

EWR Co – Let's Restart the Conversation

Online Sessions, August 2020 – Summary Report

Produced: October 2020





Parish, ward and division councillors from Bedford to Cambridge joined us for one of four online sessions we held between 18 and 25 August to restart the conversation about East West Rail following lockdown and discuss ways of working together going forward. We are grateful for the time and expertise lent to us by the 65 community representatives who attended these sessions.

The EWR Co team learnt a great deal about the priorities and issues of interest to the communities represented, and we hope they were of interest and use to the attendees.

This document captures and reflects the key themes and topics raised and summarises our notes on specific issues.

If there is anything else you would like to raise, please do not hesitate to do so by contacting us at contact@eastwestrail.co.uk.

The East West Railway Company (EWR Co) team was represented at these sessions by: Ian Parker, Programme Delivery Director; Will Gallagher, Strategy and Sponsorship Director; Hannah Staunton, Head of External Affairs; Paul Sparrow, Head of Technical Partner, and Jordi Beascochea, Engagement Manager, and supported by Stuart Edwards, Engagement Manager; Rebecca Griffin, Press Manager and a number of consultants.

Topics raised in the Q&A sections

1. The Preferred Route Option

Costs of the Preferred Route Option

Across all the sessions, attendees were keen to learn more about the costs of Route E.



EWR Co notes

We chose Route E as the Preferred Route Option as it provided the most benefits for every £ of taxpayers' money spent, performed best for transport user benefits and supporting economic growth, as well as being the most favoured option with people who responded to the consultation on route options we held back in 2019.

We are aware of the interest from local communities in the evolved cost modelling of the route options, and following the sessions, we are reviewing how to provide more detail on this subject. We will release additional details in due course.

Assessment factors

Some of the attendees across the events wondered how the 15 assessment factors were weighted to choose Route E as well as how we were assessing our route alignment options. As part of one of these conversations, some attendees asked if we were aware of Bedford Borough Council's suggestion for a further station north of Bedford to support additional housing.



EWR Co notes

We are using the same factors to assess potential alignments as we used to assess the route options. These are outlined in detail on pages 11 to 14 of 'Chapter 4, Evaluating route option within the preferred route corridor' of the 'Bedford to Cambridge Route Option Consultation Technical Report', which you can find [here](#). These factors were agreed with the Department for Transport in 2018.

The consultation that we will hold to present our route alignment options will set out the impacts and benefits of the different alignments so that residents can see the balance between them. Some of these benefits will be for the whole area, not just specific villages.

In answer to the specific point around Bedford Borough Council, the Council was one of the 7,000 consultees that responded to our consultation in 2019. Their response is available in full on pages 65 to 113 of the '2019 Bedford to Cambridge Route Option Consultation Public Feedback Report: Appendix 1-10', which you can find [here](#).

The team at EWR Co is aware that a station north of Bedford is being promoted by some members of Bedford Borough Council, but at present a station to the north of Bedford is not in our plans. As we keep on developing the railway, we will from time to time back-check our decisions to test that the Preferred Route Option and its elements continue to be the right ones for the communities who live and work between Bedford and Cambridge.

We will continue to have conversations with all the local authorities along the route, including Bedford Borough Council, to make sure that East West Rail works for the local communities.

Benefits of the Preferred Route Option

Some of the attendees were interested in understanding the benefits of the Preferred Route Option against other route options we presented at the non-statutory consultation in 2019.



EWR Co notes

Route E was – in the round – the best performing of the routes on which we consulted in 2019, with the best package of benefits to the community and the UK.

It would deliver the best opportunities for the environment by avoiding the most environmentally challenging areas and potential direct impacts on irreplaceable or sensitive environmental features, including heritage assets, with good opportunities to achieve biodiversity net gain.

As above, it performed best for transport users – e.g., provided the best connectivity - and supporting much needed economic growth across the area, as well as being the most favoured option with people who responded to the consultation on route options we held back in 2019. It was also the route that provided the most benefits for every £ of taxpayers' money spent.

We published more information about benefits of the Preferred Route Option - [here](#).

2. Route alignment options

Alignment options

Across all the sessions, attendees were keen to learn when we would be sharing the options for the Preferred Route Alignment.



EWR Co notes

We plan to do this in early 2021.

We are currently developing route alignment options, undertaking surveying and studies across a range of factors to help determine which options we should share with you for consultation.

As part of this activity we are considering station sites, studying connections with local transport networks, and undertaking land and environmental surveys. Once options for the preferred route alignment are sufficiently advanced, we will present them to you and the communities along the route as part of a second round of non-statutory consultation. We are aiming to hold this consultation in early 2021.

In the meantime, we are keen to keep talking to you and hearing your ideas and preferences. One way to do this, will be through our online community hub, which we plan to launch very soon.

Integration of EWR with local transport projects (e.g. A428), sustainable transport networks and station accessibility

Throughout our conversations, several attendees were interested in learning if we had explored the possibility of aligning the project to the A428, and if we were talking to Highways England and other organisations about a range of local transport projects.

We also recorded a strong appetite for EWR to integrate with sustainable transport networks to ease access to and from stations, including the possibility of a cycleway being built alongside the railway. This was especially important for those who could not easily access a station by walking or driving. In that sense, some attendees also highlighted the need for EWR stations to be fully accessible and suggested us to speak to local disability groups to understand how we could address all types of disabilities in our stations.



EWR Co notes

Properly integrating EWR with both existing and future transport networks in the area is something the team is passionate about, and it came across loudly that this is top of mind for communities across the area too.

We are keen to explore the efficiencies which could be realised from more than one infrastructure project being built in the same area: both, whether this would help long-term to create a better transport network, and if in the shorter term, coordinating construction work would be better for local communities.

We are working closely with the teams at Highways England, Network Rail and the relevant local authorities to ensure that the planning and delivery of EWR and [cont.]

these other transformative projects is coordinated for the benefit of the local communities they will serve.

Specifically, on the A428, we are working with their team to see whether there is a practical way to bring the projects together being mindful that it is not as straightforward as it might seem at first - railways do not like hills or bends and the station stops might not fit well with the needs of road users. However, as mentioned, we will keep talking to our counterparts at the A428 and the other projects across the area to create not just the best rail system, but the best transport system we can.

We are also committed to exploring ways of delivering improved 'active travel' plans that fully integrate with East West Rail and deliver the most benefits for passengers and its communities. We are reviewing how to provide more detail on this subject, and we will release additional details in due course.

In addition, our customer experience team is working to ensure that our stations serve all members of the community. We are committed to ensuring that East West Rail can be used easily and enjoyably by everyone, and we will be listening to local communities and accessibility groups and asking for their ideas to help us design stations that work for everyone. We aim for our services, stations and facilities to be fully accessible.

Tunnels and cuttings

Some attendees wondered whether EWR Co would be using cuttings and tunnels.



EWR Co notes

It currently seems unlikely that tunnels will be part of the infrastructure of EWR due to their cost and environmental constraints.

However, nothing has been ruled out and as part of our current work to identify potential route alignments, we are looking at all the potential infrastructure options.

Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory (MRAO)

Some attendees asked whether we were talking with the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory (MRAO) and what our engagement looked like to date.



EWR Co notes

We are having ongoing discussions with the MRAO. For example, we have talked about vibration during construction and operation, line of sight for telescopes and frequency issues. We will continue to discuss with them any mitigations that may be necessary.

3. Environmental impact

General environmental impact

Across the sessions, one consistent topic of interest was the potential impact of EWR on the environment.



EWR Co notes

We are committed to protecting the environment by finding approaches to delivery that avoid, minimise or mitigate negative environmental impacts. As part of this, we have committed to delivering biodiversity net gain along the Arc.

We will continue to assess the potential environmental effects as part of our route alignment development work. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be undertaken, and an Environmental Statement (ES) submitted when we submit our Development Consent Order (DCO) to the Planning Inspectorate.

Environmental and land surveys and the Preferred Route Alignment

Another consistent topic of interest throughout the sessions was environmental and land surveys. Some attendees advised that the appearance of survey teams in villages had raised questions over whether the alignment had been chosen already – e.g., were the survey teams only surveying an alignment area? There was also a feeling that more direct communication with local parishes and ward and division councillors about the activity could have helped clear up confusion.



EWR Co notes

As part of the work we are doing to developing route alignment options, we need to undertake land surveys in a wide area across the Preferred Route Option to capture any constraints, environmental or otherwise, along the route, to take them into consideration in identifying potential route alignments.

To help us build a good picture of the existing environmental conditions, we focused over the summer on a number of priority surveys which need to be carried out at certain times of the year. We contacted the owners of land where we think specific species or environmental features may be present – this includes great crested newts, bats and rivers. Some of these surveys, such as those for great crested newts and bats, need to be carried out over a wider geographical area than the Preferred Route Option – e.g., some bats species have populations living near the Preferred Route Option area and we need to identify their behaviour, including their flight paths, to understand how they may be using the area. As a result, we have surveyed in a wider geographical scope than what we will eventually need for the project.

We are reviewing our communications in this area and talking to our colleagues in the land and environment teams to discuss how we can share more information and more regularly with you. Thank you for your suggestion.

4. Stations

Additional stations

Throughout the sessions we had some conversations around whether additional stations could integrate East West Rail – notably in the area north of Bedford and west of Cambridge.



EWR Co notes

While a station to the north of Bedford or west of Cambridge is not within our current planning, as we keep on developing the railway, we will from time to time back-check our decisions to test that the Preferred Route Option and its elements continue to be the right ones for the communities who live and work between Bedford and Cambridge.

Currently, the new railway would serve:

- Bedford Midland station, providing interchange with Thameslink and Midland mainline services;
- A new station between the existing Sandy and St Neots stations, providing interchange with the East Coast Main Line;
- A new station at Cambourne, and
- Cambridge station, after connecting to the West Anglia Main Line to the south of Cambridge.

In addition, the project could utilise the new Cambridge South Station currently proposed by Network Rail and we are liaising with their team to understand the possibilities.

The exact location of the new stations has not yet been decided, and we will be working with local authorities and other stakeholders to make sure the locations work for the local communities.

Placing the Cambourne station to the north of the town

Several attendees were keen to discuss the location of a station in Cambourne, noting that many people would prefer a station in the north of the town.



EWR Co notes

As mentioned, the exact location of new stations has not yet been decided, and we will be working with local authorities and other stakeholders to make sure the locations work for local communities.

We would be open to exploring the possibility of a station in the north of Cambourne.

5. The impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on EWR

Another topic that came up in some of the meetings was COVID-19 and we registered a strong interest from attendees in learning about how the pandemic had impacted EWR Co and whether we would be reviewing EWR's business case on the back of it.



EWR Co notes

COVID-19 has required changes to working practices, particularly around virtual meetings and virtual engagement, but the company has not been significantly impacted. While no consensus has formed about long-term rail demand in the UK, EWR Co has started testing the possible impact a long-run rise in working from home could have on the route.

In any case, EWR is a key component of the Oxford Cambridge Arc. The Government's vision of the Arc is based upon stimulating economic growth, making it easier for new businesses to start and grow as well as supporting new homes to make it more affordable to live in the local area. This includes providing transport choices for the new businesses and residents, and there is no reason to suppose that where rail travel occurs it will not provide that sustainable alternative.

The team at EWR Co is committed to doing the right thing for the communities we serve: this includes spending taxpayer's money responsibly - and we will continue to back-check our decisions.

6. Electrification

Will EWR be electrified?

Another topic of interest throughout the sessions was to learn if EWR would be electrified.



EWR Co notes

East West Rail will be a new, environmentally sustainable way to travel across the region. We aim to become a net-zero carbon railway by 2050 while making sure biodiversity is left in a better state than we found it.

We have not yet made final decisions about the type of trains that we will be using and are exploring a wide range of technologies in both infrastructure, rolling stock and fuel systems, so we can create high quality, sustainable transport for the local communities that EWR will serve.

At present, a decision on whether the new railway will be electrified has not been made by government. However, the potential for electrification on East West Rail remains under active consideration.

Topics raised in the workshop sections

In this section, we have summarised the feedback you gave us about how we can best meet your communication needs.

Frequency of communication

- Overall, there was a strong appetite for regular project updates. The consensus was that quarterly updates would be beneficial for attendees and the local communities.

Communicating with you

- Attendees across all sessions highlighted that email and newsletters were the preferred methods of communication between EWR Co and elected representatives.
- It was also noted that attendees welcomed briefings with senior members of the EWR Co team like the sessions we held.
- There was an overall will to resume face-to-face meetings and events when safe to do so.

Communicating with the communities you represent

- There was a general agreement throughout the sessions that the best way for EWR Co to reach residents would be through the parishes' newsletters and magazines.
- Some attendees also suggested using the villages' email systems.
- It was noted that any documents provided directly to residents – e.g., newsletters, briefing packs, etc. - should be available in both digital and hard copy forms to make sure they are accessible to everyone.
- Attendees welcomed our soon-to-be-launched community hub where residents will be able to join the conversation about the EWR project.
- As per above, there was an overall will to resume face-to-face events with communities when safe to do so.
- Some attendees also advised that EWR Co should use plain English over technical language in our communications to the public wherever possible to ensure that communities can understand them without any unnecessary jargon.
- There was also a suggestion from some attendees that they would designate in each Parish Council an 'EWR point of contact' who would receive relevant updates from EWR Co and would be responsible for disseminating this information throughout their community.

What are we doing?

- **A new, dedicated team member for the community** - Since we held the online sessions, we have welcomed into the EWR Co team Claire Keith-Anderson as Community Engagement Manager. She is working on how to improve our engagement with local communities as a matter of priority. We will introduce her to you soon.
- **Creating regular communications** - We will introduce a quarterly newsletter, send by email to all parishes, with print copies made available – initially on request. These will be created in such a way that the copy can be pasted into your own newsletters, or simply circulated as they are.
- **Talking to the senior team** - We are planning a programme of meetings with the EWR Co senior team – please look out for invitations.
- **Face-to-face contact** - At the moment, we are following Government guidelines and will not be planning face-to-face meetings or events. However, we will keep reviewing the situation as it evolves: we know how important personal contact is.
- **Using plain English** - Sometimes we do use jargon where simple language would be better. We will keep a watch on this: please do tell us when we're not getting it right.
- **Launching the EWR Community Hub** - A new online area for us all to talk about the project.