



Report to the Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

Date: Thursday 2 February 2023

Title: **East West Rail Progress Report**

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

Contact officer: Susan Browning, EWR Stakeholder & Team Leader

1. Introduction

The third year of construction has seen continued activity on the Buckinghamshire region of the East West Rail route. The line has required the building of new highway bridges and new footway bridges as well as the remodelling of many existing bridges, significant earthworks, and the preparation of the site in Winslow for the new station and new carpark to be built.

2. Progress update

2.1 An update of the progress / construction of the project will be given by East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) during their presentation to the TECC Select Committee on the 2 February 2023.

3. Current key issues

3.1 Buckinghamshire Council has taken steps throughout 2022 to assist and support local communities with mitigating the impacts of disruption caused by the East West Rail line being constructed through the north of the county, by ensuring EWR Alliance (EWRA) are being held to account.

3.2 Current key issues include road closures and associated traffic management, road repairs, mud on the road, EWR interface with HS2, the Aylesbury spur, environmental impact and biodiversity net gain, rolling stock, freight and noise pollution.

Road Closures and Traffic Management

3.3 This is one of the most significant ongoing issues for the Council and impact on our communities. The issues peaked in August 2022 with EWRA's submission of their forward programme for road closures and traffic management (temporary traffic lights) to end 2022. EWRA applied for multiple road closures and temporary traffic lights commencing early September 2022 which would have led to problems with traffic flow, diversion routes and conflict with other parties (including HS2, TfB and Utilities) on our roads in the north of the county. Regrettably the Council had to refuse some permits and has invested a significant amount of resource and time to work together with EWRA to find better and more workable solutions. Working together has led to improved outcomes to minimise disruption on communities.

3.4 *Key areas of concern include:*

- *Impact on our communities* – EWRA road closures and temporary traffic lights impacting traffic flow and our communities' ability to go about their daily lives to get to/from work, the school run, doctors' appointments etc.
- *Community notifications for road closures and temporary traffic lights* – Councillors and residents have raised concerns particularly in the first half of 2022 with timings of communications and notifications issued for construction works traffic management and road closures. This has improved.
- *HGVs using non-permitted roads* – complaints have been increasing in the community regarding EWRA HGVs using non-permitted routes through villages and rural roads and associated driver behaviour.
- *Emergency Services access* – concerns have been raised as to whether the HS2 and EWR national infrastructure projects road closure planning is considering properly the essential requirement for maintaining access for emergency services.
- *School Transport* – concerns have been raised regarding ensuring that all EWRA road closures must incorporate planned access for school transport / buses or provide alternative solutions.
- *Diversionary Routes* – diversion routes have been put in place by EWRA for construction works and closed bridges. This has led to a number of complaints from residents regarding increased traffic through villages, increased journey times for commuters, and increased costs to residents and businesses following lengthy diversions.
- *Impact on our businesses and requirement for compensation* – concerns have been raised by Councillors and businesses that the extensive EWRA road closures over the past 2 years has had a significant commercial impact on many north Buckinghamshire businesses who are struggling to stay afloat.

- 3.5 Compensation Claims – the Council requires those businesses and residents impacted by the project to be engaged with by Network Rail, and EWRA where appropriate, in a timely fashion to assess and process claims.

Road repairs

- 3.6 Councillors and residents have been concerned by the state of the roads impacted by EWRA construction works. EWRA have multiple compounds situated in the North of Buckinghamshire and a major number of HGV's using B roads and villages not designed for HGV traffic. This has caused significant damage and defects to our roads and verges.
- 3.7 The Council has been engaged in extensive discussions with EWRA to repair and reinstate our roads and verges. The permanent road repairs and reinstatement programme is dependent upon EWRA's compound demobilisation programme and significant reduction in HGV movements. EWRA have fully engaged with the Council in this process and are committed to repairing the roads. Permanent repairs commenced in Q4 2022 and will continue throughout 2023 and 2024. In the interim EWRA will undertake a programme of planned temporary repairs as well as ad-hoc urgent/emergency repairs.
- 3.8 Permanent Repairs – the permanent road repairs programme commenced in Q4 2022 with Queen Catherine Road in Steeple Claydon, and Whaddon Road in Newton Longville completed. Permanent repairs and reinstatement will continue throughout 2023 including Verney Road, Little Horwood Road, Herds Hill, Ox Lane & Lenborough Road and Sandhill Road. The programme will continue into 2024.
- 3.9 Planned Temporary repairs – a programme of planned temporary repairs is being undertaken by EWRA in the interim to maintain road useability and safety prior to permanent repairs taking place once HGV movements have significantly reduced.
- 3.10 Currently Ox Lane remains closed to the public due to significant damage caused by EWR HGVs and exacerbated by flooding in the area. Permanent repairs and opening are dependent on the EWRA compound demobilisation and reduction in HGV movements, currently estimated for Q3 2023.

Mud on the Road

- 3.11 Mud on Buckinghamshire roads generated by EWRA works and HGV movements in and out of their many works Compounds across North Buckinghamshire presented a significant issue on our highways in November 2021 and has been an ongoing problem since. Mud on the road creates a risk to public safety and the Council is holding EWRA to account on this issue requesting updated monitoring and mitigation plans, review of equipment efficacy and driver behaviour.

EWR/HS2 interface

- 3.12 The Council is keen that the handover of civils works in the Calvert area to EWRA from HS2 Ltd and their contractor EKFB happens on time. These East West Rail civils works are being undertaken by HS2 on behalf of EWRA which presents a programme risk.
- 3.13 The Council has requested from both HS2 Ltd and their contractor EKFB on a number of occasions for a copy of the interface and handover documentation in order to understand the risks associated with the handover and mitigate any risk linked to the Council, to facilitate the process to ensure EWRA programme timings do not slip resulting in on-going community impact. This documentation has yet to be provided by HS2.

Aylesbury Spur

- 3.14 Buckinghamshire Council continues to support the project on the understanding that the East West Railway will include a rail link to Aylesbury. No formal go ahead from the Department for Transport (DfT) has been given to date. The facilitating infrastructure is currently being built and the Council continues to proactively lobby the DfT and Network Rail to confirm that the necessary funding has been secured and the Aylesbury spur will proceed.

Environmental Impact and Bio-Diversity Net Gain

- 3.15 Vegetation removal has been part of the East West Rail construction works and has caused significant concern amongst communities and key stakeholders. To mitigate the environmental impact of these works the Council ecologists have carried out multiple checks during bird nesting season and action has been taken to protect hedges and trees by reworking some planned removals.
- 3.16 EWRA have actively planned their construction works wherever possible to minimise vegetation removal and impact on the environment. They are creating 20 Ecological Compensation Sites (ECS) providing habitats for species including newts, butterflies, bats, birds, badgers, otters and reptiles, with 150,000 new trees and plants.
- 3.17 EWRA have a project bio-diversity net gain target of +10%. They are currently assessing how to achieve this throughout 2023 and 2024, and we have requested Buckinghamshire to be a focal county for achieving this target.

Diesel Rolling Stock

- 3.18 EWR Company has advised that the East West Rail service will commence in 2025 with diesel rolling stock. The Council and other key stakeholders including the local Member of Parliament are robustly challenging this position with the DfT and Network Rail requesting alternative rolling stock solutions are considered for service launch including bi-mode.

Freight

- 3.19 The East West Rail line is being built to accommodate freight as well as passenger movements. The Council and other key stakeholders are challenging Network Rail and EWR Company to provide information to our communities on the likely scope of freight movements and importantly how this may increase over time.

Noise Pollution

- 3.20 Communities are concerned by potential noise pollution when the East West Railway enters into service in 2025. Particularly from passenger train and freight train movements which may operate late at night or in the early hours of the morning. Also, significant concerns have been raised by line side residents regarding potential noise impact from the new Winslow Station tannoy announcements.

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 has continued to assist residents, communities, and businesses with mitigating the impact of the construction of the East West Rail line by its continued investment (through Work in Kind) in funding dedicated officers to the EWR project to support communities to address the issues set out above.
- 4.2 Additionally, Buckinghamshire Council still funds two 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.
- 4.3 The Council is working with the East West Rail Alliance to secure the necessary remuneration from the Alliance for both temporary and permanent road repairs to be completed to align with their on-going construction activities and their compound demobilisation programme.
- 4.4 Additionally, the Council continues to proactively lobby the Department for Transport and Network Rail to confirm that the necessary funding has been secured to deliver the link to Aylesbury.

5. Your questions and views

- 5.1 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: 07734 126794 or email: susan.browning@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

