



Strategic Transport Forum

12th July 2019

Agenda Item 5 : East West Rail

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Forum

- a) Notes the update on the work the East West Rail Consortium, and**
- b) Endorses and supports the Consortium's work in respect of the two issues identified by it as being of concern**

1. Context

- 1.1. The East West Rail Consortium provides leadership on behalf of the local partners in respect of the East West Rail project.
- 1.2. At its most recent meeting (11th June) the Consortium received an update on progress with the delivery of the Western Section of the project.

2. Consideration

- 2.1. The Consortium welcomed the continued good progress with the scheme and that the momentum to deliver the scheme continues. The meeting did note two issues of concern.

HS2 Programme

- 2.2. Members of the Consortium noted that as currently planned, delivery of what is referred to as the 'Calvert Box' – which forms an integral part of the Western Section – is scheduled to be delivered by the HS2 project.
- 2.3. It is widely reported that there are on-going discussions with regard to the HS2 delivery programme.
- 2.4. Whilst the Consortium noted that it was not appropriate to comment on the detail of any discussions underway, what it was concerned about is the potential for delays in the delivery of HS2 inadvertently causing a consequential delay to the delivery of the Calvert Box.
- 2.5. The Consortium has consistently set out the importance of ensuring delivery of the Western Section at the earliest opportunity and that delivery of the 'Aylesbury spur' is viewed as an integral component of the Western Section.
- 2.6. In light of the current uncertainty regarding the HS2 delivery programme the Consortium agreed to restate its position with regard to the importance of delivering the Western Section at the earliest opportunity.

- 2.7. In particular the Consortium agreed to encourage both DfT and EWR Company to actively explore alternative arrangements for the delivery of the 'Calvert Box' if changes to the HS2 programme raise a question mark regarding the timing of the delivery of the Calvert Box.

Timetable Planning

- 2.8. The Consortium noted that work is continuing on the development of the timetable for the Western Section.
- 2.9. An on-going issue appears to be concern about the capacity of the bay platforms at Oxford Station. In particular there is a concern that the constraints associated with the station layout mean this remains an on-going issue.
- 2.10. The Consortium has previously identified the importance – from a strategic perspective – of running East West Rail services through Oxford and onward to Didcot Parkway.
- 2.11. From a strategic perspective such an approach will help improve connectivity to/from the Science Vale into the wider Heartland region and beyond.
- 2.12. Whilst the section of the route between Oxford and Didcot Parkway is heavily utilised, the Consortium has highlighted previously the opportunity that exists to reallocate the paths currently used by the Oxford to Didcot Parkway local shuttle services to be used by East West Rail.
- 2.13. The Consortium has previously made the point that the fact that this would require adjustments to the current Great Western franchise should not preclude active consideration of this proposal – particularly given its fit with the wider strategic ambition for the Heartland region.
- 2.14. The Consortium agreed to restate its position on this particular issue to both the Department for Transport, the East West Railway Company and Network Rail.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1. Given the strategic importance of East West Rail and more specifically the importance of ensuring its timely delivery it is recommended that the Forum set out its support for the Consortium's activities in respect of the two issues identified in this report.

Martin Tugwell
Programme Director

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