

East West Rail Consortium Strategic Board 12th October 2020

Agenda Item 7: East West Main Line – Realising the Longer-Term Potential

Recommendation: It is recommended that the meeting consider how it might wish to build on the delivery of the current East West Rail proposal by:

- a) Identifying those related and/or associated proposals that need to be considered as part of a longer-term co-ordinated approach designed to maximise the benefit of the initial investment in the East West Main Line**
- b) Considering how it might want to promote such a package as part of the long term infrastructure requirements**

1. Conext

- 1.1. The strategic ambition defining the East West Rail Consortium is to promote and secure a strategic railway connecting East Anglia with Central, Southern and Western England, including a spur to Aylesbury.
- 1.2. Whilst the Consortium refers to activities in terms of the Western, Central and Eastern Sections, it is a fundamental principle of the Consortium that the East West Rail project is about working collaboratively to realise this strategic ambition.
- 1.3. Improving east-west connectivity provides the over-riding transformational opportunity for both the EEH and Transport East regions. In addition delivering the East West Main Line unlocks opportunities to improve north-south connectivity.
- 1.4. The latter has been a key aspect of the Consortium's work throughout its existence – a reflection of how by intersecting the traditional main lines that radiate from London the East West Main Line creates new journey opportunities.
- 1.5. Identifying those points as regionally significant rail interchanges creates opportunities to offer users a range of new rail-based journey options.

- 1.6. In this way the creation of the East West Main Line will have a powerful impact, one that will act as a catalyst for change. It is therefore important that the opportunities created by having improved access to rail services is use to shape future economic and housing growth proposals that are developed and brought through the planning system. Where that is the case, it will be essential that the investment in strategic connectivity is complemented by investment in improved local connectivity as part of a co-ordinated package of investment.

2. Transforming Journeys

- 2.1. Delivery of the current East West Rail proposal will mark the beginning of the transformation in connectivity. However the longer term potential of the East West Main Line to support planned growth and encourage further shift in both passenger and freight movements on to the rail network will require additional investment in its capacity and capability.
- 2.2. Whilst there is much that remains to be done to ensure that the current East West Rail proposal is delivered, now is an appropriate opportunity for the Consortium to consider the wider ambition and start identifying its longer term ambition for the East West Main Line.
- 2.3. Members of the Strategic Board will recall that in July EEH published the first output from its Rail Passenger Study. This work, undertaken by Network Rail (System Operator) provides a baseline of the rail network across the EEH region, as well as picking up the linkages with adjoining regions, including Transport East, Midlands Connect and Western Gateway.
- 2.4. The work was commissioned specifically in response to the recognition that the creation of East West Main Line provides the opportunity to reassess how the rail network might best serve and support economic activity and enable growth.
- 2.5. The second stage of the work is now underway and will entail Network Rail's Economic Analysis team undertaking more detailed work to assess the potential for development of the rail network.
- 2.6. The work, which will report early in the new year, will in effect provide the basis for developing conditional output statements as to what we should collectively seek from the rail network with the creation of the East West Main Line.
- 2.7. The Government has signalled that passenger rail services will transition to a concession based model over the next 18 months. By having an evidence-led approach to the identification of our future requirements, local partners will be well placed, through the Sub-national Transport Bodies, to ensure the needs of communities and businesses are better reflected.
- 2.8. With both EEH and Transport East supporting it, the EWR Consortium is well placed to influence and shape the work of both Sub-national Transport Bodies.

3. Potential Longer Term Requirements

3.1. The meeting is invited to consider how it might wish to build on the delivery of the current East West Rail proposal by:

- c) Identifying those related and/or associated proposals that need to be considered as part of a longer-term co-ordinated approach designed to maximise the benefit of the initial investment in the East West Main Line
- d) Considering how it might want to promote such a package as part of the long term infrastructure requirements

3.2. Related and/or associated proposals that the meeting might consider include (note: this list is not intended to be exhaustive, nor should the order be taken as being prioritised):

- Oxford Station – addressing the acknowledged bottleneck at the station, and accelerating development and delivery of required enhancement
- Oxford Station to Didcot Parkway (including linkages westwards towards Swindon) – to improve east-west connectivity between South Wales/Bristol/Bath and Oxford – Cambridge Arc by enabling restoration of direct services: to also consider opportunities to deliver new stations along the GWML in Oxfordshire, Swindon and Wiltshire
- Cowley Branch restoration

[Note: the Consortium continues to support the work of the Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study which has been examining these issues – an update on which will provide to a future meeting of the Strategic Board]

- London Road Level Crossing, Bicester – delivering a solution to the impact of barrier down-time is essential in order to realise the full potential of the current East West Rail project, including Central and Eastern Sections

[Note: the Consortium as part of its agreed work programme is funding a piece of work being taken forward by Oxfordshire County Council looking at this issue – to be reported back to the Strategic Board at its December meeting]

- Northampton – Milton Keynes/Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common corridor – a combination of East West Rail and opening of HS2 (which allows for reallocation of paths on the West Coast Main Line) creates the opportunity to introduce a new north-south service along this corridor
- Aylesbury – EEH has identified the potential to use the combination of investment in East West Rail as a catalyst for enabling a step-change in local connectivity in support of planned growth
- Bletchley Station – the availability of an enhanced rail offer at this station creates opportunities to support the potential for growth in this area, with the station a focus point

- Marston Vale Line – EEH has identified the Bletchley to Bedford section as an area where there is a need to develop a complementary package of local measures required to improve local connectivity to/from rail stations
- Bedford Midland Station – the opportunity to use investment in East West Rail as a catalyst for regeneration opportunities in the immediate area
- Midland Main Line – with Bedford Midland Station as an interchange with East West Rail there is a need to identify the linkages required with Luton (including the Airport) and to stations to the north, including linkages with Northamptonshire

[Note: the Strategic Board has previously received a briefing on the work commission by Bedford Borough Council to identify its longer term rail priorities]

- Sandy/St Neots – identified as a potential interchange with the East Coast Main Line as part of the preferred route for the Central Section
- Cambourne – identified as a new station on the preferred route for the Central Section, with linkages/interchange to the CAM
- Cambridge South Station – a priority scheme being taken forward to delivery, but where there remains a need to ensure the longer term potential of the location is realised
- Cambridge Station – ensuring that the capability and capacity exists to enable through running of East West Main Line services

[Note: the Cambridge Rail Corridor Study provides a basis on which to build future requirements]

- Felistowe to Nuneaton corridor improvements – delivery of which is critical for both strategic and sub-regional outcomes

[Note: the STBs have already written in support of this corridor]

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. This paper seeks to begin a discussion amongst the Consortium members the purpose of which is to enable the partners' longer term ambition for the East West Main Line to be mapped out.
- 4.2. Building on the Consortium's previous discussions that they see delivery of the current project as the first step in realising their strategic ambition.
- 4.3. Setting out that ambition in the form of co-ordinated programme of activity would help support individual partners locally and build on the strategic investment made in the East West Rail project. The Consortium is invited to consider whether it wishes to develop such a narrative.

Martin Tugwell
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