



7th September 2018

Secretary of State for Transport
c/o Transport and Works Act Orders Unit,
General Counsel's Office,
Department for Transport,
Zone 1/18, Great Minster House,
33 Horseferry Road,
London SW1P 4DR

Dear Mr Grayling

**East West Rail Transport and Works Act Order Application –
Response from Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council**

As established Members of the East West Rail Consortium (which represents all local authorities along the East West corridor), Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council wish to record their support and commitment to the successful delivery of Phase 2 of this important, national strategic project.

East West Rail has already been identified by the National Infrastructure Commission as a key element of the 'multi-modal spine' across the Oxford – Milton Keynes – Cambridge corridor. The Government has accepted the strategic need for the scheme in its initial response to the NIC's report: in addition, the England's Economic Heartland Strategic Transport Forum – the emerging Sub-National Transport Body for the corridor which both Councils are engaged with – has also identified East West Rail as being of strategic importance. We echo this view.

As the Highway and Planning authorities for the East West Rail route in Oxfordshire, both Oxfordshire County and Cherwell District Councils are strongly supportive of the overall strategic case underpinning East West Rail Phase 2 and the principle of the proposal submitted under the Transport and Works Act Order. In this context, it is important to recognise that both Councils view the delivery of the complete and agreed Phase 2 project being crucial. This support is therefore conditional upon achieving the full scope of the infrastructure proposed in the Order, as this 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.

We additionally support the plans for re-opening the central section through to Cambridge and promoting greater rail connectivity across the corridor to Cambridge, Norwich and Ipswich. This all demonstrates the value of East West Rail as being greater than the sum of its parts.

In addition, both Councils are committed to ensuring that East West Rail Phase 2 services do not see Oxford as a terminus or end point, but continue to operate continuing through Oxford Station and onto Didcot Parkway – this is important for enhancing the strategic connectivity of the scheme (by linking main rail lines and major centres of growth) as well as maximising the opportunities for rail travel along the core Bicester–Oxford–Didcot “Knowledge Spine” growth corridor within Oxfordshire. This is a need and requirement we are promoting through the Oxfordshire Growth Board and its involvement in steering the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study. Through this study and further development of East West Rail we will also be exploring options for potential extension of services west to Swindon and Bristol.

We are delighted that Phase 1 of East West Rail was launched in Oxfordshire for train services in 2015, with the opening of the new Oxford Parkway station and the significantly enhanced station at Bicester Village. East West Rail is already enjoying considerable success with patronage of the train services exceeding the numbers that were originally forecast, helping to reducing pressure on the strategic highway network including the A34 through Oxfordshire. We see this as a blueprint for what successful rail investment looks like and it is already starting to support the delivery of planned Local Plan growth and influence where can best be located.

We now look forward to the opening of Phase 2, which would support the very significant planned growth in new jobs and housing across the corridor - this is a real opportunity to demonstrate how rail infrastructure investment can drive sustainable growth, which will also be an important consideration in the development of the Oxfordshire Joint Spatial Plan which both are Councils are engaged in through the Oxfordshire Growth Board. It is worth noting that our strong support for the project overall has been the case throughout its development, illustrated by the considerable resource and Work in Kind commitments that both our organisations have put into the project to help it progress and reduce risks.

Throughout this process, we have worked with the East West Rail Alliance and other partners on the details of the proposals, raising a number of comments and concerns, some of which remain unresolved. These cover a variety of areas including Highways & Transport, Ecology and Cultural Heritage, with the specific points documented in the attached annex to this letter. These are to be considered as part of our formal response to the publication of the Transport & Works Act Order, and we need to be clear that our strategic support for East West Rail as set out in this letter is dependent on the detailed issues raised being resolved.

Finally, it is recognised that London Road Level Crossing in Bicester is not part of the scope of this Transport and Works Act Order. However, the highway impacts of additional rail services on the crossing (which will mean the barriers being down for a significantly longer period every hour) must be fully taken into consideration, a point we have identified in our detailed response on the transport chapter.

It is acknowledged that future phases of East West Rail (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, further extending the barrier down time and road user delay period. In responding to the second round of consultation of East West Rail, the County Council resolved 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, and this position is maintained.

We look forward to a swift resolution of these points and the conclusion to the Transport and Works Act Order application that will enable delivery of East West Rail Phase 2 at the very earliest opportunity.

Yours faithfully

Ian Hudspeth

Cllr Ian Hudspeth
Leader, Oxfordshire County Council



Cllr Barry Wood
Leader, Cherwell District Council