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East West Main Line Partnership
c/o Buckinghamshire Council
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Dear Secretary of State

Spending Review 2021

The East West Main Line Partnership (the new name for the East West Rail Consortium) brings elected members and officers from its constituent local authorities and representatives from local enterprise partnerships together in a collaborative partnership. Its ambition is to promote and secure a strategic railway connecting East Anglia with Central, Southern and Western England, including the link to Aylesbury.

Investment in East West Rail is providing high quality connectivity in an economic region that competes on an international scale, improving productivity rates which are currently behind those of our global competitors in places such as Silicon Valley. East West Rail is also essential to supporting planned growth in the region, as set out in our partners' local plans and enabling us to do so in a way that allows us to create the sustainable places that local communities expect of us.

The Oxford to Cambridge Arc is identified by government as a national economic priority: delivery of East West Rail is the single most important opportunity for realising the ambition for the Arc. The National Infrastructure Commission in its report – Partnering for Prosperity – also endorsed the strategic importance of the East West Main Line.

The Partnership therefore welcomes 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 a key transformational project for the region, for the UK and for our position on a global platform.

Equally, investment in East West Rail is vital for realising the government's levelling-up agenda. While the region is considered relatively prosperous, there are significant variations in life outcomes within it. There are significant pockets of deprivation in places such as Oxford, Milton Keynes, Northampton, Aylesbury, Bedford and Luton – the life expectancy of people living in different parts of Oxford can differ by as much as 15 years. Rural deprivation and isolation is also a significant issue in the region.

East West Rail will unlock economic opportunities for our residents, allowing people to find employment in labour markets which were previously inaccessible and/or too expensive to live in, while the sustainable housing growth it supports will open more choice in where people live.

And, through the region's commitment to planning the right first and last mile connectivity to East West Rail, both now and in the future, we are ensuring the railway continues to support creation of places in which people want to live, work and thrive.

The government has previously set out its commitment to complete the restoration of the Oxford to Cambridge rail link (including the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link) by 2030. The Spending Review must ensure that this full commitment remains, including the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link, given the key role that East West Rail has in enabling the economic potential of the region to be realised, consistent with the requirement to achieve net zero carbon. This 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.

The Partnership's long-term ambition is for an East West Main Line running from coast-to-coast connecting Ipswich and Norwich through to Bristol and South Wales. The main line will unlock significant north-south opportunities: where it connects six radial main lines running between London and the north. The link would become a core part of the UK's strategic transport network as proposed in the Union Connectivity interim report.

Both England's Economic Heartland and Transport East sub-national transport bodies have made Spending Review submissions which reference the importance of delivery of an East West Rail Main Line at the earliest opportunity. The Partnership endorses these submissions.

From within the submissions provided, for the purposes of the forthcoming Spending Review, the Partnership would like to reemphasise the need for focus and a commitment to deliver as immediate priorities:

Aylesbury to Milton Keynes

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 (planned for delivery as part of the 'Western Section') must continue to be viewed as an integral element of East West Rail. We urge the government, through this Spending Review to provide capital funding to enable its delivery at the earliest opportunity.

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 EEH's transport strategy as a regional priority.

Bletchley to Bedford

At the same time, it is essential that delivery of Bletchley-Bedford section (also previously part of the 'Western Section') must continue without delay.

In its consultation response on the Marston Vale Line, the Partnership recognised the need for change to operations on the Marston Vale Line. However, to maintain pace, and to demonstrate the government's commitment to supporting delivery of economic and

housing growth in a sustainable way, the Spending Review must support the introduction of Oxford to Bedford services at the earliest possible opportunity.

We both consider it possible and essential to the ambitions of the region that these services be operational prior to the completion of the Bedford to Cambridge section.

Building in sufficient mitigation of construction impacts

Members of the Partnership 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.

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. This has highlighted 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.

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. Doing will also ensure that East West Rail continues to enjoy strong support from the communities it will ultimately serve.

Oxfordshire

There is a need for investment in capacity at Oxford Station from a railway operation perspective, which also affords the opportunity to realise the potential of the station as a strategic economic opportunity linked to the regeneration of Oxford's East End. This project is central to not only realising the potential of East West Rail, but more widely the ambitions for improving public transport serving Oxford and surrounding areas, as well as enabling inter-regional movements. Further funding is required to be allocated to complete works following a full business case expected from Network Rail early next year. Additional funding is also required to support development of a masterplan for further service improvements linked to East West Rail, including through services to Bristol and Southampton from 2028.

The Partnership has also long-supported delivery of a solution that addresses the increased barrier down-time at the London Road level crossing in Bicester arising from the extension of East West Rail services to Bedford and Cambridge. This will likely result in the level crossing's closure, as per the East West Railway Company's 'optioneering and sifting' exercise following its non-statutory consultation. Funding is therefore required now (prior to the Company's statutory consultation) to develop a solution with a package of mitigation measures, as currently championed by Oxfordshire County Council in its engagement with the Company. Funding must cover the production of any subsequent business case, with a view to ensuring delivery in Control Period 7 (linked with delivery of East West Rail).

Eastern Section

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 Partnership (and endorsed by the National Infrastructure Commission) is to connect services through Cambridge, and eastwards to Norwich and Ipswich.

The Partnership is completing a pre-Strategic Outline Business Case for the 'Eastern Section' – 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 and the Spending Review should provide revenue funding to enable the acceleration of this work.

Electrification

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.

Digitally enabled

The section between Bletchley and Cambridge should also be delivered as a digitally enabled infrastructure corridor. EEH and the Partnership 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: 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.

This 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.

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.

A flagship opportunity for Global Britain

By supporting East West Rail's full delivery at pace, government will 'build back better' and avoid the pitfalls of a piecemeal approach which fails to give due consideration to the communities East West Rail will serve. Experience with other large schemes throughout the years has shown that while such an approach may save money in the short-term, it will fail to fully realise the transformation impacts for which such significant investment was originally made. The cost of retrofitting at a later date is exponentially higher.

East West Rail is a flagship opportunity for Global Britain. It demonstrates the UK's ability to provide and deliver exemplary, transformative public infrastructure projects and lead the world in transport decarbonisation.

Its delivery presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for a future proofed railway that puts the country's environmental commitments at the forefront of our approach to supporting economic growth.

The Partnership will continue to champion the ambition for East West Rail, in order to ensure government secures an even greater return on its investment – by creating one of the UK's most truly transformational pieces of infrastructure in recent memory.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Steve Broadbent
Chair
East West Main Line Partnership