

## **East West Rail Consortium Strategic Board 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

### **Agenda Item 6: Digital Infrastructure (Western Section)**

**Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting:**

- a) Note the progress on the Impact Assessment and related Business Case in support of the proposal to deliver the Western Section as a digitally enabled corridor**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1. At its meeting in July the Strategic Board supported the principle of delivering East West Rail as a digitally enabled corridor.
- 1.2. The draft Transport Strategy published by EEH identifies the need to ensure that where investment is being made in strategic transport infrastructure the opportunity should also be taken to deliver that infrastructure as digitally enabled.
- 1.3. The Strategic Board also agreed to support the proposal to commission an Impact Assessment that would enable the costs and benefits of delivering the Western Section of the project as a digitally enabled corridor.
- 1.4. As recent events have highlighted improved digital connectivity is as important as physical connectivity, if not more so in many instances.

#### **2. Impact Assessment: Update**

- 2.1. The work on the Impact Assessment has been undertaken by Network Rail, working in partnership with the Consortium, DfT and the East West Railway Company.
- 2.2. As noted previously, intuitively ensuring that the Western Section is delivered as a digitally enabled corridor – one that brings benefits to the communities through which it passes – ‘feels right’.
- 2.3. Board members will recall that the purpose of the Impact Assessment is three-fold:
  - To enable the cost of delivering the 432-fibre digital connectivity to be confirmed
  - To enable the location of the ‘break out’ points to be agreed with local partners
  - To enable the commercial model proposed by NRT (Network Rail Telecoms) in relation to operation of the capacity to be understood and the benefits that this will bring to local partners (effectively understanding the return to the partners arising from the investment that they would be making)
- 2.4. The cost of the Impact Assessment is £25k and DfT agreed that the cost of the work would be recognised as ‘Work in Kind’.

- 2.5. Work on the Impact Assessment is on-going. Timescales remain tight with a need to confirm whether the proposal has an acceptable business case and agree the funding to deliver it by the end of November. Given the timescales associated with the meeting at which the decision needs to be taken this in effect means that we must have clarity on the way forward by mid-November.
- 2.6. The focus of the work at present is on two aspects: firstly seeking clarity on the commercial model, and secondly the outcome of soft market testing. Both of these aspects will help determine the outcome of the business case.
- 2.7. Fortnightly meetings between the EWR Consortium secretariat, Network Rail, DfT and East West Railway Company are taking place in order to maintain pace and ensure the information required to inform a final decision is available within the required timeframe.
- 2.8. As the output from the soft market testing and clarity on the commercial model becomes available this will be shared with the partners along the Western Section for their consideration.
- 2.9. The Strategic Board is reminded that DfT has indicated that were the partners to agree the business case, and agreed to underwrite the cost of the investment, this would be counted as Work in Kind. Fundamentally though there needs to be a viable Business Case.

**Martin Tugwell**  
**October 2020**