

South Cambridgeshire District Council response to the East-West Rail Bedford to Cambridge consultation

1. Introduction

As agreed by Full Council in September 2018, South Cambridgeshire District Council supports the principle of the Bedford to Cambridge section of the East West Rail line. It has the potential to be transformational for the regional economy, allowing sustained growth and geographical expansion of our high value industries such as life sciences, IT and digital.

The points included in the motion agreed by Council in September 2018, and shared with you by letter, have shaped our response to this Bedford to Cambridge Route Options consultation, both via the joint letter sent on behalf of councils across the Bedford to Cambridge corridor, and in the response made below on behalf of the Council alone, which is additional to that letter.

Prior to making its response below, it is important to note that the Council's response to this consultation does not prejudice an in-depth consideration of strategy issues through the forthcoming Greater Cambridge Local Plan (to be jointly prepared by South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council), which will include consideration of all reasonable strategy options.

2. The overall approach taken to developing route options

The Council supports the broad approach taken in this consultation for developing route options, including in particular considering environmental impacts, benefits for transport users (including reducing car-borne trips), and support for economic growth at a local, Cambridge Oxford Arc, and UK level.

Uncertainty regarding growth implications of consultation

Further to the above however, we note in the strategic objectives that the most significant relates to supporting growth, and that the business case for the railway is predicated upon such growth. We note from the consultation and other evidence that there is very significant uncertainty as to the scale of growth envisaged around potential station locations. Evidence sources and modelling assumptions referenced vary greatly, and the only certainty seems to be that the implied growth above and beyond current Local Plan commitments would be substantial.

The implication of potentially very significant growth implications for around Cambourne or at Bassingbourn barracks arising from the selection of a preferred station location, together with the lack of detail in the consultation on the scale of that growth, creates uncertainties regarding environmental and community impacts, and delivery expectations. As such, the Council's comments below in relation to route preferences are conditional on the findings of further detailed evidence on these issues.

Importance of comprehensive planning

Setting aside uncertainties about levels of growth, we are concerned to ensure that the choice regarding the railway route supports the creation of flourishing and sustainable communities – it cannot and should not be reduced to a numbers game. Any additional growth should be comprehensively planned: the scale and nature of new or expanded communities must be design-led and people-focused, and supported by necessary infrastructure and enhancements to natural capital. Greater Cambridge's future economic growth is contingent upon the area maintaining a high quality of life for existing and new communities.

One key aspect of this is that any new and expanded communities would need to be supported by a range of infrastructure, not just the railway. Any quantification of costs and benefits for the railway routes must factor in estimates of all infrastructure costs, so that local members are not left to choose between infrastructure and affordable housing provision.

To achieve the above goals we ask that the railway proposals are integrated more fully with spatial planning and environmental work, at an Oxford Cambridge Arc and more local level.

At the Oxford Cambridge Arc level, we note that this consultation runs ahead of wider work on growth forecasts, growth opportunities, and environmental considerations. The Council believes that the rail line should also make positive contributions to the net biodiversity and natural capital gain of the areas affected. However, to achieve this will require a joined-up plan. The Council therefore supports EWR Co's intention to continue working with the government and other agencies to contribute to their broader approach to exploring options for a local natural capital plan for the Arc. We ask for close collaboration between EWR Co. and the bodies leading on the Arc-wide spatial and environmental work-strands so that the choice of railway route is clearly informed by this wider thinking.

At a more local level, the Greater Cambridge Local Plan process starts this year with an Issues and Options consultation in the autumn. The Plan will take into account all aspects of sustainable development, and will set a spatial strategy for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. We ask for closer engagement with EWR Co. as the railway plans and the Local Plan develop, so that we can consider how the Local Plan takes account of the challenges and opportunities created by the railway, and so that the railway project is informed by the local economic, social and environmental issues raised by the Local Plan.

3. Challenges and opportunities relating to the route options

Acknowledging the broad nature of this consultation, limited information available and significant uncertainties around growth implications, it is considered that, in principle, routes including Cambourne as a station (B and E) could be preferable to routes including Bassingbourn, for the following reasons:

- A rail connection between a new well integrated/connected station at Cambourne and Cambridge would, we believe, have a positive impact upon housing delivery rates of current planned development, and would increase mode shift onto rail for local and long distance commuting along an existing growth corridor.
- Growth in this corridor builds upon an existing development strategy set out in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, with the potential that further growth could

increase the economic mass and attractiveness of Cambourne, subject to full and proper consideration through the Greater Cambridge Local Plan process.

- Further growth at Cambourne could make best use of existing and proposed transport infrastructure (existing A428 dual carriageway and Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvements along the preferred Orange route), with a new railway providing complementary sustainable transport choices. Proposals for significant growth around Tempsford/South of St Neots also included in this route option could support further infrastructure improvements in this corridor and reduce private car-based trips into Cambridge from the west.
- The railway alignment avoids potential environmental impacts on Wimpole Hall Avenue and Eversden and Wimpole Woods Special Area of Conservation.

In developing the East West Rail project, including in selecting a preferred route, we ask that EWR Co. considers in detail the following challenges and opportunities:

- Local infrastructure projects - projects such as the emerging proposals for a Cambridge Autonomous Metro could provide a stepping stone/transfer from East West Rail onto a local public transport corridor that serves not only Cambridge itself but also the science parks and university campus to the west of Cambridge. The East West Rail project needs to have proper regard to this transfer opportunity – and the importance of delivering this connection into the local public transport network.
- Local impacts on communities – we are concerned that the environmental effects of the railway and its operation may negatively impact on South Cambridgeshire residents and businesses, including among other things, on local connectivity including local roads and public rights of way. We ask that EWR Co. carefully considers these as the route options are refined, with appropriate mitigation measures made an integral part of the project;
- Environmental, landscape and heritage impacts and opportunities for enhancement along the route - in particular we note the opportunity to improve drainage conditions, providing enhanced flood storage capacity to address existing and future flood risk (for example around Bourn Brook valley near Cambourne, should route B or E be selected); and
- Consider the role of freight in moving goods efficiently and reducing carbon emissions associated with road-based travel.

4. Approach to Cambridge

The Council urges EWR Co., when making its final decision on the preferred approach to Cambridge, to take into consideration:

- The importance of enabling efficient connection with Norwich, Ipswich and other destinations to the east of Cambridge. The future economic performance of the region depends upon better connections east, as well as to the west as served by the proposed Bedford to Cambridge line. Good connections east will support high value growth within and beyond the Cambridge housing market area, by providing improved sustainable transport connections between housing and jobs;
- The benefits of the rail line directly serving jobs growth at Cambridge Biomedical Campus;

- Potential landscape, environmental and heritage impacts and opportunities, including impacts on the Cambridge Green Belt; and
- Linkages to other local transport infrastructure.

Notwithstanding the above, we consider that addressing the below points is critical for making the railway an economic success while fully considering impacts on communities and the environment:

- In preferring the southern access into Cambridge, the consultation places weight on the importance of directly serving the proposed Cambridge south station. We support this weighting, but note that while the consultation assumes delivery of Cambridge South station, the station is a separate project to East West Rail. There is a critical need for Government and all partners to remain focused on the delivery of this station project to support more sustainable commuting to this location, including making the most of the opportunity provided by East West Rail.
- The consultation does not make clear how the East West rail line would join the West Anglia Main Line south of Cambridge, and it is therefore difficult to comment on the implications of this for communities and the environment. The Council seeks in-depth engagement with EWR Co. on this point as it develops further its proposals for the rail line.

5. Other points, and request for closer future working

We understand that East West Rail project will be built to allow future electrification of the line, but that in the first instance trains running on the line are likely to be diesel powered. We are disappointed to hear this, and would stress the importance of making the line electric as soon as possible to support national and local carbon emissions reduction targets.

As highlighted in the Council's motion of September 2018 and in our responses above, East West Rail and the growth of the corridor more generally will bring significant change to existing communities. To enable us, together with our communities, to make the most of the opportunity that the railway brings, and to effectively address its impacts, we ask that EWR Co. collaborates with us closely beyond the close of this consultation, as it progresses the Bedford to Cambridge project.

Please note that this response is subject to a call in period of five working days, ending on Monday 18th March. The Council will notify EWR Co. if any wording changes arise from that call in period.