

DRAFT RESPONSE

1. Context

- 1.1. This is the response of the East West Rail Consortium to the East West Railway Company's non-statutory consultation entitled 'Making Meaningful Connections.
- 1.2. The East West Rail Consortium brings local authorities and local enterprise partnerships together in a collaborative partnership, the ambition of which is to promote and secure a strategic railway connecting East Anglia with Central, Southern and Western England, including the link to Aylesbury.
- 1.3. The EWR Consortium welcome the Government's continued commitment to restore the rail link between Oxford and Cambridge. Delivering and realising the full potential of East West Rail is the key transformational project for the region and beyond. The project will provide residents and businesses with genuinely new travel choices and opportunities, not just along the immediate corridor but as part of the wider transport system across the region.
- 1.4. The Oxford to Cambridge Arc is identified by the Government as a national economic priority, delivery of East West Rail is central to realising the ambition for the Arc.
- 1.5. This response is focused on the strategic issues in relation to the proposals published by the East West Railway Company. Where the individual partners of the East West Rail Consortium wish to comment on detailed aspects of the proposals these will be made separately by those partners.

2. Policy Framework

- 2.1. In February 2021 EEH published its Transport Strategy: '*Connecting People, Transforming Journeys*': it provides the regional policy framework for the proposals published by the East West Railway Company.
- 2.2. This vision-led, evidence-based Strategy reflects the ambition of the region and its partners. It sets the strategic policy framework for the region's transport system for the period to 2050.
- 2.3. The ambition underpinning the Strategy is simple: to support sustainable growth and improve quality of life and well-being through a world-class, decarbonised transport system which harnesses the region's global expertise in technology and innovation to unlock new opportunities for residents and businesses, in a way that benefits the UK as a whole.
- 2.4. The Strategy is guided by four key principles:
 - Achieving net-zero carbon emissions from transport no later than 2050, with an ambition to reach this by 2040
 - Improving quality of life and well-being through a safe and inclusive transport system accessible to all which emphasises sustainable and active travel
 - Supporting the regional economy by connecting people and businesses to markets and opportunities
 - Ensuring the Heartland works for the UK by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods through the region and to/from international gateways, in a way which lessens its environmental impact.

2.5. It goes on to set out how 'business as usual' will not get us where we need to be. A step-change is required to deliver the region's ambition and meet the expectations of our residents, communities, and businesses. In response the Strategy sets out how the region will:

- Focus on decarbonisation of the transport system by harnessing innovation and supporting solutions which create green economic opportunities
- Promote investment in digital infrastructure as a means of improving connectivity
- Use delivery of East West Rail and other mass rapid transit systems as the catalyst for the transformation of the region's strategic public transport networks
- Champion increased investment in active travel and shared transport solutions to improve local connectivity to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential
- Ensure that the region's freight and logistics needs continue to be met whilst lowering the environmental impact of their delivery

3. East West Rail: Transformational Infrastructure

- 3.1. Delivery of a new strategic railway connecting East Anglia with central, southern and western England, and with South Wales has been at the heart of the region's strategic transport priorities for over 25 years. The East West Rail Consortium established the strategic case in support of the new main line, which led to its identification as a project of national significance.
- 3.2. The National Infrastructure Commission in its report – Partnering for Prosperity – endorsed the strategic importance of the East West Main Line.
- 3.3. It is in this context that improving east-west connectivity is identified in the regional Transport Strategy as providing the over-riding transformational opportunity for the region. At the same time the Strategy sets out how this will also unlock opportunities to improve north-south connectivity thereby broadening the benefit of the investment across the Heartland region.
- 3.4. The commitment of Government to deliver the Oxford to Cambridge section of the East West Main Line represents a first step in realising the full benefit of this transformative link for the region, and beyond.
- 3.5. The regional Transport Strategy goes on to identify how the locations where the East West Main Line intersects existing main lines represent the opportunity to establish regionally significant transport hubs, with priority given to:
 - Oxford Stations
 - Bicester Stations
 - Aylesbury Station
 - Bletchley/Milton Keynes Stations
 - Bedford Midland Station
 - East West Rail/East Coast Main Line
 - Cambridge/Cambridge South Stations

The expectation of the regional Transport Strategy is that the locational advantages of these hubs will be taken into account by local partners when identifying opportunities for economic activity and future housing growth.

- 3.6. The regional Transport Strategy continues by noting that the longer-term potential of the East West Main Line to support planned growth and enable a further shift in passenger and freight movements on to rail will require additional investment beyond that planned by the East West Rail Company.

4. Overarching Requirements

4.1. Within the context provided by the regional Transport Strategy and the accompanying technical work commissioned by England's Economic Heartland, the East West Rail Consortium and associated partners, the overarching requirements arising from the proposals set out in this consultation are:

a) Continued support in principle for the development and delivery of the proposals required to restore the rail link between Oxford and Cambridge

The Government has previously set out its commitment to complete the restoration of the Oxford to Cambridge rail link by 2030. This commitment should remain given the key role that the rail link has in enabling the economic potential of the region to be realised, consistent with the requirement to achieve net zero carbon.

The continued commitment of Government to this timeframe will enable partners along the corridor to bring forward long-term proposals for their communities with greater confidence. It will also give continued confidence to private sector investors when determining the location of their future investments.

b) The importance of high quality and environmentally sensitive design

The scale of the East West Main Line is significant, not just as a transformational project for the region, but in terms of the potential impact it has on the natural and built environment. In keeping with the principles of the regional Transport Strategy it is essential that the design of proposed works makes a positive contribution towards the requirement to achieve net environmental benefit. The design of individual elements must respect and enhance the local environment.

c) A commitment by Government to deliver East West Rail section must include a commitment to fund the delivery of complementary improvements in local connectivity

In order to maximise the benefit of the strategic investment being made in the East West Main Line it is essential that the scheme is supported by complementary investment in improved local connectivity. Investment in active travel measures and connecting local public transport services will be essential in order to offer prospective rail users with a range of choices for their journey to/from the station. Where there is a need to make provision for car parking this should be at a level that does not undermine the ambition of encouraging access by non-car modes.

The proposals published by the East West Railway Company create a number of instances where there is a need for complementary investment: these instances are identified in the detailed requirements included herein. It is our expectation that the Company will work with individual local authorities to agree the package of complementary measures and that the Government will fund the East West Railway Company accordingly to enable it to deliver the agreed measures.

In developing the package of complementary measures particular attention should be paid to ensuring that the railway and its stations are 'future proofed': in this respect the delivery of East West Rail as a digitally enabled infrastructure corridor will be critical.

d) The section between Bletchley and Cambridge should be designed to enable delivery of the full of the East West Main Line proposal

Though each section of the East West Rail project will realise benefits for the communities and businesses it serves, the full transformational benefit will only be realised through the delivery of the East West Main Line in full.

In this context delivery of the link between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes must continue to be viewed as an integral element of the East West Main Line. The link provides a key connection that will support future growth, improving connectivity in a way that reduces demand on the road network. In addition to linking the economic cluster centred on Milton Keynes with the planned growth centred on Aylesbury, the Aylesbury to Milton Keynes link forms part of the strategic opportunity to improve connectivity on the Northampton – Milton Keynes/Bletchley – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common corridor. Realisation of this strategic opportunity is identified in the regional Transport Strategy as a regional priority.

Whilst the remit of the East West Railway Company is to restore the rail link between Oxford and Cambridge, the strategic opportunity championed by the East West Rail Consortium (and endorsed by the National Infrastructure Commission) is to connect services through Cambridge, and eastwards to Norwich and Ipswich.

The East West Rail Consortium is completing a pre-Strategic Outline Business Case for the 'Eastern Section' – i.e. in respect of services east of Cambridge. Realisation of this strategic opportunity is a priority of both EEH and Transport East Sub-national Transport Bodies. The design of the Bedford to Cambridge section must enable the running of services through Cambridge Station to/from the east without the need for the reversal of services in the station. The design of the section must also ensure that East West Rail services are able to call directly at Cambridge South in order to serve the internationally significant Cambridge Biomedical campus.

EEH and the East West Rail Consortium are working with partners in the Western Gateway Sub-national Transport Body with a view to ensuring that the potential of the East West Main Line to improve connectivity westwards of Oxford is realised.

e) The section between Bletchley and Cambridge should be delivered as electrified infrastructure

The imperative to decarbonise our transport system is front and centre of transport policy at national, regional and local level. Electrification of the East West Main Line offers the only realistic traction technology for high-speed, longer-distance passenger services and freight services that will operate on it.

The scale of construction works required for the Marston Vale Line, combined with the need for new construction between Bedford and Cambridge should be taken as the opportunity to deliver these sections as electrified infrastructure from day one.

With the West Anglian Main Line, East Coast Main Line, Midland Main Line and West Coast Main Line all electrified, the case for electrification is heightened from an operational perspective.

Experience shows that the cost of retrofitting infrastructure for electrification once a rail link is operational will be significantly higher than if the investment is made at the same time as the initial construction works.

Committing to the delivery of the Bletchley/Bedford to Cambridge section as an electrified route will avoid unnecessary costs being incurred at a future date. The commitment to electrify the Bletchley/Bedford to Cambridge section should be viewed as part of the national programme of electrification that is required to support the Government's commitment to decarbonise our transport system.

In developing detailed proposals to deliver East West Rail as an electrified route the importance of high quality and environmentally sensitive design must be applied a key principle underpinning all work.

f) The section between Bletchley and Cambridge should be delivered as a digitally enabled infrastructure corridor

EEH and the EWR Consortium have worked closely with the East West Railway Company and Government departments to enable the section between Bicester and Bletchley to be delivered as a digitally enabled infrastructure corridor. EWR Consortium members have been instrumental in enabling the digital capability being delivered to be over and above the minimum required to support rail operations: the additional capability being used to provide enhanced digital connectivity (including provision of 5G) for surrounding communities and 'back-haul' services in support of the continued expansion of the digital economy.

All parties involved with the Bicester to Bletchley works recognise the added value of delivering new infrastructure as digitally enabled. Experience with this work has demonstrated the need for future stages of the East West Main Line to be specified as needing to be digitally enabled infrastructure and for the cost of that provision to be included within the overall cost of the scheme.

Based on experience with the Bicester to Bletchley section, the cost of providing enhanced digital connectivity as a percentage of the overall scheme cost is marginal. However, unless it is included within the specification of the works from the outset it can be difficult to secure the provision. Experience with the Bicester to Bletchley section suggests that enhanced digital connectivity can be delivered at 10% of the cost of retrofitting once the railway infrastructure is operational.

The commitment to deliver the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet road improvement provides a further opportunity to ensure that new strategic infrastructure is delivered as digitally enabled. The East West Railway Company should work with Highways England to determine how best to provide a digitally enabled corridor where the two projects are in close proximity.

g) The design of the Bletchley and Cambridge section must incorporate lessons learnt during the delivery of the Bicester to Bletchley section

Members of the East West Rail Consortium involved with the delivery of the Bicester to Bletchley section of the rail link have first-hand experience of the impact of construction works on local communities and businesses.

Experience shows that in some instances the impact of the works has been exacerbated by decisions taken at the design stage which ultimately served to increase the impact on the adjacent local highway network during construction. In addition, experience during the construction period has served to highlight the need for a higher level of mitigation measures on the local highway network, and the need for a higher level of oversight and management of construction activity.

The Consortium has worked closely with the East West Rail Alliance delivering the Bicester to Bletchley section to identify lessons learnt. Those should be incorporated into the design and delivery of the section between Bletchley and Cambridge. Whilst integration of such requirements at the design stage may increase the headline cost of the works, experience from the Bicester to Bletchley section shows a failure to do so ultimately results in additional costs being incurred and additional impact on the local communities and businesses.

It is noted that works on the Bletchley to Bedford section of East West Rail are likely to overlap with construction works associated with the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement scheme. This serves to emphasise the importance of working closely with local partners throughout the design of the Bletchley to Bedford section to ensure that the measures required to enable the construction works minimise the impact on local communities and businesses.

Experience throughout the development and delivery of previous sections of the East West Main Line have served to highlight the risk of underestimating the level of engagement necessary with local communities and businesses to minimise the impact of construction works. The implications for local authorities – both in terms of cost and resources – of managing the impact of construction works need to be taken into account in finalising the detail of the proposed works.

h) The design of the Bletchley to Cambridge section should be capable of accommodating rail freight services

The evidence base underpinning the regional Transport Strategy identifies the freight and logistics sector as one of the largest contributors to our carbon emissions. The Strategy encourages greater use of rail for freight and logistics as a means of providing additional resilience for the business community, while also acting on the need to achieve net zero.

Whilst not part of East West Rail, removing the bottlenecks on the Felixstowe to Nuneaton corridor remain an immediate strategic priority for EEH, Transport East and Midlands Connect. All three STBs support the need for proposals to address them being taken forward into delivery at the earliest opportunity.

However, it is also important that the East West Main Line is designed and delivered with the capability of supporting rail freight services without the need for additional works. In this regard due consideration must be given to ensuring that the impact on local communities of rail freight movements is minimised.

The design and operation of East West Rail should take into account and contribute to the delivery of the requirements of the national rail freight strategy.

5. Detailed Requirements

- 5.1. In addition to the overarching requirements set out above, the proposals put forward by the East West Railway Company give rise to a series of more detailed requirements. For convenience, and ease of reference, these are grouped geographically.

Oxfordshire

- 5.2. The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study – funded in part by England’s Economic Heartland and the East West Rail Consortium – identifies the need for additional capacity at Oxford Station to accommodate the long-term increase in rail use (both passenger and freight), including that arising as a consequence of East West Rail.
- 5.3. EEH and the EWR Consortium support the principle of running East West Rail services through Oxford Station on the basis that this will improve wider connectivity and reduce the impact of terminating services in Oxford Station.
- 5.4. In addition to supporting the restoration of services to the Cowley branch line, the EWR Consortium are supportive of restoring direct services between Oxford, Swindon and Bath/Bristol and of additional services between Oxford and Southampton. The design of such services should support the need for improved rail connectivity to/from Didcot Parkway in support of the wider Science Vale initiative. The economic value of additional inter-regional services has been identified through the Passenger Rail Study work commissioned by EEH from Network Rail. Both service enhancements could be realised by extending East West Rail services through Oxford Station.
- 5.5. The need for additional capacity at Oxford Station from a railway operation perspective affords the opportunity to realise the potential of the station as a strategic economic opportunity linked to the regeneration of Oxford’s East End. In particular, the high level of connectivity inherent at the station (including its role as an interchange for local bus services) should be used to explore the opportunity to integrate economic opportunities as part of any station enhancement to help take forward the ambitions of the Oxford Station masterplan.

- 5.6. Oxford Parkway has been a significant success in terms of providing residents with access to fast, direct rail services to London without the need to use the main station in the city centre.
- 5.7. The significance of Oxford Parkway as a gateway to rail services will grow further as a result of Local Plan allocations for housing and economic development. Improved local connectivity – in particular, by active travel modes and local bus services – should be delivered in anticipation of the planned development in order to encourage sustainable patterns of movement from the outset.
- 5.8. The EWR Consortium has long-supported the need to deliver a solution that addresses the implications of increased barrier down-time at the London Road level crossing in Bicester arising from the extension of East West Rail services to Cambridge.
- 5.9. It is recognised within the proposals put forward by the East West Railway Company that the introduction of services to Cambridge will result in barrier down-time rising to 50 minutes per hour: effectively this means the level crossing will be closed for the majority of the day.
- 5.10. London Road is an important access route within the local highway network serving Bicester. And with significant housing growth being delivered to the south and west of Bicester the effective closure of the level crossing makes it essential that there is a comprehensive package of investment in local connectivity to offset the impact of that closure.
- 5.11. Work undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council, funded by the East West Rail Consortium, has identified such a package of measures.
- 5.12. It is on this basis that we support the closure of the London Road level crossing in support of the extension of East West Rail services to Cambridge provided that:
 - a) the East West Railway Company agree a package of improvements in local connectivity with Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council
 - b) the Government provides the additional funding required to enable the agreed package of improvements to be delivered in parallel with the delivery of the Bedford to Cambridge section of East West Rail

Bletchley

- 5.13. The EWR Consortium recognises and supports the key role that Bletchley Station has as part of the transport offer that supports delivery of planned growth in the Bletchley area. This serves to emphasise the importance of having a new 'eastern entrance' to Bletchley Station – one that provides easy access to both East West Rail services and those operating on the West Coast Main Line.
- 5.14. We expect the East West Railway Company to continue to work with Milton Keynes Council and Network Rail to agree a package of improvements in local connectivity associated with the provision of a new eastern entrance. We would look to the Government to provide the additional funding that enables the agreed package to be delivered in parallel with the delivery of investment in the Bletchley to Bedford section of East West Rail.
- 5.15. In addition, the work of EEH has identified a potential requirement in the longer term for a new chord connecting East West Rail (from the east) with the West Coast Main Line. Enabling the provision of such a chord will enable direct rail services between Milton Keynes and the eastern half of East West Rail, both passenger and freight.
- 5.16. The design of improvements in and around Bletchley Station should safeguard the option for this chord to be delivered at a future date.

Bletchley to Bedford: the Marston Vale Line

- 5.17. We recognise the need for change to operations on the Marston Vale Line. We accept that the proposals previously agreed as part of the Transport and Works Act for the 'western section' are not sufficient to enable this section of the route to fulfil its role as part of the overall East West Rail project.
- 5.18. The existing infrastructure means that journey times between Bletchley and Bedford are slow and the user experience is poor. We accept that retaining the existing stopping service would make it harder to realise the full potential of the East West Main Line.
- 5.19. Our support for the consolidation of stations and the acceleration of services is conditional upon the East West Railway Company working with the relevant local authorities to agree an appropriate package of complementary measures that ensure the stations are well connected to their communities. It is our expectation that East West Railway Company will receive the additional funding required to deliver the agreed package of measures.
- 5.20. Such a package of measures would need to both improve connectivity for existing residents and be available to residents of new developments from day one. The latter is particularly important in order to enable the adoption of sustainable travel patterns from the beginning of new developments.
- 5.21. The emerging outputs of the first mile last mile work commissioned jointly by EEH and the East West Railway Company should be used as the basis to develop the package of improvements in local connectivity required to complement the investment in East West Rail. The evidence base underpinning this work has been developed with the assistance of local authority partners. The detail of the package of improvements must be developed and agreed with the local authorities once a final decision has been made on the number and location of stations on this section of East West Rail.
- 5.22. Our support for this approach is also conditional upon the additional funding required to implement the agreed package being made available by Government.
- 5.23. Whilst we accept the need to close level crossings on the section between Bletchley and Bedford this can only be done when satisfactory alternative arrangements have been agreed with the relevant parties. We note that detailed proposals already exist that would enable a number of level crossings to be closed. We also note that there are specific concerns amongst the communities of Fenny Stratford and Lidlington regarding the impact that closure will give rise to in those locations. We expect the East West Railway Company to work closely with the relevant local authorities to identify solutions that are mutually acceptable.
- 5.24. Our support for this approach is conditional upon the additional funding required to implement agreed arrangements being made available by Government.
- 5.25. In keeping with our shared recognition of the need to ensure that there is appropriate investment in local connectivity to/from EWR stations, we expect the East West Railway Company to bring forward proposals that will improve connectivity from EWR stations to the planned Wixams Station on the Midland Main Line.
- 5.26. We note the scale of the proposed works along the Marston Vale Line is significantly greater than that originally planned under the proposals agreed as part of the Transport and Works Act for the 'western section': what is now proposed effectively represents a complete reconstruction of the existing rail corridor.
- 5.27. Experience with the first phase of the East West Rail project – specifically the Oxford to Bicester section – demonstrated the added value realised from the complete closure of the railway for the duration of the works. Although such an approach has implications for existing passengers, experience shows that the rail industry is able to lay on alternative arrangements that ensure the travel needs of passengers continue to be met.

- 5.28. The alternative of seeking to reconstruct the Marston Vale and maintain the existing train service will lengthen considerably the time taken to deliver the proposed works and add significantly to the cost of delivering those works.
- 5.29. We therefore support a temporary closure of the Marston Vale line to enable its reconstruction. Our support is conditional upon the detail of alternative travel arrangements being agreed with the relevant local authorities and additional funding being provided to enable those arrangements to be delivered reliably throughout the temporary closure.
- 5.30. The East West Rail Consortium strongly support the introduction of Oxford to Bedford services at the earliest possible opportunity. We both consider it possible and important in terms of supporting delivery of planned growth that these services to be operational prior to the completion of the Bedford to Cambridge section.

Bedford

- 5.31. East West Rail services calling at Bedford Midland will support the ambition to realise the economic potential of the town and is strongly supported by the EWR Consortium.
- 5.32. The new railway will serve as a catalyst for the development of Bedford Midland Station as a regionally and nationally significant interchange, offering opportunities for interchange between East West Rail services and those on the Midland Main Line.
- 5.33. With respect to Bedford St Johns, we support relocating the station to the west of its current location to improve the alignment of the rail infrastructure, remove the existing speed restriction and support growth in the area.
- 5.34. To develop a more detailed understanding of the implications of each of the options set out in the consultation, EEH is supporting Network Rail in the preparation of a piece of strategic advice that will inform the selection of the optimum interfaces between Bedford and East West Rail. This piece of work will report in autumn 2021 and inform EEH's response to East West Rail's statutory consultation.
- 5.35. We welcome the recognition of the opportunity for improvements at Bedford Midland Station to support wider proposals for the regeneration of the town. We support local aspirations that seek to connect a newly regenerated station with economic redevelopment opportunities nearby and the construction of an 'up fast' platform that would enable interchange with express services on the Midland Main Line. The East West Railway Company should continue to work with partners in Bedford to ensure the proposals for Bedford Midland Station support the ambitions of Bedford Master Plan.

Bedford to Cambridge

- 5.36. It is noted that each of the five different route alignments proposed between Bedford and west of Cambridge benefit from a shared movement corridor with the A428. We support this approach on the basis that aligning both rail/road infrastructure in this way will ensure new housing and communities are brought forward with the certainty of multi-modal transport connections.
- 5.37. It is also noted that work is ongoing to consider the benefits of the new alignment serving either a station at Tempsford or St Neots South. Timetabling and station design must facilitate frictionless interchange between East West Rail services and East Coast Main Line services. This will enable better rail access to the other significant regional destinations (e.g. Peterborough) that are not located along the railway's core.

- 5.38. Given the scale of growth that could potentially be delivered as a result of a new interchange station, it is also considered essential that commitment is made from Government to align the provision of new rail infrastructure with the need to plan for and deliver improvements to the A1 corridor. The capacity of the A1 is a known constraint to development in both the St Neots and Tempsford areas and a solution will be required before any growth can be considered along this corridor. These two infrastructure solutions combined would substantially improve connectivity, as well as creating the optimum location for future growth.
- 5.39. It is noted that East West Railway services will be in addition to existing services operating on the Shepreth corridor west of its junction with the West Anglian Main Line. Experience suggests that it will be necessary to examine in more detail the interaction between those existing services and East West Rail.
- 5.40. It is important that proposals for four-tracking between Shepreth Junction into the city are integrated with the new Cambridge South Station. Delivery of the latter is a regional priority given the national, if not international significance of the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. We support the delivery of the new station by 2025, and it is essential that East West Rail services also serve the station from the opening of the Bedford to Cambridge section. We urge the East West Railway Company to work closely with the promoters of Cambridge South and the South East Transport project to ensure opportunities are aligned.
- 5.41. Cambridge Station will continue to grow in importance as a hub station on the national network. The need for investment in passenger facilities, including the need for additional circulation space, should be kept under regular review. As should the potential need for a new passenger access on the eastern side of the station.

East of Cambridge

- 5.42. In looking at the future requirements for Cambridge Station these should enable East West Rail services to travel through the station to/from the east.
- 5.43. The Passenger Rail Study taken forward jointly by England's Economic Heartland and Network Rail has identified that improving connectivity through Cambridge to/from East Anglia (i.e. Ipswich and Norwich) will unlock regionally significant economic benefits.
- 5.44. The EWR Consortium commissioned work to develop a pre-SOBC for the 'Eastern Section' is testing the benefits and implications of several new service options that provide enhanced connectivity to Ipswich and Norwich from Cambridge and further west. The emerging findings of the pre-SOBC have confirmed that the Eastern Section has a strong strategic and economic case and extending East West services provides value for money.
- 5.45. The true transformational benefit of the East West Main Line will not be felt until the country has coast-to-coast, through connectivity from East Anglia to the South West. Through the work of the East West Rail Consortium and the Sub-National Transport Bodies (Western Gateway, England's Economic Heartland and Transport East) we will work together to continue to make the case for this investment.

6. The Customer Experience

- 6.1. A key focus for the Heartland Transport Strategy is the need to ensure that investment decisions reflect the user need.
- 6.2. Our Strategy recognises that a user's experience is shaped by their end-to-end journey; not only how they feel whilst on-board the train. The aspiration for consistent, clock-face timetabling is supported and a reminder of the need for service improvements to public transport to take into account social factors.
- 6.3. We encourage the East West Railway Company, in its role as Shadow Operator, to use the framework provided by the Williams-Shapp Plan for Rail to embrace and/or pioneer an approach to ticketing that better reflect changes in working patterns and other exogenous factors that have arisen in recent years.

- 6.4. Enhancing the user experience of the stations located on the East West Main Line should be afforded a high priority. The design of stations on the Marston Vale Line and on the Bedford to Cambridge section should be consistent with this ambition. It is expected that where necessary existing stations between Oxford and Bletchley will be retrofitted to the same standard.
- 6.5. We expect that, as a minimum, each station will provide a rich blend of future proofed facilities, enabled by new digital services that make the user experience simpler and more comfortable. In addition, we encourage the East West Railway Company to explore opportunities to re-establish the station as a focus for the local community.
- 6.6. This may include provision of additional facilities – such as meeting/workspace, or commercial activities – that give rise to added value. Experience suggests that in these circumstances the overall level of passenger safety is increased.
- 6.7. We invite the East West Railway Company to ensure that the design of its stations, and the surrounding public realm, prioritises access by active travel and local bus services. This extends beyond the provision of accessible routes to/from the station by considering the ways in which the need for passenger drop-off/pick-up and parking are managed to avoid the creation of streetscapes that are dominated by motorised transport.
- 6.8. The need to plan for a safe and inclusive transport system is a principle that underpins the region's Transport Strategy. The provision of on-board staff (in addition to the driver) does a lot to instil confidence when it comes to safety, as well as making a positive contribution to the overall customer experience. It is anticipated that services will therefore operate with an on-board member of staff.
- 6.9. We expect the East West Railway Company to ensure that station design, including from street to platform and from platform to train, is completely accessible for all.
- 6.10. Empirical research undertaken by the EEH Business Unit has demonstrated that users with impaired mobility are less likely to use stations that do not have level-boarding between platform and train when compared with stations that provide both ramp provision and level boarding. It is essential that a 21st century railway meets the needs of modern travellers and accessibility should ideally be accommodated by improved platform and rolling stock rather than manual ramp provision.

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