

East West Rail Consortium
14th June 2018

Agenda Item 9.2: Service planning for East West Rail trains through Oxford and on the West Coast Main Line

Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting:

a) Proposes as absolute requirements for East West Rail train services the following:

- **EWR Train Services into and through Oxford to Didcot (and ultimately to Reading) to be a priority consideration in the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study, as outlined in item 10.1;**
- **Timetabling of the Aylesbury to Milton Keynes train service be given priority within existing WCML timetabling considerations and additionally, following delivery of HS2 in 2026, train paths for EWR train services are prioritised on the WCML.**
- **Consideration be given in the longer term for train services to be extended beyond Aylesbury to London Marylebone**

1. Background and Context

1.1 As part of developing the East West Rail (EWR) phase 2 scheme, Network Rail's Capability & Capacity Analysis team has been developing a 'GRIP 4' Concept Train Plan for Phase 2, incorporating the existing Oxford-Marylebone and Bedford – Bletchley services with the following additional services:

- 2 trains per hour per direction between Oxford and Milton Keynes
- 1 train per hour per direction between Oxford and Bedford

1.2 Along with the additional 1 train per hour per direction between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes (considered separately) these services form the 'core' EWR train service specification and the infrastructure to be provided by the East West Rail Phase 2 and associated works.

1.3 This work has identified constraints and issues both into and through Oxford, and where East West Rail services share the West Coast Main Line (WCML) between Bletchley and Milton Keynes.

2. Key Messages

- 2.1. The current approach has been to take planned timetabling on the rail network (including, for example, the WCML and Great Western Railway [GWR] timetables), factor in a number of assumptions, and attempt to work the EWR timetable around these 'fixes'.
- 2.2. The result is that, considering all of these factors, whilst it is possible to construct a concept train plan that delivers the required 2tph Oxford – Milton Keynes and 1tph Oxford – Bedford, there are a number of significant compromises involved in doing so. These include
- East West Rail Phase 1 (Oxford to London Marylebone) services have to be retimed to fit around limited network capacity in the Oxford area – likely to include a change to the entire Chiltern franchise timetable.
 - A highly inflexible timetable where any changes on the WCML will require a change to the entire East West Rail timetable and, by association, the Chiltern franchise timetable.
 - A variable journey time between Oxford and Milton Keynes that differs by up to 8 minutes despite having the same routing and calling pattern.
 - A train plan that is very prone to delays propagating across the system and enables delays to spread easily across major arterial routes in the country, with not much flexibility in the way of service recovery meaning that once delay is in the system it is difficult to recover it or prevent it being transmitted on to other services
 - Conflicting requirements emanating from competing train operators may be potentially compromising the provision of an optimum East West Rail timetable
- 2.3. Ultimately the output is a concept train plan that is sub-optimal in terms of performance and operability and is likely to be unworkable in reality. A number of options therefore need to be explored to deliver a more robust concept train plan that doesn't undermine the business case but also does not significantly impact upon the rest of the railway or compromise the train services and connectivity which East West Rail would provide.
- 2.4. In order to resolve the issues with the concept train plan, some decisions need to be made to reduce the risks of the concept train plan and analysis needs to be undertaken to establish what changes need to be made to the approach to this work in order to deliver the required results and outcomes for EWR.



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3. Conclusion and Next Steps

- 3.1 It is self-evident that East West Rail is considered by government, as well as the National Infrastructure Commission, to become a truly transformational railway that is of paramount importance in achieving the delivery of very significant economic growth within the Oxford – Milton Keynes- Corridor. As such it might therefore be expected in terms of undertaking the timetable planning of the EWR train services, EWR would be given the absolute highest priority. At this current planning stage this does not appear to be the case.
- 3.2 Thus it is essential that an optimum timetable be prepared that delivers EWR train services with an optimum performance specification, one that is given at least equal priority to all other existing train services – and if necessary a higher priority if that is what is required to secure a reliable and resilient EWR train service.
- 3.3 Moreover if there are any considerations of protecting existing franchise arrangements that may currently prevent such a timetable being realised, then consideration should be given to overruling these.
- 3.4 In terms of network capacity and timetabling through the Oxford area, the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study (covered in more detail in the paper to item 10.1) provides the opportunity to consider options and scenarios for running resilient EWR services to and through Oxford.
- 3.5 These could include connecting to or taking over existing ‘shuttle’ service patterns between Oxford and Didcot, which have arisen as a result of changes to the Great Western Electrification programme, or taking opportunities to develop the Cowley branch line for greater operational or passenger use. This would be a matter for that study to consider and report back on.



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