



Report to the Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

Date: Thursday 20th January 2022

Title: **East West Rail Progress Report**

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Steven Broadbent
Cllr Peter Martin (Deputy)

Contact officer: Gavin Jones, EWR Team Lead

1. Introduction

Following confirmation of funding in the 2020 Spending Review, construction is underway of the section between Bicester and Bletchley, delivered through the East West Rail Alliance. This will allow EWR to run trains from Oxford to Milton Keynes by 2025.

The second year of construction has seen an increase in works on the Buckinghamshire region of the route. The line has required the remodelling of several bridges, significant earth works and the preparation of the site in Winslow for the new station to be built.

2. Progress update

- 2.1 A detailed update of the progress / construction of the project will be given by East West Rail Alliance (EWRA), during their presentation on the 20th January 2022.
- 2.2 Buckinghamshire Council have taken several steps this year to assist local communities with the disruption caused by a major national infrastructure project being constructed through the north of the county.
- 2.3 EWR have undertaken a number of initiatives to support the local community while construction is ongoing. EWR will update members during their presentation on the 20th January.

3. Issues that have arisen during construction

- 3.1 Councillors and residents have been concerned by the state of the roads in the north of the county. EWR have a significant number of HGV's using B roads and villages not designed for HGV traffic. This has caused a significant number of defects to roads. A recurrent problem is created by mud on the road from insufficient wheel washing and road sweeping at EWR depots.
- 3.2 Several diversions have been put in place for closed bridges in the area. This has led to a number of complaints from residents regarding increased traffic through villages, an increase in journey times for commuters and increased costs to residents and business of following lengthy diversions.
- 3.3 Several new bridges are under construction by EWRA. The new designs and construction have been a source of complaints for residents. The major example of this is the bridge on Sandhill Road. The completion of the bridge was delayed by several weeks. Once the asset had been handed back to the council, it was identified the new roadway is not sufficiently wide enough for passing cars. Temporary traffic measures have had to be put in place, on the grounds that it is potentially dangerous for 2 cars approaching the bridge at the same time. A permanent solution to the problem is still being sought.
- 3.4 During construction, a number of organisations have suffered a loss of earnings and the project has had a significant impact on local businesses. Small businesses have struggled with the impact of construction and have raised complaints regarding this. Residents have also raised complaints regarding compensation for the disruption they have endured. Most noticeably the residents of Comerford way in Winslow. They have raised over 30 issues to the local member of Parliament that remain unresolved.
- 3.5 Roads that have had work completed on them have remained closed for longer than necessary. Queen Catherine Road was closed for 2 months longer than scheduled due to a failure of EWR to complete the overlay on the project. Ox Lane remains closed due to significant damage caused by HGV's and exacerbated by flooding in the area.
- 3.6 Buckinghamshire Council supported the project on the understanding that EWR would include a rail link to Aylesbury. No budget has been agreed for this and it increasingly looks as though this link will not receive the go ahead from the Department for Transport. As the line was due to be constructed along HS2 routes, we are running out of time to construct this while EWR are constructing lines in the county.

- 3.7 On the 21st December 2021. Greg Smith MP posted a statement on his Facebook page, criticising several aspects of EWR's actions. Describing the significant amount of problems residents are having and calling out the safety concerns of mud on the road around EWR compounds. Greg Smith went on to criticise EWR's unwillingness to step up resources and that the work has "therefore fallen to the Local Authority and my office to clean up after the Alliance, a perpetual burden which is unwarranted, unnecessary, and unfair". The Alliance has reached out to Greg Smith's office to arrange a meeting and discuss any issues that he has highlighted.

4. Actions taken by Buckinghamshire Council to support residents in the construction of the line

- 4.1 Over the course of the year Buckinghamshire Council have undertaken a number of steps to assist residents with the construction of the East West Rail line. New staff have been brought on board, community boards have been held and a new mailbox for dealing with complaints and issues has been instituted.
- 4.2 The council has invested (through work in kind funding from Network Rail) in 2 new officers dedicated to the EWR project. A new team lead has been brought in to coordinate the Council's response. A new community lead has joined the major projects team to reach out to the community and support Parish Council's and residents with issues faced by the construction works.
- 4.3 Buckinghamshire council has also invested in 2 new marshals to support residents with the construction of both HS2 and EWR. Marshals are on hand to go on site and investigate issues, meet face to face with residents and raise concerns with works relating to major projects in the county.
- 4.4 The Council has instituted 2 Community Boards (CALM and North Bucks Community Board) to support residents with issues they are dealing with. The boards are chaired by local councils and are attended by EWR and HS2 representatives to allow Parish Councils and residents to discuss issues with the major stakeholders.
- 4.5 The EWR and HS2 mailbox has been created to provide a central and tracked response to issues raised by the community. This has allowed officers to respond to issues quickly and we aim to respond to any enquiry within 24 hours.

5. Lessons learnt

In Q3/Q4 of 2021, Buckinghamshire Council and EWR undertook an exercise to identify and highlight some lessons that had been learnt. Some of the key findings were:

- 5.1 During the design phase, explore additional ways to involve communities and allow sufficient time for stakeholders to fully understand the impacts of designs.
- 5.2 A 6-month planning ahead process to review designs and agree communication plan for works.
- 5.3 A clear construction traffic management plan (CTMP) should be in place before moving to an implementation phase of the project. Local communities should be aware of the impact of the CTMP once the construction becomes real.
- 5.4 Ensure Community Liaison personnel are in place prior to TWAO being granted, to allow them to build relationships and communicate upcoming activity.
- 5.5 Identify hot spot areas with local authorities using their experience of other projects in the local area.
- 5.6 There is no such thing as 'too much community comms'. A strategy for how to successfully coordinate communications and its content should be consistent and to make best use of resources rather than duplicating resources is required at the early stage of the project.
- 5.7 Prepare for the unexpected. The COVID pandemic has had an impact on face to face communications, the impact on local communities has been different from what was originally anticipated due to working from home arrangements.

6. Your questions and views

- 6.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report, please get in touch with the author of this report. This can be done by telephone [07815 023950] or email [gavin.jones@buckinghamshire.gov.uk]

