Transport East Briefing

Subject: East West Rail Non-Statutory Consultation
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The Transport East Board endorsed this response to the EWR non-statutory consultation on 20 January 2025.

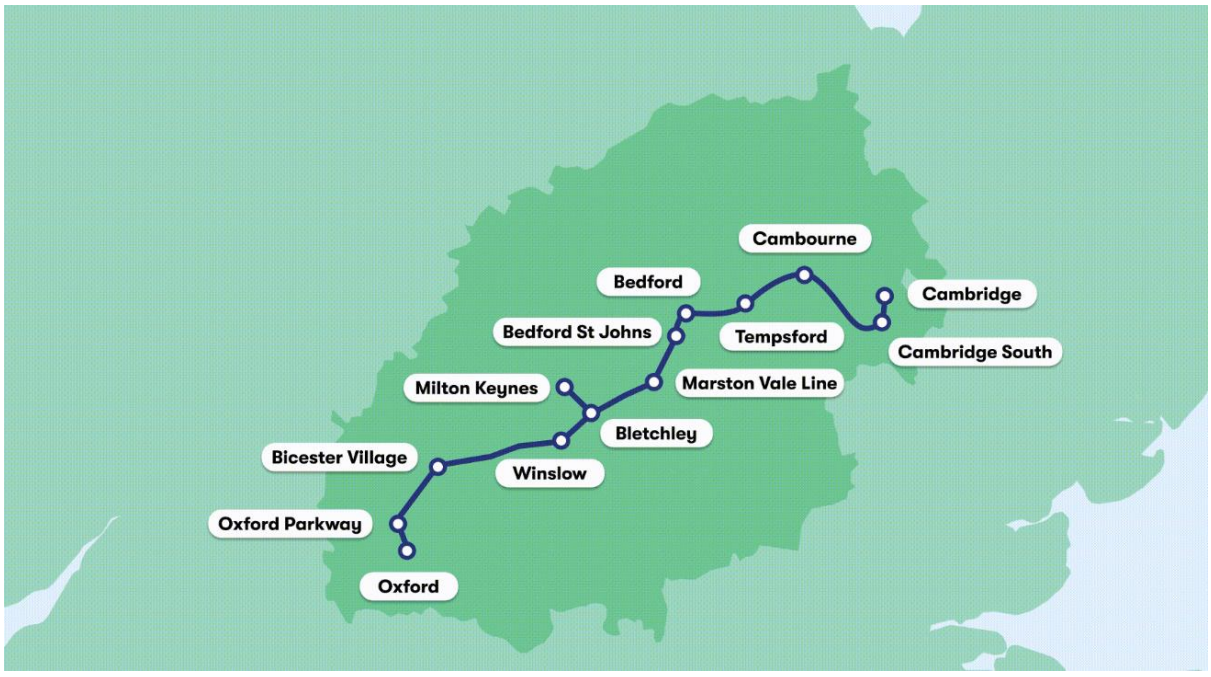
This response aligns with that of EWR Eastern-Board.

East West Rail has launched a non-statutory consultation to gather feedback on its proposals for the new railway connecting Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford, and Cambridge. This consultation will help shape the development of the railway, ensuring it meets the needs of the communities it will serve.

The consultation is open from 14 November 2024 to 24 January 2025, focusing on three strategic themes:

- Enhancing regional connectivity
- Promoting sustainable travel
- Supporting economic growth

The route covered by East West Rail is detailed below.



1. Transport East

1.1. Transport East holds the secretariat for the East West Rail – Eastern Board. The views expressed in this response reflect feedback from discussions with the board. A separate, aligned response will be submitted from the EWR-Eastern Board.

1.2. Transport East is the Sub-national Transport Body for Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Southend-on-Sea, and Thurrock. The partnership provides a single voice for our councils, business leaders and partners on our region's transport strategy and strategic transport investment priorities, working in close collaboration with the government and the rest of the UK.

1.3. The DfT has committed to pay due regard to our Strategy when developing future transport policy. These documents set out a vision for the future of transport in the East and a set of strategic priorities to deliver that vision.

1.4. Our vision and priorities

We seek a thriving Eastern region with safe, efficient, and net zero transport networks advancing a future of inclusive and sustainable growth for decades to come.

To deliver the transport network to support this, the Strategy identifies four core priorities for the region. Setting out a pathway of activities to address challenges and improve transport provision.

- Decarbonisation to net zero – Transport creates 42% of carbon emissions across the region, more than any other source. We aim to achieve net zero carbon emissions from transport by 2040. Our decarbonisation pathway underpins the other three pathways in the Strategy.

- Connecting growing towns and cities – With 75 towns and cities, the East has a strong economy, but our growing places are spread out and our towns are congested. We want enhanced links between our fastest growing places and business clusters.

- Energising rural and coastal communities – Much of our population lives in rural areas or on the coast. Transport links in these areas are historically poor and this is exacerbated by poor digital connections. We want everyone in rural and coastal areas to be able to do more, more easily and more sustainably.

- Unlocking international gateways – With 13 ports, including 2 Freeports, and 3 international airports, we are the UK's gateway to the world for trade. We want better connected ports and airports to help UK businesses thrive.

1.5. Transport East is committed to ensuring that the EWR should maximise benefits to enable future development of the Eastern section. This includes direct services to Norwich and Ipswich, an ambition shared with Suffolk County Council, Norfolk County Council, Essex County Council and the East West Rail – Eastern Section Board. The current consultation by EWR presents a critical opportunity for Transport East to provide feedback.

2. Overview

2.1. Transport East strongly supports the vision of direct East to West, coast-to-coast rail connectivity. This vision aligns with our commitment to ensuring that the East-West Rail proposals maximise the benefits and opportunities for connectivity not only along the proposed route, but with a particular focus to the benefits in the wider Cambridge area and for the East region, to Norwich, Ipswich, Essex and onward to the coast;, catering to both passenger and freight needs.

2.2. The East of England contributes £163 billion annually to the UK economy, with 270,000 businesses and 3.2 million jobs. Its high employment rates and productivity are driven by sectors such as life sciences, digital services, clean energy, creative industries, and advanced manufacturing. Key economic hubs include Cambridge, Newmarket, and Norwich, alongside major international gateways in Suffolk and Essex.

2.3. Despite its strengths, there are parts of the region where in transport infrastructure is holding back potential for growth. Addressing these issues could unlock higher productivity and sustainable development that benefits the entire UK.

2.4. By enhancing rail links to and from Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire to rapidly growing areas such as Milton Keynes, Oxford and the rest of Great Britain, without the need to travel via London; the EWR project is well-positioned to bring significant benefit to the East. Improved connections between these key regions are expected to boost regional economic growth along the East-West Corridor and beyond, and ensure that the East reaps the full potential benefits of the EWR initiative.

2.5. The Transport East response will focus on the broader strategic benefits and regional connectivity provided by the EWR project.

3. Our core points are as follows:

- The proposals for the EWR route, and in particular the designs in and close to Cambridge should ensure that the opportunities for future improvements to the East are safeguarded. Recognising the ambitions and priorities of the East West Rail – Eastern Board and the importance of connectivity to Norwich, Ipswich and Essex.

- Transport East supports through services from the East of Cambridge to the West and infrastructure design that ensures this can accommodate future ambitions of the Eastern Board, recognising that frequency would provide the initial benefits.

- For the main Cambridge station the design proposals should accommodate passenger access to the station from the East. Also consider an approach outside the station to the west, that encourages the use of public transport over taxis.

- We ask EWR to consider; extending the double track extension towards Newmarket to the extent that it can achieve the robust operation of two trains an hour, at least, to unlock early benefit for the EWR Eastern Section; ensure connectivity from King's Lynn, and Norwich to London during construction work at Cambridge, and understand how onward journeys will

be made; and consider a new station to the East of Cambridge and the onward link to Stansted.

- The provision of East-West capacity for freight will ensure both resilience and capacity. To support regional and national growth, connecting the East key Freeports and airports with national major industrial and population centres through the EWR project and the Eastern Section in the future. The impact on residents should be assessed and appropriate mitigation identified.

- We recognise the benefits of electrification and support full electrification instead of discontinuous electrification to ensure the operation of heavy rail services. To ensure that the future electrification of freight can be realised, the infrastructure that supports the energy demand and load required by freight should be delivered by the project. A right first-time approach.

- In principle, we support the exclusion of new level crossings and the removal of some existing level crossings to enhance freight and passenger. It is essential that provisions for walking, cycling, wheeling, and riding are maintained. and the needs of the local communities are met. EWR should address public concerns and consider the impacts on less connected communities when implementing these changes.

- The Ely and Haughley junction improvement schemes are crucial for improving passenger and freight movements in the East of England and nationally. They would also provide improved resilience for the new East / West route. We recommend that the EWR project highlights the opportunities of the Ely and Haughley schemes to unlock its full potential

- We emphasise the importance of door to door connectivity delivered through the EWR project to promote active travel and public transport.

- Additional interventions that could support the core EWR scheme have been identified. There is recognition that any further interventions, either within this scheme or delivered outside of the scheme by an alternative approach, must demonstrably add value to the business case, so we ask that wider consideration is given to assessing the opportunities, costs and benefits of improvements at:
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    - The Fen Road level crossing
    - The addition of two new tracks on the Bedford route section
    - The addition of a new chord at Bletchley , to significantly enhance freight movements from Felixstowe to Milton Keynes, Northampton, and Daventry.
- Emphasising the importance of the Ely and Haughley junction improvements to realising the benefits of the EWR proposals.

4. Our detailed considerations are as follows:

4.1. Cambridge

Transport East supports design options that enable through services from the East of Cambridge going West and supports proposals for the main Cambridge station.

We also support the proposals for the Cambridge North station to modify the track layout to allow services from the north to terminate there during construction. However, Transport East seeks confirmation that this will not result in services from King's Lynn and Norwich terminating at Cambridge North on completion of the EWR project, so as not to affect direct services to Stansted onwards. In addition to ensuring through connectivity it is important to maintain direct services from King's Lynn south to London. In addition, we seek consideration in including a convenient and fully accessible pedestrian access from the eastern side of station.

The EWR project proposes to double track the line to Cherry Hinton to provide a new train turnback. Currently the single-track section between Cambridge and Newmarket is a significant constraint for services to the East. The extension of a double track towards Newmarket to the extent that it can achieve the robust operation of two trains an hour, at least, would unlock early benefit for the EWR Eastern Section. This would also support the Cambridge economy. Transport East strongly supports the inclusion of this extension.

Transport East recognises the opportunities that extending the double track as part of the EWR project, could present for a potential development and station to the east of Cambridge, recognising the need for third party investment to deliver the station. The new station, though not currently part of the official proposals, could significantly drive improved connectivity for the growing population and businesses (including technology parks) in the area, facilitating easier access to jobs, education, and services. The station would also support the development of new housing and commercial spaces, helping to alleviate the pressure on Cambridge's existing infrastructure. This is also supported by local businesses.

Southern routes including access to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC) are also vital. We recognise that EWR project should enhance connectivity to the CBC, supporting its growth and development by providing better transport links and facilitating collaboration with other leading institutions and businesses in the region.

Furthermore, Stansted Airport has plans to increase its annual passenger capacity to between 48 and 51 million by the late 2030s. To support this ambition while maintaining sustainable transport options, it is important for EWR to consider the connectivity between Stansted Airport, Cambridge and beyond to Norfolk/Suffolk, in particular how East-West services integrate with these connections. This is crucial for residents, businesses, and visitors from Norfolk and Suffolk, who would approach via Cambridge.

We recognise that it's crucial to achieve and maintain excellent performance for the success of future rail service aspirations. This requires significant infrastructure capacity and operating conditions. Effective connectivity, especially at key hubs like Cambridge, is essential for driving patronage growth, with frequency often being more critical than through trains.

(This section responds to question 21 regarding the proposals for Cambridge in the consultation feedback form.)

4.2 Freight

Recognising that the primary purpose of EWR is to provide connectivity for passenger services, East-West Rail has the potential to provide both capacity and resilience for freight. The East is home to two freeports which are significant international hubs for freight. To support regional growth and maximise the economic potential of these key freight destinations, it is essential to ensure they are well-connected with major industrial and population centres. Providing sufficient freight through the EWR route is vital to fully unlock the freight potential of the future Eastern Section.

Options proposed to increase capacity and the provision for direct connectivity at Cambridge are supported.

While not currently part of the project, the addition of a new chord at Bletchley would significantly enhance freight movements from Felixstowe to Milton Keynes, Northampton, and Daventry. We Recognise that there are social and environmental challenges associated with this proposal. This strategic improvement would not only benefit associated proposals in the future but also receive strong support from freight stakeholders in the East. Transport East (TE) strongly advocates for an assessment of the relative costs and benefits to better understand the case for its inclusion in future proposals, recognising its potential to streamline freight logistics and bolster regional economic growth , and benefits in delivering within the EWR project to optimise the opportunities for freight from the East on completion of the project.

Additionally, Transport East supports the proposal of twin-tracking through Fenny Stratford. Although not explicitly proposed for freight, the infrastructure improvements would inherently support increased freight capacity and resilience in the future.

(This section responds to question 22 regarding the route-wide matters in the consultation feedback form.)

4.3 Electrification

The EWR propose using discontinuous overhead line electrification combined with hybrid battery-electric trains to minimise the need for full electrification and reduce visual impacts.

Electrification of the route would help increase rail capacity by enabling faster acceleration and deceleration, higher average speeds, more frequent and reliable services, longer trains with greater capacity, and reduced dwell times at stations. For example, with electrification, the Trans-Pennine Route Upgrade (TRU) allows up to six fast trains per hour between Leeds and Manchester. Local business stakeholders show strong support for the electrification of the entire route.

To achieve net zero for freight transport, the currently available traction options are limited to Fully Electric Freight. While hybrid locomotives are emerging, they are not fully approved or widely used, and only achieve zero emissions in electric or battery mode, making full electrification a more reliable option for heavy rail services. Therefore, to enable longer-term freight benefit, full electrification should be considered. It is also noted that electrification also has a positive impact on

noise reduction. Additionally, if EWR is electrified, we recognise it is essential to ultimately electrify the lines onwards east of Cambridge to allow direct services from Ipswich/Norwich through to EWR.

EWR is nationally important infrastructure and the wider long-term benefits of full electrification, as demonstrated by the TRU, should be sought over short-term expediency.

Even if full electrification could not be immediately achieved through the EWR project, It is vital to ensure that there is sufficient power supply infrastructure in place for full electrification. This would avoid the need for retrofitting when full electrification is required in the future, thereby avoid costly and disruptive changes later on.

(This section responds to question 22 regarding the route-wide matters in the consultation feedback form.)

4.4 Safety (level crossings)

It is stated in the consultation document that level crossings, being critical interaction points between railways and the public, are increasingly associated with traffic issues and safety risks due to higher rail and road traffic. Consequently, new level crossings are not being considered, and existing ones are either to be upgraded or replaced with safer alternatives to maintain connectivity and enhance safety. Transport East supports the approach of no new level crossing.

We also support the removal of level crossings to enable more freight movements and unlock passenger capacity EWR route. However, it is crucial to ensure that walking, cycling, wheeling, and riding provisions are maintained. The public are concerned about closure alternatives. Therefore, it is important for EWR to consider the wider local impacts, particularly for less connected communities, and address these local issues in a targeted way. A crossing of concern is Fen Road, adjacent to the Cambridge North station, which is not currently considered in the proposals. . The Fen Road level crossing is a critical point for local connectivity, providing access for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. Its closure without proper alternatives could significantly impact the local community. We ask for this to be included in future scheme development.

(This section responds to question 22 regarding the route-wide matters in the consultation feedback form.)

4.5 Door to door connectivity

It is essential that door to door connectivity is considered as part of the EWR project, the consultation material has limited reference to door to door or first/last mile measures. The project should explore options for improving connectivity between the new rail stations and surrounding communities taking an integrated approach to transport.

One of the key considerations in the design of new stations is the alignment with the objectives of active travel and public transport. It is essential to integrate the new stations seamlessly into the wider networks, potentially through integrating bus and rail timetables, and to promote active

travel opportunities for door to door connectivity, via branding and way-finding. This would help impact general public's travel behaviour towards more sustainable and efficient modes of transport.

Concerns have also been raised that the current EWR proposals do not address the existing problem of a lack of provision of bus replacement facilities at Cambridge station, it is important for EWR to consider addressing it as part of the planned works to ensure seamless door to door connectivity for passengers.

(This section responds to question 22 regarding the route-wide matters in the consultation feedback form.)

4.6 Bedford

Additionally, we also support the proposals to add two new tracks on the Bedford route section. This expansion is anticipated to provide additional track capacity, increased line speeds, and enhanced service reliability. This will facilitate more efficient and dependable rail services, contributing to the overall success and effectiveness of the EWR project. However, we recognise there might be challenges from housing demolition, and the local impacts must be managed and mitigated as much as possible.

(This section responds to question 12 regarding proposals at Bedford route section in the consultation feedback form.)

4.7 Local impacts

When considering the strategic benefits and impacts of a nationally significant infrastructure such as East West Rail, the impact on local communities should also be given full consideration. This applies to the door to door connectivity needs of the new/improved network; impacts of increased rail movements at level crossings on road and active travel movements in the local areas; the potential increase in traffic to access the new stations and services (and the subsequent environmental impacts); and the impact of the construction phase. We encourage EWR to undertake ongoing engagement with the communities and their local authority representatives to ensure that an inclusive and integrated project is delivered, and necessary assessments are undertaken. By actively working with local partners, EWR can manage and mitigate local impacts, enabling local plans and ambitions to be realised.

This response has not provided detailed feedback on environmental impacts, the Board recognises that this detail is best provided by those with more detailed local knowledge of the route, the proposals and impacts. We refer you to the responses of our Board partners.

4.8 Ely and Haughley

The Ely and Haughley junction improvement schemes are crucial for improving passenger and freight movements both in the East of England and nationally. These enhancements will facilitate increased freight and passenger paths from Felixstowe and provide improved access up to Norwich and also meet the demand at Cambridge. It will provide improved resilience for the new East / West route.

We recommend that the EWR project highlights the opportunities of the Ely and Haughley schemes to unlock its full potential.

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