East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board Minutes

23rd July 2026

11:00 to 13:00

Virtual

Present:

Cllr Katie Thornburrow	Cambridge City Council
Cllr Nicola Gribble	Bedford Borough Council
Cllr Robin Wyatt	Cambridge & Peterborough Combined Authority
Cllr Tumi Hawkins	Cambridge City Council
Cllr Brian Milnes	South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr Judy Roberts	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Thomas Broom	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Richard Butler	West Northamptonshire Council
Cllr Peter Martin	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Tracey Grant	Ipswich Borough Council
Cllr Alex Beckett	Cambridgeshire County Council
Cllr Thomas Broom	Buckinghamshire Council
Cllr Phil Smart	Ipswich Borough Council
Cllr Sue Clark	Central Bedfordshire Council

Apologies:

Cllr Tim Bearder	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr Gareth Epps	Oxfordshire County Council
Cllr David Allatt	Cambridgeshire County Council
Cllr Henry Batchelor	South Cambridgeshire District Council

EEH Team Members Present:

Naomi Green	Managing Director
Suzanne Winkels	Head of Transport Planning
Fiona Foulkes	Capability, Excellence & Governance Manager
Hanane Elmaarouf	Business Unit Co-Ordinator

1	**Introductions and apologies** **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members were asked to introduce themselves when speaking.
2	**Minutes of last meeting** The minutes were agreed.
3	**Chair's Update** **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** opened the meeting and welcomed the new Prime Minister and Cabinet and said she was encouraged by the Government's continued focus on economic growth and connectivity. She said Andy Burnham's recent comments on the Manchester–Cambridge Innovation Partnership reinforced the importance of East West Rail in supporting regional and national growth. She said the Partnership should continue making the case for the railway and welcomed the opportunity presented by Number 10 North to strengthen engagement with Government. She proposed writing to Louise Haigh to congratulate her on her new role and set out the Partnership's long-standing support for East West Rail. **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** said the opening of Cambridge South Station demonstrated the benefits of investment in rail infrastructure and said the Partnership should continue supporting the long-term ambition of extending East West Rail beyond Cambridge towards Newmarket, Ipswich and Felixstowe, and beyond Oxford towards Swindon, Bristol and South Wales. She also referred to the successful community engagement undertaken around Cambourne and suggested inviting the Shared Planning team to present the work at a future meeting. **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** updated members on the response received from Lord Hendy regarding passenger services between Oxford and Milton Keynes. She said the Department for Transport continued to work with Chiltern Railways and its partners to establish a start date for services and said officers should continue seeking regular updates. **Action: Write to Louise Haigh congratulating her on her appointment and highlighting the importance of East West Rail and the partnership's shared priorities.**
4	**East West Railway Company Update** **Naomi Green** welcomed **Will Gallagher, Ed Leech** and **Joe Harris** from East West Railway Company. **Will Gallagher** said East West Rail remained an important national infrastructure project but the change of Government meant the case for the railway continued to need strong support. He said the project had reached an important stage as it moved towards submission of the Development Consent Order. He said the new Planning and Infrastructure Act introduced a different consenting process and East West Rail was one of the first schemes to operate under the new arrangements. **Will Gallagher** said the project team recognised there were challenges in balancing timely delivery with meaningful engagement. He said delays to the

	Development Consent Order would delay delivery of the railway and the benefits it would bring but also recognised the need to work closely with local authorities to resolve outstanding issues. **Joe Harris** introduced himself as Strategic Relationships Lead. He said his role was to strengthen relationships with local authorities and elected members and to provide a clear point of contact for councils throughout the Development Consent Order process. He said he wanted engagement to reflect the needs of individual authorities rather than following a standard approach and encouraged members to contact him directly. **Ed Leech** presented an update on the route-wide consultation. He said consultation had generated good levels of engagement and that further location-specific engagement would take place during the autumn where particular issues had been raised. He said East West Railway Company would continue discussions with local authorities throughout the Development Consent Order process and outlined the proposed engagement arrangements, including Local Representative Groups and a Local Authority Forum. **Cllr Peter Martin** said local communities had undertaken significant work analysing the proposals and believed the project was progressing without all the necessary evidence. He said this risked damaging confidence in the project and asked East West Railway Company to continue discussions with the Council. **Cllr Thomas Broom** said Buckinghamshire Council remained disappointed with the consultation process, particularly regarding the Train Maintenance Depot. He said communities had not been given meaningful opportunities to influence proposals before decisions had effectively been made and said this had damaged trust. **Naomi Green** asked how the proposed Local Authority Forum would complement the East West Main Line Partnership. She said it was important that detailed project discussions took place through the appropriate forum while the Partnership retained its wider strategic role. **Joe Harris** said the Local Authority Forum would focus on Development Consent Order matters and detailed project delivery. **Alastair Southgate** said the impact of East West Rail extended beyond the areas where construction would take place and that authorities east of Cambridge also needed to remain engaged because of the effects on existing rail services. **Will Gallagher** said Ted Allett, an independent chair that EWR Co commissioned to support a review of their engagement mechanisms, had recommended separating detailed project discussions from wider strategic discussions so that each could receive appropriate attention. He said the intention was not to replace the Partnership's role but to provide a dedicated forum for detailed Development Consent Order matters. **Naomi Green** said it would be helpful for the Chair and EEH officers to meet Ted Allett to ensure the relationship between both groups was clearly understood and that members had confidence in the arrangements. **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** agreed and said a meeting would be arranged.

	Action: Arrange a meeting with Ted Allett to discuss the proposed EWR engagement structure and how it will complement the East West Mainline Partnership Board. **Action: EWR Company to follow up with Buckinghamshire regarding concerns raised about engagement and the proposed train maintenance depot.**
5	**Financial Update, subscriptions and workstream update** **Naomi Green** introduced the item and gave an update on the 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. **Suzanne Winkels** provided an update on the wider programme of work supporting East West Rail. She said work continued on Transport Opportunity Plans to maximise the benefits of the railway by improving local connectivity around stations. She said priority work was progressing around Universal UK Resort, Silverstone, Marston Vale, Tempsford, Milton Keynes, Luton, airport connectivity, Aylesbury, Westcott, Bicester and Stevenage. She said the Integration Taskforce had recently met to consider opportunities around Tempsford and was bringing together partners including MHCLG, Homes England and East West Railway Company. Suzanne said work continued on maximising the benefits of East West Rail and HS2 together, including opportunities around the Aylesbury link and improved connectivity towards Old Oak Common. She added the introduction of Oxford–Swindon–Bristol services demonstrated what could be achieved through collaboration between England's Economic Heartland, Western Gateway, Network Rail, Great Western Railway and East West Railway Company. Suzanne also updated members on work to support Ely Area Capacity Enhancements and the Regional Visitor Economy Strategy. She said consultants were preparing an action plan to maximise tourism opportunities arising from East West Rail, Universal UK Resort and other major investments across the region. **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** said the breadth of work being undertaken demonstrated the value of the Partnership but that the Board would benefit from more time to discuss these programmes at future meetings. **Board noted the update on work being undertaken by EEH to support delivery of East West Rail** **Board agreed to freeze EWMLP subscription rates for 2026/27** **Board agreed 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 Main Line Partnership and the Eastern Section Board**
6	**Meaningful Engagement**

	Fiona Foulkes introduced the report and said recent changes to the Planning and Infrastructure Act had removed the requirement for statutory consultation on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. She said this created an opportunity for East West Rail to demonstrate what meaningful engagement could look like under the new planning arrangements. **Fiona Foulkes** said the revised Lessons Learned report reflected comments received from members at previous meetings and now included additional consideration of cumulative impacts on communities where multiple infrastructure projects were taking place. She said the report drew together the experience of local authorities involved in planning and constructing the Oxford to Milton Keynes section and aimed to ensure those lessons informed future projects. **Fiona Foulkes** said the report should not remain solely within East West Rail but should also be shared more widely with organisations involved in delivering major infrastructure projects. **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** said members had contributed to improving the document over several meetings and suggested members be given a further opportunity to review the final version before it was formally approved. **The Board agreed that members would provide any final comments within two weeks. If no further comments were received, the report would be treated as approved and officers would consider where it should be shared.**
7	**East West Rail 2026 Consultation Response** **Fiona Foulkes** presented the proposed Partnership response to the latest East West Rail consultation. She said the response reflected the Board's strategic priorities while also incorporating comments from affected local authorities. **Fiona Foulkes** said the consultation response considered the implications of Universal UK Resort, changes to the proposed delivery approach, cumulative impacts on communities and concerns around community severance. She said the response also reflected disappointment that the consultation had taken place during the pre-election period, limiting the ability of some local authorities to respond fully. **Fiona Foulkes** said discussions with planning and transport officers had informed the location-specific sections of the response and that conversations with East West Railway Company had continued beyond the formal consultation period. **Cllr Brian Milnes** said it was important that both the Greater Cambridge Development Company and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority were fully engaged as proposals developed because of their responsibilities for transport and future growth. **Cllr Sue Clark** said Central Bedfordshire Council had not been represented politically on the Board for some time and said it was important that the consultation response fully reflected the impacts of East West Rail and Universal on communities in Marston Vale and Tempsford. She referred to concerns regarding community severance, the scale of station car parks and the proposals affecting Ridgmont Station.

	Fiona Foulkes said she had discussed these issues with Councillor Clark and confirmed that additional comments would be incorporated into the final consultation response. She said the questions around Ridgmont Station and future demand were important issues for further discussion. **Ed Leech** said East West Railway Company was aware of the concerns raised by Central Bedfordshire Council and confirmed that discussions with the authority were continuing. **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** said the additional comments should be incorporated into the response before it was circulated to members for one final review. She said members would be given a short period to submit any further comments before the consultation response was finalised and submitted. **Actions: Incorporate Central Bedfordshire's additional comments into the consultation response, including community severance, station car parking and Ridgmont Station.** **Actions: Fiona to circulate the updated consultation response to Board members for final review on the day of the meeting.** **Subject to additional comments, Board approved the EWMLP consultation response to East West Rail 2026 consultation.**
8	**Eastern Section Update** **Cllr Phil Smart** introduced the item following the recent meeting of the Eastern Section Board. He said he had been appointed Chair of the Eastern Section Board following the local elections and that a Vice Chair would be appointed in due course. He thanked Cllr Alexander Nicoll for his work as the previous Chair. **Cllr Phil Smart** said the Eastern Section Board had considered its response to the recent East West Rail consultation. He said members supported the proposals for Cambridge East Station and the eastern entrance to Cambridge Station but also wanted to ensure that the infrastructure was designed to support future expansion beyond Cambridge towards Newmarket, Ipswich and Felixstowe. He also said discussions had also taken place regarding the proposed Train Care Centre east of Cambridge. He said there remained an opportunity to ensure the design supported future rail services beyond Cambridge and that sufficient time remained to develop those proposals. **Cllr Phil Smart** said the Eastern Section Board had also discussed the longer-term vision for the route. He said the ambition remained to extend East West Rail beyond Cambridge and that work was continuing to identify the most appropriate sequence of projects needed to achieve that vision. He said it was important to consider schemes such as Ely and Haughley alongside future eastern connections so that the overall programme could be delivered in manageable stages. **Alastair Southgate** said the Eastern Section Board continued to support East West Rail as part of a wider railway rather than simply an engineering project between Oxford and Cambridge. He said work was continuing to develop the strategic case for future connections east of Cambridge and to ensure those opportunities were not lost as the current scheme progressed.

	Naomi Green said the recommendations approved earlier in the meeting regarding Secretariat funding reflected the increasing amount of work taking place on the Eastern Section. She said England's Economic Heartland would continue working closely with Transport East to support development of the Eastern Section programme. **Cllr Katie Thornburrow** said it was encouraging to see continued progress on the Eastern Section and agreed it was important to retain the long-term ambition of extending East West Rail to the east coast. She said she had also received correspondence from businesses supporting additional stations east of Cambridge and said these opportunities should continue to be considered as the programme developed.
9	**Future Meeting Dates** • 22 October 2026 (remote)