

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board

23 July 2026

Agenda Item: 7 East West Rail 2026 Consultation Response

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Considers and approves the EWMLP consultation response to East West Rail 2026 consultation.**

1. Purpose

- 1.1. East West Rail has recently closed its third non-statutory public consultation on the scheme. This paper provides an overview to the proposed EWMLP consultation response.

2. Context

- 2.1. East West Railway Company (EWRCo) recently undertook a non-statutory consultation, building on the *You Said, We Did* report in 2025. This included a number of new elements, including the phased delivery approach and the increased demand at Stewartby to serve Universal United Kingdom Resort.
- 2.2. To enable the Board to consider the wider regional response to the consultation documentation, EWRCo are aware that the EWMLP will be submitting its response following this Board meeting.
- 2.3. The consultation invited feedback on a number of location-specific proposals, as well as providing additional information on certain route-wide matters.

3. Thematic Response

- 3.1. The proposed EWMLP response draws heavily on the Partnership's agreed six key strategic areas of interest as outlined in Annex 1. The EWMLP Secretariat has worked with officers across our local authority partners and with Transport East to develop our thinking and proposed response.
- 3.2. In Members' consideration of this response, attention is particularly drawn to four high-level themes which have not previously been discussed by this Board:
- Given the changes in scope of the project, such as demand from Universal United Kingdom Resort, confirmation of the consolidated stations options and increased services, the response questions whether a review of previous decisions have been undertaken in light of these – for example, around third party funding of Bletchley eastern entrance rather than use of the station access and mitigations schemes funds or mitigations from station closures to ensure public transport access to the new locations.
 - The proposed phased delivery approach proposed changes the expected timeline in comparison to the previous Connectivity Stages-based programme. The lack of detail makes it challenging to understand the delivery implications.

- Given the level of cumulative impact from ongoing or recent major developments in proximity to the EWR works (such as Universal United Kingdom Resort and various NSIPs), the EWMLP wishes to see a clear commitment to coordinating and working alongside local authority partners and with EEH on route-wide, coordination across local authority boundaries to minimise disruption for all. Construction impact is keenly felt by local residents.
- The response also expresses disappointment that this consultation has been undertaken in the pre-election period for multiple local planning authorities along the route. This conflicts with the reasonable expectation of local authorities that there will be meaningful engagement, including the unfettered opportunity to respond to consultation. As yet, secondary legislation has not been passed to fully remove the requirement for statutory consultation under the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, nor has supporting guidance been published. Whilst the EWMLP is understanding of the need for timely delivery of major infrastructure to support the growth of the region, with East West Rail acting as a pathfinder for this NSIP streamlining measure, this should not come at the expense of local authorities and communities having the opportunity to feed into and help steer development in their area.

4. Location Specific Responses

- 4.1. The EWMLP Secretariat is aware of a number of location-specific concerns, which will be reflected in individual local authority responses. The EWMLP Secretariat has worked with officers across our local authority partners to develop local specific responses and reflect the local position.
- 4.2. In three places, it was felt that the specific impact on the local communities was so significant (and potentially spatial in decision making factors) that it was not appropriate for EWMLP to respond: Bletchley West Train Maintenance Depot; Marston Vale level crossing updates; and Cambridge Eastern Train Care Centre.
- 4.3. For the line of route west of Oxford to Milton Keynes, the proposed response particularly picks up:
 - The need for clarity on the timescales for retrofitting and new infrastructure requirements.
 - The need for greater certainty around the Cowley Branch Line to explain assertions that no further works are required at Oxford station, despite increased train services.
 - The need for London Road level crossing in Bicester closure solution to be an underpass with appropriate mitigations if third-party funding does not come forward.
 - Recognition that the London Road level crossing area is highly pedestrianised, and that EWRCo and Oxfordshire County Council need to work together to develop a safe design that is also future-proofed.
 - The opportunity around Bristol-Bath-Swindon-Oxford services being extended onto EWR.
- 4.4. For the Marston Vale Line enhancements (Milton Keynes to Bedford), the proposed response captures:
 - That Woburn Sands, Ridgmont, Lidlington, Stewartby and Bedford St John's stations are the minimum viable solution for supporting the economic development opportunity presented by the Martson Vale Line.
 - The need for clarity on the transitional arrangements for Marston Vale Line services and stations, recognising that this is an existing operational railway and that "new stations" are really relocated replacements.

- Concerns that public transport connections between closed stations need to be retained e.g. through the pump priming of bus services, and that these provisions must be in place prior to any closures taking effect.
- The opportunity for the “new stations” to embed exemplar integration into their design.
- Welcomes the inclusion of the eastern entrance to Bletchley station; however, requests review for whether funding for this could have been included within the station access and mitigations funded schemes, particularly in light of Fenny Stratford station closure.
- Concerns that the highways infrastructure to access Ridgmont station is conditional on part-funding by housing developer, but there is no allocated site or extant planning permission in this area.
- The need for local community usage of the consolidated Stewartby station to be recognised and serviced, alongside Universal United Kingdom Resort visitors.
- The need to understand timelines and timescales for delivery between Stewartby and Bedford, including electrification, Bedford St John’s station, track realignment and sidings in Bedford area.
- The need to work with the local authority with regard to regeneration of Bedford in order to balance the local impact on residents with local economic aspirations.
- Welcomes inclusion of an ‘up fast’ platform at Bedford station to enable interchanges with Midland Main Line express services.
- The need for the car parking assumptions along the Marston Vale Line to take into consideration the likelihood of overspill parking impacts resulting from high car parking feeds at the Universal United Kingdom Resort.

4.5. For the section of proposed route Bedford to east of Cambridge, the proposed response reflects on:

- The opportunity to embed exemplar integration into the design of Cambourne station.
- The need for greater clarity around train service specifications at Cambridge as the rationale for major changes to the station and track layout.
- The need for coordination with Network Rail around blockages at Cambridge to minimise disruption for all.
- Welcomes the inclusion of Cambridge East station within the scheme’s thinking, and the opportunity to embed exemplar integration into its design.
- The need to understand what further interventions would be required if third party funding for Cambridge East station does not come forward.
- The opportunity around EWR services being extended to Ipswich and Norwich via Cambridge.

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(on behalf of) East West Main Line Partnership Secretariat
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