

CABINET – 18 JULY 2017

EAST WEST RAIL WESTERN SECTION PHASE 2 – RESPONSE TO TRANSPORT & WORKS ACT ORDER CONSULTATION

Report by Director for Planning & Place

Introduction

1. East West Rail is a strategic national rail infrastructure proposal to reopen and upgrade the rail corridor connecting Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, extending on to Ipswich and Norwich. It is split into three distinct sections covering Oxford to Bedford and Milton Keynes to Princes Risborough (Western); Bedford to Cambridge (Central) and Cambridge to Norwich and Ipswich (Eastern). The plans in Annex 1 shows the East West Rail Network.
2. This report is primarily concerned with the Western Section, which includes the route in Oxfordshire. Phase 1 of the Western section, connecting Oxford to Bicester via Oxford Parkway, with services extending to London Marylebone, has already been constructed with services now running.
3. The powers are now being sought by Network Rail to construct and operate phase 2 of the Western section, which in Oxfordshire runs from east of Bicester town centre to the County Boundary, extending on to Milton Keynes and Bedford via Bletchley. A Strategic Alliance led by Network Rail is taking the project through approvals and implementation, and is seeking powers under the Transport & Works Act process to construct the railway.
4. This process necessitates the production of a draft Environmental Statement for the scheme, for consultation with the public and Stakeholders. This consultation began on 30th June and runs until 11th August. Details of the proposals are set out on the East West Rail website, www.eastwestrail.org.uk.
5. The purpose of this report is to set out what Oxfordshire's overall response to the consultation should be in principle, in the context of East West Rail programme as a whole and the Council's ambitions for the Oxford to Cambridge corridor. This response will be supplemented with more detailed comments on specific areas of the consultation, once all the information has been analysed. A schedule of these comments will be circulated as an addendum to the report, along with any issues raised at the consultation events arranged for Bicester (10 July) and Launton (13 July).

Background

6. The Western section of East West Rail has been developed and refined over many years by a Consortium of local authorities, of which Oxfordshire County Council is a founder Member. All these authorities have committed to

providing Government with significant local financial contributions to the project – for Oxfordshire, this amounts to some £11.06m, around £500k of which has already been contributed ‘Work in Kind’. The East West Rail Consortium as a whole will also be responding to the consultation.

7. The Western section was approved in principle by central Government in its 2012 'High Level Output Statement' for the railway. Since then, further design and development work has taken place, with an initial public consultation on the proposed scheme held by Network Rail in autumn 2015. The response to this consultation was extremely positive, with over 70% of respondents either strongly supporting or supporting the scheme.
8. The proposals for the scheme have now been updated ready for Transport & Works Act submission (planned for early 2018), with a draft Environmental Statement produced. Details of this and the wider scheme are set out in the consultation materials, and the non-technical summary of project is set out in Annex 2. In summary the scheme infrastructure comprises:
 - i. Reconstruction and upgrade of the railway between Bicester and Milton Keynes / Bedford via Bletchley with an additional connection from this line down to Aylesbury and Princes Risborough;
 - ii. Associated new highway infrastructure in Bicester, in particular a new bridge crossing of the railway by the Bicester Eastern Perimeter Road (Charbridge Lane), and new bridges to replace some level crossings;
 - iii. Two new bridges and associated highway approaches, to take the highway over the railway at each end of Launton Village, replacing an existing structure at the western (Bicester Road) end and a level crossing at the eastern (Station Road) end;
 - iv. Some consolidation / realignment of parts of the Rights of Way network to tie in with the new crossing proposals;
 - v. A new station at Winslow in Buckinghamshire.
9. As important as the infrastructure is the service patterns it creates for travellers. New journey opportunities include:
 - i. Oxford to Milton Keynes and Bedford, stopping in Oxfordshire at Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village;
 - ii. Milton Keynes to Aylesbury and London Marylebone: an extension of the existing service between Marylebone and Aylesbury Vale Parkway;
 - iii. Within Oxfordshire, direct, frequent services linking Didcot, Oxford and Bicester (the Oxfordshire “Knowledge Spine”).
10. There is also significant potential for new regional and national rail connections, extending not just to Cambridge and beyond, but westwards to Swindon/Bristol, south to Reading and Heathrow airport. Some of these connections will require investment in additional infrastructure, for example

upgrading the railway between Didcot and Oxford, and through Oxford Station.

Strategic Opportunity

11. East West Rail aims to provide infrastructure to support local authorities' ambition for substantial economic growth based on the creation of new private sector jobs and the development of major areas of new housing. So whilst at one level it is a railway proposal, East West Rail is much more than that – essentially it is a national infrastructure scheme that will enable and support growth and the economy in Oxfordshire, along the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, across the England's Economic Heartland Area and beyond.
12. Altogether, the East West Rail programme has the potential to support well over 250,000 new jobs and a similar number of homes across the corridor, with the Western section representing a significant proportion of these figures.
13. It is worth noting that the recent opening of Phase 1, connecting Oxford to Bicester and London, has already led to new sustainable growth opportunities coming forward, for example Cherwell District Council's proposals in their Local Plan to allocate land for housing in areas close to Oxford Parkway station, and the continued development of Bicester as a Garden Town.
14. Early delivery of East West Rail was a key recommendation arising from the National Infrastructure Commission interim report published last year. On that basis, £100m of additional funding was allocated to the project, to ensure that the project's interface with the High Speed 2 proposal could be taken forward ahead of other works, in line with the HS2 construction programme.
15. As well as the established Project Management and Governance through the Consortium and Network Rail-led delivery alliance, a new East West Rail company has been formed to oversee the approval and construction of the project, with an initial remit to deliver it as early as possible at a reduced cost. A report on how these are to be achieved is expected to be published soon.
16. In this context, there should be an opportunity to bring the operation of the scheme forward from the dates outlined in the consultation, with a reduced project cost. In considering these, it will be important that the scope of the project and the outcomes it would achieve, as set out, are maintained.

Detailed Considerations

17. While the section of Phase 2 of the route within Oxfordshire is relatively short, there are some important considerations and areas where the Council will need to be satisfied with the detail of the proposals, including arrangements for the construction of the project. Specific issues include:
 - i. The requirement for a complete Transport Assessment (TA) of the proposals; a draft TA has been undertaken, but has not yet been finalised or agreed;

- ii. Ensuring that bridges, structures and proposed highway alignments meet OCC standards, especially where new alignments are proposed;
 - iii. Proper and thorough consideration of Environmental Impacts, including landscape, ecology and architectural heritage, matters on which relevant Council officers are already engaged;
18. It will also be important that the East West Rail service patterns maximises the potential of the infrastructure investment, including the ability of services to extend beyond Oxford to connect with the Great Western Railway, Crossrail and services to Heathrow at Didcot / Reading.

Proposed Consultation Response

19. East West Rail has long been established as a priority for Oxfordshire and we have been working with partners on its development for over 20 years, with some frustration that it has not yet been constructed. It has been identified as a priority requirement in the Oxfordshire Rail Strategy, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) and underpins the potential of the Oxford to Cambridge strategic development corridor. It also directly supports growth and development elsewhere on the route, for example at Aylesbury. Within Oxfordshire, it greatly increases the potential for local rail trips – for example by providing 4 trains an hour in each direction between Bicester and Oxford.
20. In this context, the basis of the Council's response to the consultation is proposed to be based on the points below. It is proposed to agree the final consultation response in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for the Environment, who is the Council's representative as Deputy Chairman of the East West Rail Joint Delivery Board. The main points to make are:
- i. Strong support for the project, as a major opportunity to enhance local, regional and national rail connectivity, stressing its role as a nationally important piece of economic infrastructure that is essential to support growth;
 - ii. Welcoming the infrastructure and associated proposals contained within the Transport & Works Act scheme to reopen and upgrade this rail corridor;
 - iii. Reinstatement of the Council's view that the infrastructure proposed in the Transport & Works Act proposal, identified as the 'core' scheme, is what is required to ensure the aims and outcomes of the project can be achieved; any changes to the project which reduce its scope such that these outcomes and benefits would not be achieved would not be acceptable;
 - iv. To press for as early as introduction of East West Rail services as possible, in order for the benefits to be maximised and realised at the earliest opportunity;
 - v. To welcome the enabling highway infrastructure around Bicester and Launton, including the proposed Charbridge Lane crossing, and ensuring that its design continues to make provision for the Bicester Eastern Perimeter Road to be upgraded to dual carriageway status in the future.

21. The overall strategic response would be accompanied by a schedule of detailed comments, as per the addendum to this report.

London Road Level Crossing, Bicester

22. One of the knock-on effects of the opening of East West Rail Phase 1 has been intensified use of this crossing, previously only occasionally used for rail freight services. The crossing was considered as part of the Transport & Works Act into EWR Phase 1 in 2011. The T&WA Inspector concluded that an at-grade level crossing was acceptable for that level of train service (2 trains per hour in each direction, now operating) *plus* the additional East-West Rail 'core' service envisaged to operate once Phase 2 was open (an additional 2 trains per hour in each direction, i.e. approximately doubling frequency).
23. Accordingly, an upgrade of this crossing – over and above that required for railway operations and safety, now in place - is not within scope of Phase 2. Although potential bridge and tunnel solutions have been examined, this type of solution would be extremely costly and disruptive to build, and there is currently no technical justification or funding identified for any scheme. However, it remains on the list of Oxfordshire Infrastructure requirements.
24. Typical current "barrier down" times are around 14 minutes in each hour, although they vary according to train direction. These are projected to go up to between 30 and 34 minutes with the introduction of the core EWR service.
25. It is acknowledged that future phases of EWR (extension of the scheme to Cambridge/the east when the Central and Eastern Sections come on stream, together with an enhanced service pattern with additional passenger and freight services) will place significant additional pressure on the crossing, significantly extending the barrier down time and road user delay period. However, these are not yet committed or funded and are very unlikely to come forward until the 2024-2029 rail investment period at the earliest.
26. It is therefore recommended that our consultation response makes clear that any further service upgrade for East West Rail *over and above the core service specification proposed for Phase 2* is contingent upon a solution for the London Road Level Crossing being approved and funded.

Financial and Staff Implications

27. The County Council, along with all the other authorities in the Consortium, has committed to provide a substantial local capital contribution to East West Rail, some £11.06m. This commitment, alongside the Business Case which outlined the extensive benefits of the project, were the two key factors behind the commitment made by Government to East West Rail in 2012.
28. Following agreement by Cabinet in October 2013, funding for this has been agreed through the Council's capital programme, where £0.737m is added to the programme each year over a 15 year period commencing in

2014/15. However, no direct payment from the capital programme has been made owing to the uncertainty as to when the Western section Phase 2 would be funded and built. The funding added to the capital programme since 2014/15 is being held in capital reserves until it is required.

29. The Council has previously allocated funding towards project development and, more recently, has contributed 'Work in Kind' towards the project. A total contribution of just over £500,000 has been made, leaving a residual commitment of around £10.5m. Some of this remaining commitment has already been secured from developer contributions.
30. Over and above the £100m allocation announced last year, funding to complete the scheme has not yet been confirmed by Government. However a decision on funding is expected to be made once the current work to fully evaluate the cost of the project has been completed.
31. Commitment of Government funding would require the Council to restate its commitment to the agreed local contribution and for a revised schedule of payments to be agreed with the Department for Transport, and included within the Council's Capital Programme. This would be reported separately.
32. In order to progress speedy delivery of East West Rail, a combination of Network Rail 'Permitted Development' and Transport & Works Act powers are likely to be used. As part of supporting the project, additional Council staff resources may be required to ensure that any issues are dealt with quickly without unnecessary delay to the project. These would be counted as Work in Kind, and deducted from the Council's total contribution.

Equalities Implications

33. There are no direct implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

34. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) **Reconfirm the Council's strong support for the East West Rail scheme set out in the consultation proposals, as a strategic investment priority;**
 - (b) **Submit a response to the Western Section Phase 2 consultation, based on the points outlined in paragraph 20 above, with the final response to be agreed by the Cabinet Member for the Environment in consultation with the Director for Planning & Place;**
 - (c) **For this response to include a schedule of detailed points, as per the addendum circulated to this report.**

CA12

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Background papers: None

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