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board

23 July 2026

Agenda Item: 5 Financial Update, subscriptions and workstream update

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Provides a steer on proposed projects for 2026/27**
- b) Notes the update on work being undertaken by EEH to support delivery of East West Rail**
- c) Agrees to freeze EWMLP subscription rates for 2026/27**
- d) Agrees that EWMLP pays £31,212 to cover secretariat costs, we will work with Transport East to ensure these are fairly distributed in support of both the East West Mainline Partnership and the Eastern Section Board**

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This paper aims to update the East West Main Line Partnership Board members on work being undertaken by England's Economic Heartland, as secretariat for the partnership, to maximise the opportunity presented by East West Rail. It also provides an update on EWMLP's budget and proposes that 2026/27 subscription rates are frozen.

2. Key Points to Note

- 2.1. EEH is working with local authorities and EWR Company to maximise the opportunity presented by East West Rail as a core mainline railway connecting the Oxford to Cambridge Growth corridor, and beyond that from coast to coast.
- 2.2. A core part of this is ensuring East West Rail continues to provide transformational connectivity opportunities for as many people as possible across the region, including progressing key projects such as: promoting connections both east and west including the link to Aylesbury as part of wider Northampton to Old Oak Common, services east including improvement at Ely and services between Oxford and Swindon to Bristol.
- 2.3. EEH continues to deliver the East West Rail Legacy Integration Programme, using funding received from the Department for Transport. Within the programme, EEH is leading on two of the four themes: Integration and Quality of Life, Place, Heritage and Culture.

- 2.4. Given the pressures on local authority budgets, it is proposed that EWMLP subscription rates are frozen at £1,545 for district authorities and £3,090 for unitary and county authorities.

3. Context

- 3.1. As the sub-national transport body for the region covering East West Rail between Oxford and Cambridge, EEH has been the secretariat for the EWMLP since 2016. In this role, EEH works with local authorities and East West Railway Company from a regional, strategic and technical perspective, aiming to facilitate effective, collaborative working, as well as enabling tangible deliverables.
- 3.2. There are several strands to this work, covering door to door connectivity, bus/rail integration, engagement with EWR Co, and legacy projects relating to quality of life.
- 3.3. In addition, there is more strategic work being undertaken by EEH to ensure the role of EWR is planned and considered for all parts of the region. This includes places not directly on the route of the railway but more particularly those places that had been planned with the fair expectation that EWR would be delivered, but funding has not yet been forthcoming – most notably for the Aylesbury link.

4. EWR Planning Approvals Update

- 4.1. EWR Co is pressing ahead with the preparation needed to make their DCO application to the Planning Inspectorate (currently we are in the pre-application stage) as part of gaining the relevant planning consents from the Secretary of State to deliver the scheme. This is still expected to be submitted in summer 2027.
- 4.2. A third route-wide non-statutory consultation has been undertaken, with further engagement expected from EWRCo particularly where there will be localised impacts.

5. Financial Update – 2025/26

- 5.1. The East West Main Line Partnership carried over £73,697 into financial year 2025/26. In addition, £43,260 covering 25/26 and 24/25 was received in local contributions, further contributions are still expected.
- 5.2. This meant that the total income for 2025/26 was £116,957. In the same year, the Partnership Board agreed a spend of £82,912. The below table outlines the spend of the partnership over the financial year. Some projects commenced in the previous financial year are still in progress, with project completion expected in the coming months.

Expenditure	Actual	Planned	Commentary
Staffing inc WiK management, secretariat and communications support	£31,212	£31,212	Covering costs of EWMLP secretariat function including policy and communications, project management, budget control and work in kind record keeping.
Website, Marketing and Graphics Materials	£900	£2,900	

Making the case for East West Rail – Eastern section	£12,500	£12,500	
Meeting Management	£1,293.25	£1,300	
Support for DCO and consultation response	£0	£25,000	With changes to government legislation, there is no statutory consultation for EWR. Response to the non-statutory consultation was drafted using in-house technical expertise.
Major infrastructure lesson learned	£10,000	£10,000	Contribution to major infrastructure lessons learned project. Project completed and invoiced.
Total	£55,905.25	£82,912	

5.3. As of 31st March 2026, the Partnership's balance stood at £61,052. This accounts for the roll over from the financial year 25/26 and income received minus the spend from 25/26. The full amount of was rolled over into financial year 2026/27.

5.4. £40,170 in local contributions were received in financial year 202526. We are still expecting £4,635 from 25/26 and £1,545 from 24/25 in local contributions which were not received by year end. In order to keep contributions as low as possible, it is vital that contributions are received from all members.

6. Financial Update 2026/27

6.1. Looking ahead, and in recognition of ongoing financial pressures facing local authorities, it is proposed that subscription levels for 2026/27 are frozen at current levels: £1,545 for district authorities and £3,090 for unitary and county authorities.

6.2. Assuming subscriptions are secured again from all member authorities during the 2026/27 financial year, this will generate £50,985 of income.

6.3. For the 2026/27 financial year we are asking for all local contributions by end December 2026 to avoid delays in receiving funding.

6.4. As part of setting the work programme for 2026/27, the Partnership is asked to agree continuation of two key principles of the EWMLP contributions:

- Local Authorities to continue their local contributions to the EWMLP into 2026/27, with funding held at current levels.
- That £31,212 is paid to towards its costs of running the partnership secretariat, this covers not just meeting preparation but coordination of activities that have been identified as priorities of this partnership.

- 6.5. This year, recognising the increasing level of activity supporting work on the Eastern Section, it is proposed that EEH works with Transport East to ensure local contributions are used as effectively as possible across both organisations. As Transport East provides the secretariat for the Eastern Section Board, it is appropriate—subject to Board agreement—that EWMLP funding supports this function, alongside the secretariat for the main EWMLP Board. This approach will help ensure that local contributions deliver the greatest possible direct benefit to the communities they represent.
- 6.6. Should all local contributions for 2026/27 be received and taking into account money previously ringfenced for projects, contribution to secretariat and allocated marketing budget, funds for new projects in 2026/27 is projected to be £74,962.

7. Proposed EWMLP projects for 2026/27

- 7.1. The Partnership Board will want to maintain a high level of focus in this financial year on both supporting individual partners as well as considering a Partnership-wide input to the DCO process as EWR moves to formal submission. To ensure the capacity and capability to provide an informed response, it is proposed that the EWMLP budgets an initial £20,000 to allow for officers to commission additional technical expertise as required.
- 7.2. In holding a budget for the Partnership, the secretariat is able – once agreed by the Partnership Board - to take forward smaller pieces of work that have an important role in progressing the opportunity of East West Rail. In the past this has included: making the case for East West Rail; exploring the opportunity of Oxford-Swindon; and setting out the need for delivery of the scheme in full, including the Aylesbury Link and recently the Lesson Learnt project.
- 7.3. Building on the success of previous years, it is proposed the secretariat continue to focus on projects and initiatives that have been a priority of this partnership for some time.
- 7.4. A key initiative this year will be to ensure East West Rail has full and active engagement in Parliament. We are exploring the option of a potential All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the Oxford to Cambridge region, which would include a major focus on securing the long-term commitment to delivering, opening and maximising the opportunity of East West Rail.

The proposed APPG will help support engagement with parliamentarians and key stakeholders, ensuring that the interests and priorities of the East West Main Line Partnership continue to be represented and promoted at a national level, while strengthening advocacy for the Partnership's strategic objectives. It is therefore expected that the East West Mainline Partnership would want to have a full and active role in supporting the APPG and therefore, a proposed contribution of £5000 for 26/27 is sought from the partnership.

- 7.5. Staff time is expected to be used to continue to support the coordination of place-based initiatives and to work with East West Railway Company on their engagement mechanisms to ensure they are fit for local authorities.

8. EEH Legacy Integration Programme

- 8.1. EEH received funding from the Department for Transport, to lead on two key themes notably: Integration and Quality of Life.
- 8.2. The Integration theme is built on the recognised potential that EWR has to unlock and catalyse integrated transport for the region. EEH published phase one of this integrated approach in December 2025.

- 8.3. The next phase is underway and is focused on the delivery of Transport Opportunity Plans (TOPs) to support the delivery a truly integrated public transport and active travel network: providing seamless, multimodal, door-to-door journeys. These are being delivered through the lens of EEH's nine Opportunity Statements, identified in the phase one report, and are focused on key locations across the region.
- 8.4. The sequencing of TOPs is dependent on a wide range of factors and, experience tells us, that these programmes are best delivered when the local conditions are right – this can be determined by a range of factors, such as a new theme park or to coincide with activity already underway within the partner authority. The Universal and Silverstone TOPs are already progressing, but the final sequencing of TOPs is still to be agreed. Early work has highlighted the following potential locations and timing:
- 2026/27 – linked to wider economic opportunities: i) Universal/Bedford, ii) Marston Vale and iii) Silverstone
 - 2027/28 – linked to EWR: i) Cambourne, ii) Tempsford and iii) Milton Keynes; linked to wider economic opportunities: i) Luton and ii) wider airport connectivity (reflecting the timing of the expansion plans of Heathrow, Stansted and Luton airports).
 - 2028/29 – wider links to EWR: i) Aylesbury and Westcott ii) Bicester and wider economic opportunities iii) Stevenage.
- 8.5. Discussions with DfT colleagues have emphasised the potential for the TOPs to act as a test bed to realise the Government's published 'Better Connected' strategy. Alignment of the 'Better Connected' priorities, along with the nine opportunity statements, acts as a baseline for EEH to identify proposed interventions.
- 8.6. EEH's integration work is supported by an Integration Taskforce of national experts; the first session of the Taskforce was held in May 2026 with a second Taskforce held in July.
- 8.7. The Quality of Life, Place, Heritage and Culture theme has been divided into three workstreams: Tourism, Access to Green Spaces, and Thriving Communities. The Access to Green Spaces project has been completed, establishing an evidence base to inform future activity. The Tourism workstream has gained more significance with announcement of Universal United Kingdom resort in Bedford and potential theme park Puy Du Fou in Bicester. The intention of the work is to establish the conditions to create and maximise a regional visitor economy and map of key tourist destinations across the region. Work on this continues to progress with the outcomes of this work expected in Autum.

9. EEH Wider Rail Work

Maximising East West Rail Opportunities and HS2 released capacity

- 9.1. EEH continues to progress its wider rail priorities that support the delivery of EWR as a mainline. To support this EEH Board has recently endorsed EEH's Main Line Priorities Rail Study that includes packages relating to EWR and 'main line connectivity', stressing the need to maximise both direct and indirect benefits from major rail infrastructure projects, in particular EWR and HS2.
- 9.2. The report includes recommendations to enhance EWR to expand EWR services beyond the line's core geography between Oxford and Cambridge. Some of these opportunities rely on further uncommitted infrastructure enhancements such as Bletchley cord and Aylesbury Link to create a link between Northampton and Old Oak Common.

- 9.3. GWR was successful in securing approval from the Office of Rail & Road (ORR) for a new Oxford-Swindon-Bristol service, which started in May. The service runs every two hours in each direction, Monday-Saturday, calling at Oxford, Swindon, Chippenham, Bath Spa and Bristol Temple Meads.
- 9.4. GWR have stated their ambition to run an hourly service in the future. In its determination, the ORR stated that such an increase in frequency would depend on further consideration of performance impacts and targeted safety improvements at level crossings on the route.

The Growth Intersection – Ely Area Capacity Enhancement

- 9.5. EEH, working with the East West Main Line Partnership, Western Gateway, Network Rail and GWR, has played a key role in advocating for this service. Its successful introduction is testament to this collaborative effort across local government and the rail industry.
- 9.6. The Growth Intersection proposition was launched at UKREiiF in May. This seeks to reignite momentum to secure funding for the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement and wider interventions across East Anglia, following HM Government's decision not to commit funding in the previous Spending Review.
- 9.7. Whereas previous advocacy has focussed on the schemes' significant freight benefits, this latest work seeks to shine a greater light on how these interventions can unlock better passenger services and the subsequent opportunities for economic growth.
- 9.8. This initial work has been largely based on existing work from rail industry and Local Authority partners. Following the successful launch at UKREiiF, EEH will work with CPCA, Transport East, Local Government East and Network Rail to determine what additional work is required to strengthen the case for the scheme.
- 9.9. It is anticipated that a refreshed, strengthened case could be submitted to Government in the next Spending Review, with a view to unlocking funding for delivery.

Regional Visitor Economy

- 9.10. EEH are taking forward work to support the creation of a regional visitor economy. This is focusing on the opportunity that EWR, Universal United Kingdom Resort and proposed PuyDuFou as a catalyst for creating a regional visitor offer.
- 9.11. EEH have commissioned Visit Oxford to develop an action plan on how to this forward working with Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEPs)/local authority partners on the scope, needs and gaps of localised visitor economies. They have already mapped 300+ local/regional visitor attractions, commissioned a supporting "EEH Economic Impact of Tourism Study" as a baseline and are currently developing "Needs and Gaps Analysis" is expected to be available by end of summer.
- 9.12. The Economic Impact Study shows that the value of Tourism in the region is £9,231,208,000 and supports over 150,000 tourism related jobs.

Suzanne Winkels
(on behalf of) East West Main Line Partnership Secretariat
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