

Cambridge City Council response to the East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation

1. Introduction

Cambridge City Council supports the principle of East West Rail which will support key priorities set out in our Corporate Plan 2019-22¹, including:

- Supporting sustainable economic growth - connecting key employment locations across the Oxford Cambridge Arc;
- Protecting our environment and tackling climate change, including our goal to make Cambridge zero-carbon by 2050 - enabling more people to travel to Cambridge by rail from the west, thereby reducing carbon emissions, congestion and pollution; and
- Supporting the delivery of our joint housing strategy – enabling further growth of a range of housing types and tenures within the Cambridge housing market area, including affordable housing, and connecting areas of housing with better affordability with key employment areas.

The consultation route choices and resulting physical changes may affect other authority areas more than Cambridge itself. Whilst sharing the views of South Cambridgeshire District Council and Huntingdonshire District Council, our response below focuses on issues of direct relevance to Cambridge.

This consultation relates to the Bedford to Cambridge section of the East West Rail project. Cambridge is not however the end of the economic corridor between Oxford and Cambridge but sits centrally within a larger economic area extending eastwards from the City towards Bury St Edmunds and the East Coast ports. The future economic performance of the region depends upon better connections east, as well as west. Realising the economic performance of the Cambridge City region requires that this phase of East West Rail is matched by a clear commitment to the delivery of the Eastern Phase of the project, meeting the objectives set out in the East West Rail Eastern Section Prospectus for Growth². To do otherwise would not capitalise upon the potential economic growth of the Cambridge Economy highlighted in the Cambridge and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER).

In making our response to the current consultation, it is also important to note that it does not prejudice an in-depth consideration of issues through the forthcoming Greater Cambridge Local Plan (to be jointly prepared by Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council), which will include consideration of all reasonable strategy options.

2. The overall approach taken to developing route options

We note the very limited detail in the consultation as to the levels of growth envisaged to be supported by the railway, the environmental and community impacts, and delivery expectations. The absence of an Environmental Impact Assessment also means that at this stage, the

¹ <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/corporate-plan>

² <https://www.eastwestrail.org.uk/2019/02/19/prospectus-makes-case-for-direct-east-west-rail-services-from-ipswich-and-norwich-to-oxford/>

Council's comments below in relation to route preferences must be conditional on the findings of further detailed evidence on these issues.

One of the Council's priorities is to plan for growth, ensuring that our new communities are successful. East West Rail and other transport projects must be sensitive to long term spatial planning priorities, including at a local level through the forthcoming Greater Cambridge Local Plan process. For this to be achieved, the Council will require certainty on delivery. We therefore require close engagement with EWR Co. as the railway project and the Local Plan develop, so that we can consider how the Local Plan takes account of the challenges and opportunities created by the railway, and so that the railway project is informed by the local economic, social and environmental issues raised by the Local Plan.

3. Challenges and opportunities relating to the route options

Subject to the uncertainties and limited information currently available, we support our neighbouring authorities in identifying possible in-principle benefits of routes going via Cambourne (options B and E), provided that, in particular, it can be demonstrated that environmental impacts can be mitigated, including those close to Cambridge.

We share with our neighbouring authorities the concern that the East West Rail project is brought forward in a complementary way with proposed local public transport infrastructure projects, including the emerging proposals for a Cambridge Autonomous Metro. This could provide a stepping stone/transfer from East West Rail onto a local public transport corridor that serves not only Cambridge itself but also the science parks and university campus to the west of Cambridge. The East West Rail project must have proper regard to this transfer opportunity.

4. Focus on route options that approach Cambridge from the south

The Council supports the approach taken to the assessment of route options for the approach to Cambridge. For the reasons above, any approach to the City should enable efficient connection with Norwich, Ipswich and other destinations to the east of Cambridge and northwards to Ely.

The consultation has only limited information however on the physical impact of the railway on its approach to the City (through the Cambridge Green Belt). The potential impact upon the historical setting of the City, and upon City residents and businesses impacted by the environmental effects of the railway and its operation, must be carefully considered as the route options are refined, with consideration of appropriate mitigation and biodiversity and landscape compensation measures an integral part of the project.

In common with South Cambridgeshire District Council, we also note the critical need for Government and all partners to remain focused on the delivery of the Cambridge South station, as a separate but linked project to East West Rail. Delivery of the station will support sustainable travel opportunities to underpin continued growth at the Cambridge biomedical campus - at the heart of one of Europe's most significant life sciences research clusters.

5. Request for closer future working

Together with our neighbouring authorities, we note the transformational impact that the East West Rail project could have on our area, and in particular the interrelationship between the project and the forthcoming Greater Cambridge Local Plan. We ask that EWR Co. collaborates

with us closely beyond the close of this consultation, as it progresses the Bedford to Cambridge project.

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