

Follow-up Meeting, Parishes & Councillors – North Bedfordshire

Meeting Notes – Tuesday 23 November 2021

Date / Time: 23 November 2021, 6pm – 7.55 pm

Type of meeting: Hybrid meeting

EWB Co attendees: EWB Co Attendees: Simon Blanchflower CBE – CEO, EWB Co – in-person
Will Gallagher - Strategy and Sponsorship Director, EWB Co – in-person
Jordi Beascoechea – Engagement Manager, EWB Co – in-person
Paul Sparrow – Head of Development Partner, EWB Co – in-person
Stephen Barker – Development Manager, EWB Co – virtual
Tobias Paul - External legal advisor (DCO process and compensation) – in-person
Two representatives from AECOM – in-person
Representative from Barley Communications - in-person

Attendees: Cllr Mike Barlow, Brickhill Parish Council – in-person
Cllr Nicky Gribble, Renhold Parish Council – in-person
Cllr Stephen Moon, Great Barford Ward, Bedford Borough Council – in-person
Cllr Graham Palmer, Colmworth Parish Council – in-person
Cllr Amanda Quince, Renhold Parish Council – in-person
Cllr Bernadette Russell, Ravensden Parish Council – in-person
Cllr Martin Towler, Riseley Ward, Bedford Borough Council – in-person
Cllr Sarah Walker, Clapham Parish Council – in-person
Cllr Tom Wootton, Wyboston Ward, Bedford Borough Council – in-person
Dr Cath Terry, Department for Transport – in-person
Steve Arnold, Technical advisor – in-person
Jetinder Dhaliwal, Technical advisor – in-person
John Mabblerley, Technical advisor – in-person
Peter Norris, Technical advisor – in-person
Tom Pearce, Technical advisor – in-person
Cllr Justin Griffiths, Roxton Parish Council – virtual
Cllr Brent Fielder, Wilden Parish Council – virtual
Cllr Gordon Johnston, Wyboston, Chawston and Colesden Parish Council – virtual
Cllr Phil Kenmore, Ravensden Parish Council - virtual
Cllr Chris Kew, Bolnhurst and Keysoe Parish Council – virtual
Cllr Rob Neville, Blunham Parish Council – virtual
Cllr Michael Thompson, Thurleigh Parish Council – virtual
Cllr Tim Wood, Great Barford Parish Council – virtual
Paul Jenkins, Technical advisor, CPRE – virtual

Presentation summaries / key discussion points / questions raised

1. Introductions and matters arising by EWR Co by Simon Blanchflower

- Outstanding questions addressed from 19 October meeting were handed out hard copy and published on the website.
- The Integrated Rail Plan the Government published last Thursday has no bearing on East West Rail.
- We aim to announce our Preferred Route Alignment in the first half of 2022 and next steps for delivering East West Rail, dependent on Government agreements.
- Simon Blanchflower (SB) will leave EWR in March 2022. Simon has provided his full contractual notice of his decision to retire. The executive team will continue to work whilst a replacement is recruited.

2. Summary of areas of issue by Cllr Mike Barlow

- Cllr Mike Barlow (MB) stated his concerns regarding the transparency of EWR Co and lack of cost details released to the public relating to Route E and the alignments between Bedford and Cambridge. MB also raised the timing of the new Rail Freight Strategy.

3. Connectivity, Service Frequency & 3-way Junction by John Mabberley (8 slides)

John Mabberley (JM)'s presentation summarised the following representations:

- The BFARe Ltd alignment is the '3-Way junction' proposal which promotes connectivity, greater flexibility, and faster journey times with lower construction costs.
- The proposal is more environmentally- friendly and trails over flatter terrain than the EWR route.
- The proposal provides a more efficient route for freight traffic.
- There is no compelling purpose for EWR to go north of Bedford.

EWR Co questions raised in response to presentation and points of discussion:

Bedford Midland Station

- Stephen Barker (SB2) raised the question about the working layout of the proposal having analysed the route previously and posed the question as to whether the BFARe Ltd alignment will include any works at Bedford Midland station.
- JM responded by stating that they must do the bare minimum to make it possible for EWR trains but there is no requirement for the trains to go further north than Bedford Midland Station.
- SB2 raised the question of whether BFARe Ltd have done an assessment as to what the bare minimum works would be in terms of Bedford Midland station.
- JM stated that they had not done this assessment because they do not have the professional means or expertise to do so.

Frequency of trains and a clock-face service

- SB2 questioned how many trains an hour the proposal would have serving Bedford Midland in the BFARe Ltd alignment.
SB2 stated that there are fundamental issues with designing a railway and ensuring that it will support the level of traffic on it in a reliable way. Considering this, SB2 stated that he is unsure as to how the BFARe Ltd alignment will be capable of supporting the level of traffic.
- MB questioned why there needs to be a high demand for traffic. EWR are looking to serve Bedford with 4 to 6 trains an hour and this raises the question of how this coincides with the passenger numbers predicted. MB further asked whether it would be more efficient to have a faster service from Oxford to Cambridge, bypassing Bedford, and then fewer trains connecting into Bedford Midland in order to ensure connectivity.
- SB2 stated that it is important for a successful railway to have a service which is easy to understand through timetabling (clock-face) and has a high frequency of service. SB2 raised concerns regarding the BFARe Ltd alignment offering a complex service pattern and how the conflicting movements on the railway would be dealt with, including three junctions and conflicts at the station. Overall, there are five points of conflict that are not being factored in.
- Steve Arnold (SA) stated that technology has advanced to deal with these conflicts and has been considered for HS2.
- SB clarified that this is a different service to HS2. HS2 is a long-distance service whereas EWR is designed to provide regional connectivity through a high-speed clock-face service.
- Peter Norris (PN) raised a question about how a clock-face service can insert a fifth and sixth service.
- SB clarified that this matter will be addressed if a fifth and sixth service are added in the future, however the current specification is a four trains per hour clock-face service.
- Phil Kenmore (PK) stated that the issues around the clock-face could be resolved and the complexity of the BFARe Ltd route alignment can be balanced with the other suggested benefits the BFARe Ltd alignment.
- Will Gallagher (WG) stated that there are significant issues regarding the complexity, reliability, expense, and journey times due to the five conflicts SB2 raised previously regarding the BFARe Ltd alignment.
- PK stated it is not possible to prove the alignment promoted by BFARe Ltd is cheaper without access to EWR cost data.

South Bedfordshire

- Tom Pearce (TP) stated that the residents of the new developments south of Bedford will face the challenge of travelling into Bedford Midland station in order to get out again and therefore there is a clear advantage of providing a service that will serve south of Bedford which is not high-speed.
- Paul Sparrow (PS) clarified that station access south of Bedford in the Kempston Hardwick and Stewartby area will remain under EWR Co's proposals anyway and details regarding these stations (and the station layout) formed part of the previous Non-Statutory Consultation on which the public were invited to provide their feedback.

4. Flood Plain, Viaducts and Embankments by Peter Norris (1 slide, presents BFARe Ltd route alignment map)

PN's presentation summarised the following representations:

- The EWR route encroaches within Flood Zones 2 & 3 and with the impacts of climate change may create an increased likelihood of flooding.
- Concerns regarding the EWR route topography with the current gradient factor limiting freight capacity.
- Bromham Road to the end of Section C construction would require works to take place in an area that is congested with traffic and lies within a Groundwater Source Protection Inner Zone.
- Technical and historic studies suggest positive indications that the BFARe Ltd alignment is most suitable and offers relatively level land.
- The requirement for viaducts is less via the BFARe Ltd route alignment as it avoids the Clapham flood plains which Route E passes through.

5. Soil Characteristics by Tom Pearce (3 slides, presents EWR alignment and BFARe Ltd alignment on Route & Soil Variation Map)

TP's presentation summarised the following representations:

- The BFARe Ltd alignment has more varied and less problematic soil beds.
- The shorter length of track means that the variations are less critical and requires minimal gradient changes.
- The terrain requires minimal gradient changes and would therefore mean less movement of soil at construction.

EWR Co questions raised in response to presentation and points of discussion:

- SB2 raised the question as to how the railway will cross over the various features such as the Midland mainline, A6 and A421. In particular, what elevation is the railway at that point? Overall, how will it function without significant structures in place?
- PS added, from Kempston Hardwick the railway must cross a landfill and the Midland mainline and explained it is difficult to tie that into the section coming south out of Bedford with the Flood Zone. PS questioned how the BFARe Ltd alignment would cope with the vertical differences. PS further stated that there is a Flood Zone west of Elstow that must be considered.
- TP stated that the BFARe alignment is missing an in-depth level of detail because they don't have the technical expertise of EWR.

6. Housing and the Local Development Plan by Steve Arnold (1 slide, presents BFARe Ltd route alignment map)

SA's presentation summarised the following representations:

- The Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030-2040 and housing strategy does not coincide with EWR proposals, deeming Route E as outdated and needing to be backchecked.
- Bedford Borough Council are focusing on housing and employment developments south of Bedford as a result of the consultation taking place last summer, which constitutes new information.
- The alignment promoted by BFARe Ltd proposes no demolitions.

EWR Co questions raised in response to presentation and points of discussion:

Train stations

- WG raised the concern regarding the 'triangle' in terms of the frequency of service for Kempston Hardwick and Stewartby and the connection into Bedford.
WG asked BFARe Ltd to clarify if they are proposing any more locations to have stations in the south of Bedford.
- SA stated that it is for EWR Co to answer in terms of undertaking demand assessments for these existing and additional locations.
- TP stated that due to developments south of Bedford, another station location would be required along the BFARe Ltd alignment but is not currently included. This way road congestion along the route can be dissipated.
- JM stated that there is no parking at Bedford Midland Station, therefore people within Bedford will not choose to drive into the already congested town centre.
- WG clarified it was never in the scope of EWR to have a station north of Bedford.
- SA stated there is a long-term disadvantage for not delivering a station north of Bedford through longer term housing delivery.
- SB2 stated that as there are no current plans for housing north of Bedford in the pipeline, EWR Co cannot take account of this as part of current local planning policy.

Housing demolitions

- WG asked a question to clarify if there would be any demolitions on the BFARe Ltd alignment, as EWR Co have investigated and predicted there may be near Elstow.
- SA said that the BFARe Ltd alignment avoids housing demolition and damage.

7. Sustainability & The Environment by Jetinder Dhaliwal (13 slides)

Jetinder Dhaliwal (JD)'s presentation summarised the following representations:

- Matters regarding potential risks to the environment and sustainability in Bedford.
- Bedford's air quality has breached Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) levels since 2007 and WHO air quality levels for almost a month out of the last 12 months.
- Other infrastructure projects are going to contribute to air pollution before EWR will be constructed.
- Air purification demand is already high in and around Bedford.
- The Carbon Footprint of Route E and alternatives should be made publicly available.
- The increase in the high volume of traffic and emissions produced will impact on Bedford.
- Route E and the alignments will encroach on a Water Source Protection Zone in the Clapham area.
- Operational costs are rising – the BFARe Ltd alignment offers a less energy intensive route.
- The BFARe Ltd alignment avoids Local Nature Reserves & Habitats and Public Rights of Way.
- The food production capacity of farmland is lower via the BFARe Ltd alignment.

EWR Co questions raised in response to presentation and points of discussion:

- PS clarified and confirmed that carbon assessments form part of the wider environmental surveys in developing the railway and will continue to do so.

8. Meeting close and next steps

- Feedback from the meeting and the analysis of the alignment promoted by BFARe Ltd will be available in the Public Feedback Report.