



Strategic Transport Leadership Board

30 September 2022

Agenda Item 7: East West Rail strategic narrative

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Notes recent updates on progress to secure commitment from government to delivery of East West Rail in full, including Bletchley to Cambridge and the Aylesbury link**
- b) Agrees publication of the East West Rail Strategic Narrative report, annex 1.**
- c) Notes the publication of the business advocacy document, commissioned by East West Main Line partnership, annex 2**
- d) Notes the additional work agreed by the East West Main Line Partnership in June 2022 to review the strategic case for the Aylesbury link**

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. To receive further updates on activity underway to make the case for investment in delivery of East West Rail in full. To seek approval from the Board to the publication of the East West Rail strategic narrative, following further feedback from Board Members.

2. Key points to note

- 2.1. The desire to secure government commitment to delivery of East West Rail in full, including Bletchley to Cambridge and the Aylesbury link has been a long-standing commitment of the Strategic Transport Leadership Board.
- 2.2. In order to support the case for investment, it was agreed by this Board and the East West Main Line Partnership that a single set of clear narratives about the role of East West Rail was essential.
- 2.3. Following feedback by the Board, EEH officers have reviewed the draft Strategic narrative to ensure it much more clearly shows the links between East West Rail and both economic growth and sustainable connections for communities.
- 2.4. In parallel, the East West Main Line Partnership has completed work on their business advocacy report, which complements the strategic narrative very well.
- 2.5. On Friday 23 September, the new Chancellor's Plan for Growth 2022¹ included East West Rail as one of a number of schemes identified for delivery as soon as possible.

¹ [The Growth Plan 2022, HMT](#)

3. Context

- 3.1. England's Economic Heartland's transport strategy includes a policy to support 'the delivery of the East West Rail project with the expectation that Oxford to Bletchley/ Milton Keynes is open by 2025, with links to Bedford and Aylesbury to follow at the earliest possible opportunity thereafter, and Oxford-Cambridge delivered no later than 2030'.
- 3.2. The section of East West Rail between Oxford and Bletchley is currently under construction and expected to be operational by 2025. The East West Railway Company is in the process of designing and delivering the next stage of East West Rail between Bletchley and Cambridge.
- 3.3. Government announcements around levelling up and investment priorities in the North, as well as the general squeeze on public sector finances, and the changed position of the government on its appetite for a 'top down' approach to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc had collectively reinforced the need for continued emphasis of the benefits of investing in East West Rail. This was particularly pertinent to the next phases of works between Bletchley and Cambridge, including the link to Aylesbury, for which funding is still yet to be confirmed.
- 3.4. In September 2022, the new Chancellor's Plan for Growth 2022 included East West Rail as one of a number of schemes identified for delivery as soon as possible. While this is welcome, it didn't give an explicit commitment to delivery of East West Rail in full, namely between Bletchley and Cambridge and in due course the Aylesbury link.
- 3.5. Work continues to press the case for investment in East West Rail in full. Publication of the two complementary narratives, supported by a suite of engagement activity is an important factor in showing local commitment and support for the scheme.

4. Strategic narrative: overview

- 4.1. The project to provide a supporting strategic narrative of the East West Rail project has been jointly funded by EEH and the East West Railway Company. It is being carried out by consultants Steer.
- 4.2. The concluding report provides a high-level overview of the strategic rationale for East West Rail, consolidating evidence from several sources, while also including new evidence following discussions with local authority officers and the creation of East West Rail catchment maps.
- 4.3. Following comments from the Strategic Transport Leadership Board in July 2022, the report has been revised. The redrafted version provides a much clearer position: East West Rail is needed to support the region's economic growth capabilities and to ensure as many communities as possible are able to benefit from it.
- 4.4. A revised draft of the strategic narrative is attached at Annex 1 for the Board to consider and approve.

5. Business imperative for East West Rail

- 5.1. Complementary to the strategic narrative is a business advocacy brochure intended to provide a powerful and visual narrative around the business imperative for East West Rail.
- 5.2. The report is intended to be used by key regional figures, including leaders and MPs, as they advocate for East West Rail. It was published on 21 September 2022.
- 5.3. A copy of the report is attached at Annex 2.

6. Communications and Engagement

- 6.1. Letters from the EEH Chair have been sent to the new secretaries of state at DfT, BEIS, and DLUHC, alongside the Chancellor, outlining the importance of East West Rail for economic growth.



- 6.2. A blog from the Chair on the importance of investment in infrastructure, including East Rail, was placed on the EEH website, social media and shared with trade press (<https://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/news/chairs-view-investment-in-our-region-can-deliver-new-governments-economic-objectives>).
- 6.3. A statement from the EEH Chair was put out following the Mini-Budget, which emphasised the economic value of investment in our roads and rail, including East West Rail (<https://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/news/reaction-to-september-2022-mini-budget>).
- 6.4. In addition, the East West Main Line Partnership' business advocacy brochure has been shared with MPs, ministers, business groups and media.
- 6.5. Complementary communications activity is now underway with a follow-up event planned to be held in the House of Commons on 25 October 2022.

7. Updating the business case for the Aylesbury link

- 7.1. In June 2022, the East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board agreed to work updating the business case for the Aylesbury link.
- 7.2. The delivery of an East West Rail link to Aylesbury has been an integral part of the East West Rail scheme for over a decade. Its delivery has been a longstanding priority for the East West Main Line Partnership, England's Economic Heartland and Buckinghamshire Council. The link would unlock economic opportunities and support sustainable growth in the town, while also providing strategic benefits for the wider region, including improved north-south rail connectivity.
- 7.3. Aylesbury Station and Aylesbury Vale Parkway Station were included within what was previously named the 'western section' of the route, proposals which also included Bicester to Bedford. 'The Transport and Works Act Order for the western section was approved by the Secretary of State in February 2020, including in it the Aylesbury link.
- 7.4. However, East West Rail capital funding announced in January 2021 only covered parts of the original Western Section Phase Two – the section between Bicester and Bletchley. Therefore, it was agreed that work to revisit the existing EWR business case, updating it with the specific benefits that the link to Aylesbury would bring, be undertaken.
- 7.5. The agreed works will explore how the Aylesbury link can:
 - Contribute to the business case for the overall scheme
 - Improve the local and regional transport system
 - Facilitate economic growth and jobs creation
 - Act as a catalyst for the further regeneration of Aylesbury town centre
 - Support current and future housing growth
 - Reduce reliance on the car
 - Contribute to a net zero transport system
 - Identify any wider opportunities to improve rail connectivity such as Northampton to Old Oak Common
 - Could, with the right interventions, also improve connectivity westwards to Oxford.
- 7.6. EEH (as secretariat of the Partnership) has agreed to take forward delivery of the study.

8. Next steps

- 8.1. Subject to agreement, the East West Rail strategic narrative will be published and shared with stakeholders including government.
- 8.2. The business advocacy document was published earlier this month and has been shared with stakeholders including government and MPs. An event to launch the report with MPs has been scheduled in the House of Commons on 25 October 2022.
- 8.3. Work will progress on commissioning the business case for the Aylesbury link.



Naomi Green
Managing Director
September 2022