

East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board

9 March 2022

Agenda Item 3: Upating the case for East West Rail

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board:

- a) Notes the work being carried out to update the strategic case for East West Rail between Oxford and Cambridge, including the Aylesbury link**
- b) Agrees to contribute £12,000 to joint fund modelling work to be commissioned by England's Economic Heartland**
- c) Agrees to spend up to £30,000 on work to better leverage the business imperative for East West Rail**

1. Context

- 1.1. Delivery of a railway connecting East Anglia, with central, southern and western England has been a strategic priority for the local authorities comprising the East West Main Line Partnership (formerly the East West Rail Consortium) for over 25 years.
- 1.2. East West Rail's delivery is also priority in England's Economic Heartland's transport strategy, published in February 2021, and is a key scheme in Transport East's draft transport strategy, published in December 2021. Western Gateway sub-national transport body's 'Rail Strategy Phase 2' also references opportunities from delivery of East West Rail.
- 1.3. The section of East West Rail between Oxford and Bletchley is currently under construction and expected to be operational by 2025. The East West Railway Company is now in the process of designing and delivering the next stage of East West Rail between Bletchley and Cambridge.
- 1.4. While the government did not take the opportunity to publicly restate its commitment to East West Rail as part of last year's Spending Review and Budget, it is expected that funding to continue development and delivery of the next phase of East West Rail will be confirmed by DfT, pending internal decisions within Government.
- 1.5. Members will be aware of recent announcements around levelling up, investment in HS2 and the wider integrated rail plan for the Midlands and the north. These commitments, as well as the general squeeze on public sector finances, and the changed position of the government on its appetite for a 'top down' approach to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, collectively reinforce the need for continued emphasis of the benefits of investing in East West Rail for the region, and the country as a whole.
- 1.6. The East West Rail Consortium made the original business case for East West Rail. However, in recent years the impact of East West Rail has been analysed through the lens of 'top down' reports such as 2017's 'Partnering for Prosperity' by the National Infrastructure Commission.
- 1.7. Particularly in light of the government's changed preference towards locally-led initiatives, there is a need for a local and regionally-led piece of work which provides refreshed evidence to re-emphasise the strategic case for East West Rail between Oxford and Cambridge (including the Aylesbury link).

- 1.8. The proposed work has the support of the Department for Transport, East West Railway Company and the EEH Strategic Transport Leadership Board. It also aligns with the East West Main Line Partnership's six strategic areas of focus, as agreed by the Board in September, including (but not limited to) 'delivery of Oxford-Cambridge at the earliest opportunity'; 'north-south connectivity'; and 'coast to coast connectivity'.
- 1.9. The project is divided into three distinct packages, set out below. In order to make the most of the project, each package is seeking funding from partners.
- 1.10. It is recommended that the Partnership supports the work, including investing a total of £42,000. The funds will contribute towards two of the three packages, including as leader commissioner on one of these packages.

2. Project one: Consolidating the Strategic Case for East West Rail

- 2.1. The first piece of work is being jointly funded by EEH and the East West Railway Company.
- 2.2. This will form a literature review which will summarise existing evidence regarding the strategic case for East West Rail. The review will cover the local, regional, and national strategic cases for East West Rail.
- 2.3. There will also be an assessment of how East West Rail aligns with known local economic and housing plans.
- 2.4. Another aspect is the drawing up of station catchment areas (based on different modes), to better understand the local impact of East West Rail.
- 2.5. Work will be completed within two months of project commencement.

3. Project two: Strategic modelling

- 3.1. England's Economic Heartland is also procuring quantitative strategic modelling of the benefits of East West Rail (Oxford-Cambridge and the Aylesbury link) including economic impacts and modal share.
- 3.2. The project will utilise the model already developed by EEH, meaning modelling outputs can be delivered without any of the strategic costs associated with it.
- 3.3. The outputs of the work will provide – at the strategic level – an evidence-based narrative about the impact of investing in East West Rail for the region and the country as a whole.
- 3.4. The work is strategic in nature but will be used by to support the wider case for East West Rail.
- 3.5. In order to take forward the work, it is proposed that the East West Main Line Partnership contribute £12,000 towards the project – 50% of its total costs.
- 3.6. Work will be completed within three months of project commencement.

4. Project three: 'Business Imperative for East West Rail'

- 4.1. The third project seeks to build upon the outputs of the first two packages.
- 4.2. The work would provide a convincing, powerful and visual narrative around the business imperative for East West Rail. This will include:
 - Sourcing quotations from leading figures from business, academia, local authorities and MPs regarding the importance of East West Rail's delivery
 - Case studies that demonstrate how East West Rail will open opportunities to unlock support businesses, improve the UK's global competitiveness, grow the economy, level-up and improve the transport network.
 - A high level, visual summary of the first two projects to create a key facts document with associated infographics for stakeholder consumption.
 - Advice on a potential East West Rail Westminster event – likely to be the first event of the England's Economic Heartland APPG which is currently being planned.

- 4.3. The project will capture and present invaluable qualitative evidence to sit alongside work packages 1 and 2. It provides an important tool to capture the wider benefits of a transformative scheme like East West Rail which can't easily be reflected in the business case.
- 4.4. Given the nature of the work, focusing on advocacy and ensuring the voice of the region is well represented in decision making on East West Rail, the project aligns with the core values of the Partnership.
- 4.5. It is therefore proposed that the Partnership leads oversight and delivery of the work. The project is expected to cost around £30,000, with a delivery time frame from commencement of around three months.

5. Budget considerations

- 5.1. If the Board approves funding for projects 2 and 3 (£42,000), the remaining budget for the financial year 22/23 (as proposed in agenda item 4) would be £85,112.
- 5.2. This would remain sufficient to deliver all, or parts of the projects set out in agenda item 4 in the time frame that they are needed.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. Subject to the Board's comments and approval, Partnership officers will take forward delivery of packages two and three.
- 6.2. The Board will be fully updated of the progress with the three packages when it next meets in June 2022.

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