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## Executive Summary Points

### INTRODUCTION

Atkins and Roger Tym & Partners were appointed to undertake a study into the issues surrounding EW links in the region bounded by Oxford and Bicester in the West, Aylesbury in the South and Milton Keynes / Bedford in the East.

Historically there has been a lot of interest in the promotion of a rail link to support proposed growth in the region. The purpose of this study was to reconsider the rail option in light of changing growth policy background, and also to look at alternatives to the EW transport links issue and to include road/express coach as competition and as a solution instead of EW rail.

More specifically – from the Brief *“February 2003 the Government launched its Sustainable Communities Plan to address long term challenges concerning housing and communities, including the need to increase housing supply, regenerate urban areas and achieve better land use. One of its key policies was to facilitate further growth in the wider south east, through four growth areas, including the Milton Keynes and South Midlands area.*

*Draft proposals for alterations to Regional Planning Guidance, the Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy were issued in July 2003. These proposals were the subject of consultation and an examination in Public (EIP) which took place in March/April 2004. The EIP Panel Report agreed with the need to improve east west public transport links across the sub-region, including East-West Rail.*

*...Before a decision is made whether to proceed to the next stage a transport links study is needed to provide a wider assessment of all transport options along the western end of the corridor and to evaluate the potential benefits associated with planned growth.*

### METHOD

The study was undertaken by focussing on two areas of research. An assessment of the changing planning situation in the region of study and an assessment of the alternative transport scenario to address the impacts of the planning situation on the existing transport infrastructure.

The transport assessment built upon a combination of an existing rail model for EW rail and the SERTM strategic highway based model. These were used in combination to develop a simple mode choice model to determine levels of transfer between modes that would result from changes to the base transport (road, rail, other PT) costs.

The planning assessment developed two alternative growth scenarios to determine housing/population and employment growth between 2001 and 2031, and to identify the broad locations of such development. The purpose was to understand exactly where and how future land use policy will manifest itself over the next thirty years.

The process involved a combination of policy review and workshops with developers, local planning officers and transport operators. The output from the process was two development scenarios based on transport zones for the study area.

The scheme appraisal was based on a combination of scheme specific issues such as affordability and mode share, as well as standard NATA categories. It was important in the appraisal process to set the scheme testing up such that it could address the fundamental questions being asked of EW links by the brief. As such options were tested on the following lines:

- EW Rail only against a basic do-minimum – to test the basic viability of EW Rail.
- EW Rail against a do-minimum that includes competition from highway and other PT modes – to test the viability of EW Rail when faced with competition from other modes.
- EW Rail with complimentary measures (feeder buses / P&R facilities) against a basic do-minimum – to test how much EW rail can be improved and the case for such developments.
- Highway and other PT mode solutions to the EW links problem.

The final piece in the study process was an investigation into the potential funding options for East West Rail specifically, particularly in light of the tight fiscal framework within which EW rail is trying to be developed.

## STUDY FINDINGS

Improved East/West Links are at the heart of the growth strategy for the MKSM region. It is a central plank to the pattern and scale of growth that was defined in the MKSM growth strategy and it is considered that without improved EW links the basis upon which the MKSM strategy was developed would be flawed.

The scale of growth proposed within the region gives rise to significant congestion issues on EW movements within, to the extent that congestion levels would become detrimental to the functioning of the region.

The economic case for improved EW links is strong. There are however differentials in the ability of the various options tested to address one of the key objectives of the case - highway congestion.

The highway/express coach options do appear to quite naturally alleviate congestion issues – albeit with an increased adverse environmental impact, and poorer fit with sustainability goals.

Rail based options appear to have a minimal impact on the levels of highway congestion. Interestingly this works in two ways in the case for rail based options:

- On the one hand the fundamental objective of highway congestion reduction is not directly addressed;
- On the other in options where road and rail modes are considered together, the case for rail is not undermined.

On the basis that rail in isolation cannot resolve the highway congestion issues, and highway solutions cannot meet the strategic and sustainability objectives of the rail options, an optimal solution is likely to be a combination of the two. It is recognised that the highway modelling work has been, out of necessity, strategic, and that more optimal (and affordable) solutions could be developed if more detailed highway modelling were undertaken.

## **PROJECT FUNDING**

A key issue for EW Rail is that of funding. The current fiscal environment is extremely tight, and the situation for the rail sector in particular is arguably even tighter. That said, the scale of proposed development in the region is significant, and comes with the opportunity for developer contributions in the longer term.

Investigations have indicated that no section 106 monies would be available until after 2015 and in Bedford until after 2021. This does not necessarily mean that EW Rail should wait until then in order to tap into this resource. The goal is to cover the full capital cost through capitalising on potential additions to Section 106 contributions after 2015. There will need to be a public body which can act as the financial intermediary or 'banker', making the required payments to any contractor, and receiving the committed Section 106 revenues.

Clearly this approach is going to need further investigations in order to mesh the planning policy regime for a long term Section 106 strategy with the development programme for EW Rail, to test the willingness of local authorities to commit future S106 monies to EW Rail and to determine who a suitable and willing "banker" for the loan arrangements would be.