



PRESS INFORMATION

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For Immediate Publication



EWR Rejection Delivered to Rail Minister.

Local Representatives including MPs, parliamentary candidates, district, borough and county councilors, parish councils and environmental and other campaign groups, have signed a declaration of opposition to the proposals for the East West Rail between Bedford and Cambridge. The final route together with some implications of its business case were announced by East West Rail Company in May this year.

As the list of signatories from the public increases daily, campaign groups BFARe and Cambridge Approaches say this declaration demonstrates growing and united opposition to the proposals. The proposal includes large scale house building on green field sites significantly beyond existing Local Plans in order to justify the project.

The Declaration, has been delivered in person to the Rail Minister, Huw Merriman. The Declaration and the list of signatories (attached) includes Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Candidates, the Chairman of Cambridgeshire County Council, the Mayor of Bedford, County, District and Borough Councillors, Parishes and Parish Councillors, campaign groups and transport and environmental organisations. Hundreds of residents have also signed the declaration and the campaign groups are urging others to make their feelings known.

{BFARe Press Release Inclusions}

Mike Barlow, spokesperson for BFARe, which has been campaigning on behalf of Bedford residents, said: "The diesel East West Railway is an inefficient and antiquated Victorian transport solution without merit for modern ecological East West travel. Building a destructive greenfield railway, without a corresponding spatial transport plan, at taxpayer expense, without a credible business case must be called out as completely unacceptable for the residents whom purports to serve.

"The EWR proposal includes homebuilding well beyond that specified in the 2040 Local Plan. Housing development in Bedfordshire is already 3.5 times higher than the national average. Bedford simply does not have the facilities, the schools, the doctor's surgeries and the supporting greenfield road networks to support the existing level of developments even without those proposed by East West Rail."

Campaigners argue the EWR proposal does not provide a sensible solution for rail freight transport and instead will force rail freight through congested, highly-populated and polluted town centres. Additionally, they say the proposal does not include a spatial transport strategy for how people will access the two EWR stations between Bedford and Cambridge., which they say will force further cars onto the existing road network and add to town centre gridlock and pollution.

Conservative MP for North East Bedfordshire, Richard Fuller, who has signed the declaration, said at a recent Westminster Hall debate: "The route chosen is so full of twists and turns and ups and downs, it surely competes with what is our country's bendiest road."

{Cambridge Approaches Press Release Inclusions}

The new Elizabeth Line cost £20billion to construct and carries half a million commuters per day. However, EWRCo's Economic and Technical Report, released at the same time as the route announcement, implies that EWR will cost £7.85billion in today's money and carry only 2,090 commuters per day to Cambridge.¹

William Harrold, co-founder of Cambridge Approaches, commented: "If each Cambridge commuter represents a Cambridge job, that works out at nearly £4 million per job supported. Given that the average job in Cambridge creates £50,000 in value per year, that's a mighty expensive subsidy just to get to work. Looking at it another way 2,000 jobs at £50,000 value added per job is only £100million per year for the economy and a far cry from the £100billion claimed by East West Rail proponents. It's a really expensive railway too at around £300million per mile between Bedford and Cambridge."²

Dr. Harrold continued: "EWRCo's business case is poor even when supported by building new houses for 213,000 people, outside of any Local Plan. Of these new people, only a tiny proportion are assumed to actually use the new railway. The roads would get much busier."

Campaigners say precious grade two agricultural land between Cambridge and Bedford will be lost to this "housing sprawl" and believe East West Rail is just an excuse to build on lucrative greenfield sites. The land set aside for biodiversity net gain will be in place, perhaps doubling the land area lost and further damaging our national food security.

Campaigners said "The emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan already meets the independently assessed forecast growth in Cambridge jobs to 2041. This is achieved by an aggressive plan to build out new towns and to develop Cambridge. On top of that we have DLUHC's Cambridge 2040 plan for up to 250,000 housing in a new quarter in Cambridge. EWR was part of DLUHC's now abandoned OxCam Arc plan. It is surely now obsolete".

Phillip Phan said "Residents living along the proposed route have raised concerns about the proposed 10m high embankments and viaducts. Dubbed 'The Great Wall of South Cambridgeshire,' these will divide communities. There are also worries about years of disruption on local roads, as well as for rail commuters. Significant construction works will take place on the mainline between London and Cambridge leading to many years of rail disruption."

Dr. Harrold concluded: "Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire deserve better than EWR. If this is going to happen, we need a very, very good reason. Instead we have a shambles. Farcical optimism bias to the point of gaslighting on the financial case and industrial scale "not my problem" syndrome on health, environmental and food security issues.

"At every turn our questions are fobbed off. Stressed water infrastructure? EWR Co. say it's not their problem. Insufficient hospital capacity? Not even mentioned by EWR Co, even though we know Addenbrooke's Hospital already has a £100million maintenance backlog and the new Cancer hospital plans are now blocked by lack of water infrastructure."

¹ EWRCo. Economic and Technical Report Appendix 4 table 4.1, based on actual railway commuting around Cambridge reported in the 2011 census. Cost of HR5+Risk+Bank of England Inflation since 2010. Still optimistic due e.g. to A428 improvements and changing travel patterns.

² £8 billion capital cost divided amongst 2000 job/commuters is £4million each. 2000 jobs/commuters x £50,000 gross value added per job is £100million per year. The much quoted Partnering for Prosperity report anchors on £163billion GVA per year over one thousand times higher.

³ Michael Gove's Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities

{Common Section}

To sign the East West Rail Declaration of Opposition, please e-mail your name and first part of your post code to: declaration@bfare.org.uk. Where relevant, please include whether you are an elected official and the ward / district / parish you represent.

About Cambridge Approaches

Cambridge Approaches is a non-political campaign group founded in 2020 to challenge the EWR's approach to Cambridge and the business case for building the Bedford to Cambridge section.

Cambridge Approaches believes campaign groups are strongest when information and work is shared with other groups and that local groups are most effective at mobilising their communities. CA has strong links with other campaign groups and Parish Councils. It exchanges information and engages with BFARe, BCN Wildlife Trusts, CPRE, CBRR, STARC, many local parish councils, village based groups and others.

About BFARe

BFARe is a non-political grassroots campaign. Our members and supporters are Bedford Borough Parish and Ward Councillors, and thousands of concerned Bedford Borough residents. BFARe has over 1000 private campaign members and 15,000 social media followers.

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