

Strategic Transport Forum

7th December 2018

Agenda Item 7: East West Rail

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Forum:

- a) Endorse the East West Rail Consortium's position in relation to the draft Transport and Works Act Order for the Western Section, specifically the need for the Order scheme to address the issues identified by the Consortium as being integral to its delivery.
- b) Note the work being taken forward by Network Rail to look at the future use of capacity on the West Coast Main Line
- c) Support the development of a business case for the installation of digital infrastructure alongside the delivery of the Western Section
- d) Support the need to explore with existing Train Operators the best way of delivering initial passenger services on the Western Section and to that end invite Chiltern Railways to attend the next meeting of the Forum
- e) Note the arrangements being put in place in anticipation of the forthcoming engagement by the East West Railway Company on the Central Section
- f) Confirm the strategic importance of the Eastern Section to this Forum as an integral element of the overall East West Rail project
- g) Instruct the EEH Business Unit to work with local partners in the Eastern Section and with Network Rail with a view to identifying the work required to develop detailed proposals for the Eastern Section

1. Context

- 1.1. East West Rail is a key strategic project for local partners across the Heartland and beyond.
- 1.2. This Forum looks to the East West Rail Consortium to provide the strategic leadership the East West Rail Project: this reflects the Consortium's leadership role since 1995 and the fact that the Political leadership of the Consortium represents local partners within the governance framework associated with the East West Railway Company.
- 1.3. In recognition of the Consortium's role the EEH Business Unit provides additional technical and professional support to the Consortium members.

- 1.4. Given the strategic significance of the East West Rail project – which comprises three elements: the Western, Central and Eastern sections – this Forum receives regular updates on key issues relating to the project.
- 1.5. The next meeting of the East West Rail Consortium’s Strategic Board is scheduled for 11th December: Cllr Mark Shaw (Buckinghamshire County Council) is the Chair of the Strategic Board, with Cllr Sue Clark (Central Bedfordshire Council) the Deputy Chair.

2. Western Section

Progress with the Transport and Works Act Order

- 2.1. The Network Rail Delivery Alliance – responsible for delivering the Western Section – published the draft Transport and Works Act Order for the Western Section earlier in 2018. As a result of the responses received a Public Inquiry has been scheduled, to start on Wednesday 6th February 2019. A pre-Inquiry meeting was held on 29th November.
- 2.2. It is worth noting that the level of support in favour of the scheme expressed through responses to the draft Order was on a scale that – for a major scheme of this nature – is unprecedented. The fact that local partners have championed the scheme and worked alongside the rail industry and Government to develop the proposal is likely to explain such levels of support. The collaborative approach to developing the scheme – which has seen local partners viewed as shareholders in the scheme by Government – is potentially a model of good practice.
- 2.3. It is also worth noting that alongside the Budget, the Government published its formal response to the National Infrastructure Commission’s report into the potential of the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor. In this the Government formally endorsed the Commission’s recommendation in support of the strategic need for the scheme. The endorsement of the need for the scheme in this way is a material consideration when it comes to considering the Transport and Works Act Order.
- 2.4. The East West Rail Consortium responded to the consultation on the draft Transport and Works Act Order and will appear at the Inquiry in support of the draft Order.
- 2.5. The Consortium’s position – as agreed by the Strategic Board on 11th September - is one of strong support and commitment for the draft Order.
- 2.6. The Consortium’s support for the Western Section is set within the context that the each individual section must be viewed through the lens that it is part of the overarching East West Rail project.

- 2.7. The fact that the Consortium is supported by the EEH Business Unit has helped to ensure that the work of the Consortium and this Forum are closely aligned on the key strategic issues.
- 2.8. The Consortium's support for the draft Order is conditional upon the scheme delivering on a number of key strategic issues – issues that have been previously identified by the Consortium as needing to be integral elements of the Order scheme: those issues are:

- a) A commitment to the inclusion of a new station entrance at Bletchley Station - the Eastern Entrance - within the works for the Order scheme.

With the delivery of the Order scheme the importance of Bletchley Station as an interchange for rail services increases significantly. This will in turn increase the attractiveness of Bletchley as a location for new development. The current station entrance/exit is on the 'wrong side' of Bletchley, making the inclusion of a new 'eastern entrance' an essential requirement if the development opportunities in Bletchley are to be maximised at a later stage. The inclusion of a new 'eastern entrance' in the Order scheme would avoid the additional cost and disruption to rail services that would arise if a new 'eastern entrance' had to be built after the completion of the Order scheme.

- b) Continued inclusion of the improvements proposed for the section of the route between Bletchley and Bedford (Marston Vale Line) as an integral element of the works for the Order scheme.

The Consortium has consistently identified the need for improvements to this section as part of the overall East West Rail project and in particular as part of the works to be included in the Order Scheme. Proposals set out within the emerging Local Plan for Central Bedfordshire have been prepared on the basis that these improvements will be delivered, demonstrating how local authorities have taken into account the benefit of investment in the rail network when preparing their Local Plans. It is acknowledged that a longer-term solution for improved connectivity between Bletchley and Bedford will be required: the Consortium's position is that this will need to be considered as part of the work associated with the development of the Central Section.

- c) A continued commitment to deliver improvements to the Claydon Junction to Aylesbury section of the route as an integral element of the Order scheme.

The East West Rail Consortium has consistently identified the need to include the 'Aylesbury spur' as an integral element of the Order scheme. Proposals set out within the draft Local Plan for Aylesbury Vale identify that approximately

50% of planned housing growth during the Plan period will be located in/around Aylesbury. The Consortium's view that improved rail connectivity – as provided by the Order scheme – is essential to reducing the impact of planned growth, whilst at the same time providing residents across the region with improved access to opportunities and services.

The importance of the 'Aylesbury spur' to the longer-term development of rail services across the region was identified by Network Rail in the Chilterns Route Strategy published in August 2017. This Forum has consistently identified the need to realise the potential of the Milton Keynes – Aylesbury – Princes Risborough - High Wycombe rail corridor. Through the Consortium local partners have consistently argued that Government should seek to put in place appropriate safeguarding that will ensure the potential of the corridor (which will require double-tracking in places) can be realised. Of particular concern is the pressure on land adjacent to the existing rail corridor (which is single-track) between Aylesbury and Princes Risborough.

- d) A commitment to ensure that train services operating over the Order scheme support the strategic objective of developing, on the opening of HS2, through services on the Northampton – Milton Keynes – Bletchley – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common axis

The National Infrastructure Commission identified the critical role that improved connectivity has to play in enabling the economic potential of the region to be realised. The works included in the Order scheme will create opportunities for improved connectivity both east-west and north-south: work commissioned by the East West Rail Consortium identified travel between over sixty major urban centres will be possible with one change of train.

The opening of the first phase of HS2 shortly after the opening of the Western Section will present its own once-in-generation opportunity to reconsider, from first principles, the allocation of capacity on the West Coast Main Line. Working with the Network Rail System Operator, the EEH Business Unit is engaged in the study being taken forward to look at the future use of capacity on the West Coast Main Line.

- e) A commitment to ensure that train services operating over the Order scheme support the strategic objective of East West Rail services continuing through Oxford Station and onto Didcot Parkway.

In order to realise the improved connectivity across the region made possible by the Order scheme it is essential that new train services run beyond the geographical extent of the Order scheme. Didcot Parkway Station is centrally

located within Science Vale UK, at the heart of a network of science-based R&D facilities that are world-leading and which supports activity across the UK. Improved connectivity, via rail services operating over East West Rail, is essential to meeting the objective of the emerging Transport Strategy for the region: to connect people and places with opportunities and services. In addition the enhanced interchange opportunities realised by extending train services through to Didcot Parkway, with its connection to the Great Western Main Line (both westwards towards Swindon and beyond, and eastwards to Reading and beyond) will bring additional benefits. This Forum should note that it is contributing towards the cost of the Oxfordshire Rail Study: a reflection of the strategic importance of these issues.

- f) A commitment to require that the Order scheme makes adequate provision for additional freight services.

Realising the economic potential of the region means ensuring that investment in strategic infrastructure makes adequate provision for future freight services. The need to achieve net betterment at the same time further emphasises the importance of making adequate provision for rail freight services – both existing and potential.

This Forum will recall that it has consistently highlighted the need for the East West Rail project to consider – and if necessary make provision for – freight services that have been diverted from other strategic rail corridors. The London Mayor's Strategy sets out the strategic ambition to remove long-distance freight services from the Gospel Oak to Barking route: this being required in order to enable additional passenger services. This Forum's response to the London Mayor's Transport Strategy set out its support for this strategic ambition. However this support is conditional upon capacity for the diverted freight services being available on alternative strategic rail corridors.

Although East West Rail will not be capable of functioning as an alternative strategic rail freight corridor until completion of the Central Section, the design and delivery of the Western Section needs to be taken forward on the basis that it will have the capability and capacity to accommodate additional freight services, recognising that this may require some additional investment in the future.

This Forum has commissioned work on freight and logistics as part of the development of the overarching Transport Strategy: this work includes consideration of longer-distance freight flows from the east coast ports, in particular the strategic freight flows emanating from Felixstowe.

- 2.9. The Consortium's position has consistently been that these issues should be viewed as a single package which forms the basis of its conditional support for the draft Order scheme.

Digital Connectivity

- 2.10. In parallel with the work being led by the East West Rail Consortium, the EEH Business Unit is working with Network Rail and the relevant Government departments to prepare the business case for ensuring that the Western Section is delivered as a 'digitally connected' corridor.
- 2.11. Installation of digital infrastructure at the same time as the Western Section is delivered will ensure that restoration of the rail corridor delivers much wider benefits. At the same time it is quickly apparent that installing digital infrastructure represents a marginal incremental cost.
- 2.12. It is critical that the work being undertaken by Highways England in respect of the proposed 'expressway' takes account of the fact that a digitally enabled rail corridor will be open at least 10 years before it would be open. It is absolutely essential that the design of the 'expressway' does not inadvertently undermine the sustainable travel patterns that will be established with the opening of the Western Section – to do so would be inconsistent with the overarching ambition of realising the economic potential of the Heartland in a way that delivers 'net betterment'.

Train Operator

- 2.13. With progress being made with the delivery of the Western Section of East West Rail so it becomes all the more important for clarity on how the initial services will be operated.
- 2.14. As this Forum has discussed under the previous agenda item the rail industry is undergoing a fundamental review, the output of which will shape its future moving forward.
- 2.15. In this context it is important that decisions relating to the initial operation of rail services on the Western Section should not prejudge or prejudice the best options for securing rail services on the Western Section as part of a truly integrated transport system. It is worth noting in this context that the Department for Transport has recently announced the cancellation of a number of franchising processes, instead opting for the use of bespoke deals with existing operators.
- 2.16. Whilst the Western Section will result in the restoration of rail services to a part of the former network, the market it serves has undergone fundamental change since the line was closed. At the same time experience suggests that the approach used

to develop the business case in support of rail re-openings often underestimates the true demand for rail services – the experience with the opening up of rail services between Oxford and London Marylebone (via Oxford Parkway and Bicester) reinforces this point, particularly when considering the impact that new rail services has in an area that is predisposed towards use of rail services.

- 2.17. Taking this in the round one could make a strong case for advocating that the initial rail services operating on the Western Section should be provided by an existing operator under a bespoke arrangement – rather than seeking to let a franchise.
- 2.18. The benefits of such an approach include:
 - a) Working with an existing operator would help ensure that opportunities to incorporate rail services operating over the Western Section within existing operations – thereby helping to manage pressures on the existing infrastructure at pressure points (such as Oxford Station).
 - b) Enabling the framework for any future franchise for rail services to be based on an understanding of the actual demand for travel – as opposed to the predicted demand used to underpin the business case
 - c) Enabling the outcome of the work looking into the future use of capacity on the West Coast Main Line (post Hs2 opening) to feed into the development of service patterns using the Western Section – in particular enabling consideration of how to realise the strategic objective of introducing a new north-south service corridor: Northampton – Milton Keynes – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common.
- 2.19. Chiltern Railways through their franchise has played a key role in supporting the development of proposals for the Western Section and as such their view on this issue would be of considerable interest. It is therefore proposed that to invite Chiltern Railways to attend the next meeting of the Forum.
- 2.20. Given the interaction of East West Rail at the western end of the scheme with the Great Western franchise the Forum may also wish to consider whether it wishes to invite Great Western at the same time.

3. Central Section

- 3.1. The East West Rail Consortium commissioned work that led to the identification of a Conditional Output Statement for the Central Section (Bedford to Cambridge). That was the basis on which Network Rail had been taking work forward to identify a preferred corridor for the Central Section.

- 3.2. With the establishment of the East West Railway Company the work on the Central Section has been given fresh impetus. The Government's response to the National Infrastructure Commission has signalled its intent to accelerate the delivery of the Central Section – with a target date in the latter half of the 2020's now the ambition. Indeed Budget 2018 confirmed an additional £20m of funding to support the work required to develop the business case for the Central Section.
- 3.3. Responding to this commitment from Government the East West Railway Company has been reviewing the Strategic Objectives and Conditional Output Statement for the Central Section – in particular to ensure they are consistent with the framework used with the Western Section.
- 3.4. The Company has signalled that it is intending to undertake a round of engagement on the Central Section early in 2019. This will provide the region with the opportunity to formally consider the revised Strategic Objectives and Conditional Output Statement, along with offering a view on the relative merits of potential corridors for the Central Section.
- 3.5. The engagement – which will be a non-statutory consultation – will be the first step in the journey towards developing the detail of the scheme and securing the necessary permission to build the Central Section (which will be through a Development Consent Order).
- 3.6. Arrangements are already in hand – through the East West Rail Consortium – for the local partners to consider the proposals published by the East West Railway Company with a view to developing a considered view: the intention being that that will be considered by the East West Rail Consortium Strategic Board at its March 2019 meeting.
- 3.7. Arrangements are also in hand to ensure that this Forum receives a briefing on the proposals for the Central Section from the East West Railway Company at its next meeting.

4. Eastern Section

- 4.1. It is essential that this Forum continues to remind wider stakeholders that the Eastern Section is an integral element of the overall East West Rail Project – indeed it is always worth remembering that the East West Rail Consortium was the original idea of colleagues in Ipswich who were the first to advocate (in 1995) the objective of promoting and securing a strategic railway connecting East Anglia with Central, Southern and Western England.

- 4.2. With the progress made with the Western Section has grabbing much of the attention of late, the East West Rail Consortium is actively looking to raise the importance of the Eastern Section to the project as a whole.
- 4.3. It is important to understand that delivery of the East West Rail project is not sequential – delivery of the Eastern Section is not dependent upon either the Western or Central Sections. Indeed work undertaken by the Consortium suggests that improvements delivered as part of the Eastern Section have the potential to support the case for investing in the Central Section.
- 4.4. Led by the local partners, the Consortium is finalising a 'prospectus' that sets its (the Consortium's) ambition for the Eastern Section. The prospectus will be considered by the Consortium at its meeting on 11th December: the intention being that the prospectus will be formally launched early in the New Year.
- 4.5. Given that the Eastern Section is an integral element of the overall East West Rail project it is important that this Forum continues to support the work of local authorities and local enterprise partnerships in Norfolk and Suffolk.
- 4.6. To that end the EEH Business Unit will continue to work closely with local partners to ensure that the strategic importance of the Eastern Section is understood by Network Rail and the Department for Transport. More importantly it will work with Network Rail's System Operator function with a view to identifying the work required to develop detailed proposals is taken forward as a matter of priority.

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