



Information Bulletin - September 2007

Western Section: Proving the viability

The publication of the 'GRIP2' study report in March 2007 demonstrated there is a strong case for upgrading the railway between Oxford and Milton Keynes, and added benefit in rail links between Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and Bedford. The Consortium has now joined forces with English Partnerships (EP) to spearhead the next phase in developing a scheme for the Western Section.

Following competitive tendering led by EP under its procurement framework, a group of consultants has been appointed to develop the operating and business case for this section of the line, in detail over the next six months. The group comprises specialists in transport and financial appraisal, civil engineering and railway operations, and the companies involved are Steer Davies Gleave, RWA Rail, Lloyds Register Rail and Tony Gee & Partners.

The work has been made possible by substantial funding from EP, and other funding from South East England Regional Assembly (the Assembly), South East England Development Agency, Aylesbury Vale Advantage and the Consortium.

The next phase will focus on defining the network of services to be delivered by East West Rail, including timetable development, rolling stock procurement, staffing and running costs. Key issues to be addressed include:

- How East West Rail will integrate with the national network particularly at Bletchley/Milton Keynes and Oxford where existing Network Rail projects are under active development;
- A more detailed assessment of the infrastructure requirements and costs for upgrading the Aylesbury spur;
- How best to integrate the Marston Vale services with East West Rail, and improve connectivity with Bedford, where Network Rail has substantially upgraded the track and signaling of the line.

A Management Board of key stakeholders has been set up to direct the work, and a client management team headed by EP, with assistance from the consortium officers representing the Assembly, Buckinghamshire County Council and Oxfordshire County Council will oversee the day-to-day activity of the consultants.

The objective now is to demonstrate a robust operating and business case that is consistent with Network Rail project development criteria, and can be presented to them and the Department for Transport to gain their support early in 2008. This will allow the project to advance to final design and implementation (subject to funding and delivery mechanisms being in place).

Policy and Funding

Work is underway to further develop the concept of using a supplementary tariff on new dwellings across the western corridor (as already exists in Milton Keynes), to generate the private sector capital required to build and upgrade the railway.

We are in the process of engaging with the Local Planning Authorities to ensure East West Rail is part of their spatial and transport options as they commence work on Local Development Frameworks, ensuring the best fit between site sustainability and financing. We need their policy support for the principle of using developer funding for the scheme.

As the majority of the scheme funding will come from the private sector, East West Rail does not appear in the recent Government White Paper "*Delivering a Sustainable Railway*". It is mentioned in the DfT Thames Valley Regional Planning Assessment for the Railway (June 2007) which acknowledges the need for better inter-regional links that can underpin housing, employment and economic growth and it makes positive references about the possibility of achieving a passenger service on the Western Section in the short to medium term (up to 2014). A potential freight role for East West Rail is also listed as a future opportunity.

The Examination in Public Panel Report for the draft South East Plan was published in August, giving support to the implementation of East West Rail. The Report identified the strategic importance of the project by improving orbital connectivity in the South East, and in the delivery of higher density development, as well as economic growth in the Oxford to Cambridge Arc.

East of Bedford

The Consortium has also commissioned a high level review of routing options for the Central Section, east of Bedford, demonstrating its commitment to securing through services to Cambridge and East Anglia. The results of the review will be considered by the Consortium in November 2007.

Neil Gibson
Chairman, East West Rail Consortium