

East West Rail Consortium Board
11th June 2019

Agenda Item 4: Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study – Progress Update

Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting:

- a) **Notes the progress made on Stage 1 of the study**
- b) **Requests a more detailed report to the September meeting of the Board, to consider the outcomes of Stage 1 and provide input into the Scope of Stage 2 of the work.**
- c) **Reaffirm the Consortium’s position as to the importance of East West Rail services continuing through Oxford to maximise connectivity, including links to the Great Western Main Line**

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 The Remit for this study was endorsed by the Consortium at its meeting in June 2018. That meeting agreed to a £25,000 funding contribution towards the work.
- 1.2 Owing principally to the complex nature of the partnership taking for what is a fairly unique arrangement, it took more time than expected for the Study Remit, Governance and funding arrangements to be fully agreed and signed off.
- 1.3 Work on the first stage, the Strategic study for the network, started in early 2019. Alongside this, more detailed option development work has commenced on the Cowley Branch Line (see below)

2. Key Messages

- 2.1 For Stage 1, Network Rail is fully funded (by DfT) through their regulated financial settlement to carry out the strategic study element of ORCS, in order to meet their licence duty. Their approach is based on Continuous Modular Strategic Planning, tailored to reflect Oxfordshire’s position and requirements, particularly in terms of the scale of housing and employment growth. A Working Group, with representation across the Partnership, is progressing this.
- 2.2 During this stage, Oxfordshire County Council is representing the broad views of the EWR Consortium on the Study Steering Group, reflecting both the targets for operation of the Western Section by 2023 and the aspiration for the central section to be operating by the mid-2020s. The East West Rail Company has also been represented at Steering Group discussions.
- 2.3 The Stage 1 strategic study, which we are expecting the initial outputs from in July (and finalisation in September) will need to be endorsed by funding partners, including the EWR Consortium (and also England’s Economic Heartland – which is also a funder of the study).
- 2.4 By its nature, the strategic element of the study will be fairly high level, with work on options and more detail to follow. It is this subsequent stage – Stage 2

where the full partnership funding (including the Consortium's £25k contribution) would be used for early-stage development of several 'interventions' approved by the Steering Group at the end of Strategic Study (in addition the Cowley Branch Line, work on which is underway in parallel with the strategic study).

- 2.5 Stage 2, which is really a standalone piece of work, would produce a GRIP Stage 1 - Output Definition Report. There will be an opportunity for the Consortium to shape the remit of this work (although there are guidelines on what has to be included), and also an opportunity to participate in a Value Management Workshop to capture the views of stakeholders – this would replicate the approach being taken for Cowley which seems to be working well. The report to the Board in September would also cover this.

3 Other Issues to Note

- 3.1 Over the past few months, a number of discussions have taken place about how the 'Midlands Connect' and ORCS ambitions and workstreams can reinforce each other.
- 3.2 The ORCS Working Group hasn't started to look at inter-regional connectivity yet, but early "within Oxfordshire" results show a need to better (directly) connect Didcot and Bicester – where there would be a specific opportunity and role for East West Rail in the context of looking at service opportunities beyond Oxford. Note that the ORCS output won't necessarily provide the solution, just identify that something needs to be done, and it will be for Stage 2 to develop a solution.
- 3.2 In this context, it would be helpful to restate the previously agreed Consortium view that, in order to maximise connectivity and growth potential, EWR services should continue beyond Oxford.
- 3.3 DfT has been clear this is a study about Oxfordshire; so currently no allowance is made for considering enhanced (as opposed to standard background) growth beyond the county boundary. This will need to be considered further.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 Initial outputs from the Stage 1 Study are expected in mid-July, for consideration and comment by the ORCS Steering Group.
- 4.2 Following this, the Study findings would be reported to the September Consortium Board meetings, along with proposals and recommendations for the Scope and work programme for Stage 2.

May 2019