

East West Rail Consortium Board
11th June 2019

Agenda Item 3b: Western Section

Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) Welcome the progress being made with the Western Section**
- b) Confirm with the Department for Transport and East West Railway Company:**
 - i) The critical importance to the region of ensuring that the Western Section is delivered at the earliest opportunity possible**
 - ii) The importance of actively pursuing the potential to extend EWR services through Oxford and on to Didcot Parkway**
- c) Agree that the Chair write to the Secretary of State for Transport requesting a meeting with a view to exploring what further actions are required to ensure delivery of East West Rail at the earliest opportunity.**

1. Background

- 1.1 The meeting will receive an update from the EWR Alliance on progress being made with the Western Section.
- 1.2 Development work associated with the Western Section continues to be moved forward at pace, something the Consortium should welcome.

2 Consideration

HS2 Programme

- 2.1 Members of the Consortium will recall 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.
- 2.2 It has been widely reported that there are on-going discussions with regard to the HS2 delivery programme.
- 2.3 Whilst it is not for the Consortium to comment on the detail of any discussions underway, what should be of concern is the potential for delays in the delivery of HS2 inadvertently causing a consequential delay to the delivery of the Calvert Box.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 In light of the current uncertainty regarding the HS2 delivery programme it is recommended that the Consortium restate its position with regard to the importance of delivering the Western Section at the earliest opportunity.

- 2.6 In particular the Consortium should 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

- 2.7 Work is continuing on the development of the timetable for the Western Section.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 The Consortium has previously identified the importance – from a strategic perspective – of running East West Rail services through Oxford and onward to Didcot Parkway.
- 2.10 From a strategic perspective such an approach will help improve connectivity to/from the Science Vale into the wider Heartland region and beyond.
- 2.11 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.
- 2.12 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.
- 2.13 It is recommended that the Consortium restate its position on this particular issue to both the Department for Transport, the East West Railway Company and Network Rail.

3 Engagement with Government

- 3.1 With the TWAO Inquiry complete, and the Inspector's report anticipated to be published early in the autumn, the Western Section will shortly be moving into the phase of delivery.
- 3.2 Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's continued commitment to East West Rail as a project we should not underestimate the importance of maintaining a high profile for the scheme and in particular the importance of continuing to make clear the support that the scheme has amongst the Consortium members.
- 3.3 As we start to look to the autumn – a point at which there will be a new Prime Minister and work on the Comprehensive Spending Review gathers pace it is recommended that the Chair/Vice-Chair request a meeting with the Secretary of State with a view to ensuring that the current momentum is maintained throughout what will potentially be a more uncertain period within Westminster.
- 3.4 Such a meeting would present the opportunity to press the case for the EWR project in its entirety, including the Central and Eastern Sections.

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