



# Report to the Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

**Date:** Thursday 01 February 2024

**Title:** **East West Rail Progress Report**

**Cabinet Member(s):** *Cllr Steven Broadbent, Cabinet Member for Transport  
Cllr Peter Martin, Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport (HS2/EWR)*

**Contact officer:** Susan Browning, EWR Team & Stakeholder Leader

## 1. Introduction

The fourth year of construction has seen continued activity in Buckinghamshire to deliver the East West Railway. 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, installation of permanent acoustic barriers, and the preparation of the site in Winslow for the new station and new carpark to be built.

Good progress has been made by the East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) throughout 2023 with highway bridges and footway bridges construction completed, construction of the Winslow station and track laying (rail and sleeper construction) well underway. Works during 2024 will focus on track construction completion, railway systems equipment installation completion, testing and commissioning, the construction of Winslow station carpark and completion of Winslow station and landscaping. The EWRA 'Infrastructure Ready' date is on target for end of 2024 and the East West Railway is planned to 'Enter into Service' during 2025.

## 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 01 February 2023.

### **3. Current key issues**

- 3.1 Buckinghamshire Council has taken steps throughout 2023 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 and take any necessary action.
- 3.2 Current key issues include road closures, diversion routes and associated traffic management, road repairs, mud on the road, dust pollution impact, EWR interface with HS2 and potential delays, environmental impact and biodiversity net gain, the Aylesbury spur, diesel rolling stock, freight service and impacts, noise pollution and the railway 'entry into service' plans for passenger services.

#### **Road Closures and Traffic Management**

- 3.3 Road closures and temporary traffic lights are one of the most significant ongoing issues for the Council and impact on our communities. Lengthy road closures required by the project to enable construction works and long diversion routes are disruptive to the Buckinghamshire residents and businesses as they go about their daily lives.

The Council has challenged EWR Alliance (EWRA) on their applications for road closure permits working with EWRA to reduce the durations of the closures, stop simultaneous EWR road closures and improve the traffic flow to minimise the impact on the communities where possible. The Council has 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 Areas of concern for Councillors and communities have been around access for School Transport and ensuring that all EWRA road closures incorporate planned access for school transport and buses or provide alternative solutions. Also, concerns have been raised around the national infrastructure projects (both HS2 and EWR) planning to consider the essential requirement for maintaining access for emergency services.
- 3.5 Communities have voiced ongoing concerns regarding HGVs using non-permitted routes through rural villages and roads, and associated driver behaviour and speeding. In response, EWRA have significantly increased their briefings to drivers and monitoring.
- 3.6 Diversion routes have been put in place by EWRA for construction works and closed bridges. This has led to complaints from residents regarding increased traffic through

villages, increased journey times for commuters, and increased costs to residents and businesses following lengthy diversions.

- 3.7 Concerns have been raised by Councillors and businesses that the extensive EWRA road closures over the past 4 years have had a significant commercial impact on many north Buckinghamshire businesses. The Council requires EWR Company (EWR Co), Network Rail (NR), and EWRA where appropriate, to engage with the businesses and residents impacted by the project and assess and process their compensation claims as quickly as possible.

### **Road repairs**

- 3.8 Councillors and residents have been concerned by the deteriorating condition of the roads impacted by the East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) construction works. EWRA have multiple works Compounds situated in the North of Buckinghamshire and a significant 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.
- 3.9 The Council has been engaged in extensive discussions and commercial negotiations 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. The Director of EWRA has agreed to a significant programme of permanent works which commenced at the end of 2022, continued throughout 2023 and will complete in 2024.

In the interim, during 2023 EWRA continued to undertake planned temporary repairs.

- 3.10 Permanent Repairs – the permanent road repairs and reinstatement programme commenced in Q4 2022 with Queen Catherine Road in Steeple Claydon and continued throughout 2023 with construction routes including Verney Road, Little Horwood Road, Sandhill Road, Ox Lane, Lenborough Road, Whaddon Road Newton Longville and Herds Hill completed. The programme of permanent repairs and reinstatement will complete during 2024.
- 3.11 Planned Temporary repairs – during 2023 a programme of planned temporary repairs was undertaken by EWRA in the interim to maintain road useability prior to permanent repairs taking place once HGV movements significantly reduced. The Council supported by stepping in where necessary to undertake emergency repairs to maintain road safety.

### **Mud on the Road**

- 3.12 Mud on Buckinghamshire roads generated by EWRA works and HGV movements in and out of their many works Compounds across North Buckinghamshire presents a significant issue on our highways and has been an ongoing problem. Mud on the road creates a risk to public safety and the Council is holding EWRA to account on this issue requesting updated mud monitoring and mitigation plans, reviews of equipment efficacy as well as driver behaviour.
- 3.13 EWRA have implemented additional equipment including wheel washers in all main compounds, and both HGV underframe manual jet washing as well as high pressure jet washing in key areas on sites. They are improving driver behaviour with a compulsory 'stand to examine inspection and clear for release' for all HGVs prior to leaving their compounds.

### **Ballast Dust Impact**

- 3.14 Excessive ballast dust generated by EWRA construction and track works along the line of route and from their Compounds (particularly at Winslow) has been a significant problem, particularly during the dry weather and summer months. Ballast dust presents a risk to public safety from the silica respirable particulates and the Council is holding EWRA to account on this issue requesting interventions and additional mitigation to protect the residents.
- 3.15 EWRA have implemented a track ballast dust suppression system, tractor and bowser suppression in highly affected areas, and in early summer 2023 an additional ballast dowsing gantry was installed at their main B3 Furze Lane Winslow Compound.

### **EWR/HS2 Interface and Potential Project Delays**

- 3.16 During 2023 the Council lobbied to ensure that the handover of civils works in the Calvert area to East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) from HS2 Ltd and their contractor EKFB happened on time. Any further delay to these works being undertaken by HS2 (on behalf of EWRA) could present a significant programme risk to the delivery of the East West Railway project and entry into service date.
- 3.17 The Council 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, in order to be able to facilitate the process to ensure the EWRA programme timings did not slip and result in on-going community impact. This documentation has yet to be provided by HS2.

- 3.18 Unfortunately, this risk did materialise with the final element of the works to be handed over from HS2 Ltd/EKFB to East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) being delayed from July until late November 2023.
- 3.19 East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) have managed to effectively reduce the knock-on impact of this HS2 Ltd/EKFB delay and mitigate where possible to minimise the overall impact on their programme. The EWR project will be infrastructure ready in Q4 2024.

### **Environmental Impact and Bio-Diversity Net Gain**

- 3.20 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.
- 3.21 The Council has robustly challenged EWR Alliance (EWRA) on their vegetation removal programme and in response EWRA have planned their construction works wherever possible to minimise vegetation removal and reduce impact on the environment. The project is providing additional rurally sympathetic landscaping of 350,000 trees.
- 3.22 20 Ecological Compensation Sites (ECS) are being created by the project providing habitats for species including great crested newts, butterflies, bats, birds, badgers, otters and reptiles, with 150,000 new trees and plants. Additional
- 3.23 EWRA have a project bio-diversity net gain target of +10%. They are currently assessing how to deliver this throughout 2023 and 2024, and the Council requires Buckinghamshire to be a focal county for achieving this target.

### **The Aylesbury Spur**

- 3.24 Buckinghamshire Council continues to support the overall benefits of the project on the understanding that the East West Railway will include a rail link to Aylesbury. The facilitating infrastructure is currently being built and the Council continues to proactively lobby the Department for Transport (DfT) and Network Rail (NR), in conjunction with third parties such as EEH and EWMLP, to confirm that the necessary funding has been secured and the Aylesbury spur will proceed.

### **Diesel Rolling Stock**

- 3.25 EWR Company (EWR Co) has advised that the East West Railway service will commence in 2025 with diesel rolling stock. The Council and other key stakeholders including the local Members of Parliament are robustly challenging this position with the Department for Transport (DfT) and EWR Company (EWR Co), requesting alternative rolling stock solutions are considered for service launch including Bi-mode trains.

### **Noise Pollution**

- 3.26 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 public address system announcements.

- 3.27 EWRA installed permanent acoustic barriers in several key locations along the line of route including Verney Junction and Steeple Claydon early in the project delivery to protect the community during construction. The long-term purpose of these permanent acoustic barriers is to reduce noise levels for those living in close proximity to the line from the train service upon entry into service.

### **Freight Services and Impacts**

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

- 3.29 Councillors and residents' concerns and questions to be answered by EWR Company (EWR Co) and Network Rail (NR) include: when will freight train movements begin on the EWR line; how many movements a day at the start and how will this increase over time; will movements run through the night and early hours of the morning; will the acoustic barriers put in place to mitigate noise pollution for line-side residents from passenger trains be effective against freight trains. EWR Co and NR are currently assessing these concerns and have advised they will revert with further information.

### **The EWR Line Entry into Service Plans for Passenger Services**

- 3.30 Councillors and residents are keen to understand the plans for the East West Railway line passenger service upon entry into service, including the service pattern and how

many passenger trains will run daily, both weekdays and weekends, along with train times. Network Rail (NR) have confirmed they are currently working through the specifics of the timetabling.

- 3.31 The EWR train service Operator has still not been formally announced and EWR Company (EWR Co) have advised this is imminent.

#### **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, including those set out above.
- 4.2 Additionally, Buckinghamshire Council fund two Marshalls to support residents with the construction of both HS2 and EWR. The Marshalls are on hand to go on site and investigate issues, meet face to face with residents, and raise concerns with works relating to both of the national rail infrastructure projects impacting the county.
- 4.3 Buckinghamshire Council has worked hard for our residents to support them with engagement. According to the recent National Audit Office (NAO) report “the EWR Company (EWR Co) still has more to do to respond to the concerns of local residents, some of which could be negatively affected by the project and are unhappy with how EWR Company (EWR Co) has engaged with them”.
- 4.4 The Council is working with the East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) to secure the necessary remuneration from the Alliance for permanent road repairs to be completed to align with their on-going construction activities and their compound demobilisation programme.
- 4.5 Additionally, the Council continues to proactively lobby the Department for Transport (DfT) and Network Rail (NR) to confirm that the necessary funding has been secured to deliver the link to Aylesbury and for the DfT to formally instruct works to commence as soon as possible.

#### **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: 07795 478687 or email: [susan.browning@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:susan.browning@buckinghamshire.gov.uk).