



Buckinghamshire Council

Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2024 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 12.26 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

B Chapple OBE, R Carington, P Brazier, M Caffrey, M Collins, P Cooper, C Cornell, E Gemmell, S Guy, M Rand, L Sullivan, D Watson and A Wood

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

S Broadbent, T Broom, D Barnes, J Jordan, P Martin, A Schaefer, S Bambrick, R Barker, A Beckett, S Browning, K Campbell, M Cuzner, J Fuller, P Hoskins, D Johnson, H Joyce, L Leech, C Ward and S Moore

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr N Naylor. Apologies were also received from Jez Baldock (East West Rail Alliance) and Peter Hume (Network Rail).

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th November 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Five public questions had been received to be considered at the meeting. Four were answered during the meeting by the Cabinet Member for Transport, the fifth would receive a written reply. The questions and answers would be appended to the minutes.

5 EAST WEST RAIL

- The Chairman welcomed Mark Cuzner and Kate Campbell (East West Rail Alliance) and Pip Hoskins (Network Rail) to the meeting then invited the Cabinet Member for Transport, Councillor Steven Broadbent, to introduce the item.
- The Cabinet Member thanked Cllr Martin for working on the East-West Rail (EWR) project, which was now in its fourth year. Visible progress had been made in the last 12

- months, notably in Winslow where the station had been built. The infrastructure was due to be completed by the end of 2024 and the service due to start in 2025.
- On behalf of residents, the Council had a duty to hold national construction projects to account. This was so that disruption to the road network and to communities was mitigated. Section 3 of the report detailed work to clear mud from the roads, manage traffic flows and lessen the effect of dust on nearby communities. Despite the large number of road closures and diversions, the Council had not granted all requests. Permits had been refused or altered in order to let the public and school transport through. He mentioned that some businesses had suffered and could apply for a limited mitigation payment, but this was not an easy process.
 - The Cabinet Member recognised that East West Rail had delivered temporary and permanent road repairs, which substantially mitigated the impact of the construction work on local roads. He thanked East West Rail for substantially completing 20 roads and acknowledged that some road defects remain.
 - The Cabinet Member chaired the EWR Mainline Partnership, which includes all the authorities on the route and has continued to lobby central government for the Aylesbury spur to be built. He noted the mitigation measures on day-to-day activities and mentioned that Council marshals were providing oversight.
 - In 2023 the National Audit Office report on railways mentioned how Buckinghamshire Council had championed local residents. He hoped that work to maintain communications with residents had been effective. He felt it important to understand the importance of good communications.
 - Cllr Martin, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Transport, recorded his thanks to Susan Browning who had worked on mitigation for this project. The Chairman stated that the entire committee echoed Cllr Martin's thanks.

Mark Cuzner, Director of the East West Rail Alliance, made the following points during the EWR presentation:

- The Cabinet Member was thanked for his positive comments on road repairs.
- The track was almost complete and all 10 footbridges were completed before schedule to reinstate public rights of way. Eight out of the ten compounds had been restored.
- The completion dates had not changed – the infrastructure would be complete in the third quarter of 2024. Both stations were being completed and the foundations for the car park at Winslow station had been laid. The bridges built over roads had now opened. Any risks to the completion date had been managed and EWR had taken the delivery date seriously to minimise disruption. Once the infrastructure was completed, work would be done on the systems - Signalling, Power and Communications (SPAC).
- Near compounds, some road repairs needed to be completed but the Verney Junction compound had been put back to its former condition.
- The project realised that mud and dust had been a problem for residents and road sweepers had been used to mitigate this. Now that the major works were almost complete, the impact on residents would be much reduced. An officer noted that EWR had been very responsive to complaints about mud and dust.
- The project has been designed to take climate resilience into account and the drainage put in place could cope with increased levels of rainfall.
- There was a commitment to provide 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This was assessed by taking measurements before and after the works. There was currently a 5.6% BNG, this would increase to 10% by Q3 of 2024.
- Contributions of over £3 million had been made to community schemes. As the project winds down, these funds will dwindle but EWR was currently donating material to local social groups.

- The project had received industry recognition and had been put forward for national award schemes. It was good to see that the project had been held to account by local authorities.
- Pip Hoskins extended her thanks to Susan Browning and Laura Leech for their work on the project.

The following points were made during the Select Committee's discussion:

- There was a discussion of other projects where planting had been problematic. With EWR, Network Rail would be progressively responsible for planting maintenance in the railway corridor whilst landowners were required to sign agreements to look after planting on private land. Where landscaping was done, there was always a failure rate but any plants which had died within a year of being planted were replaced. Survival rates had been relatively high compared to previous years. During the winter months, work had also been done to cut back weeds.
- Mark Cuzner advised that relatively few trees had been removed and this was because the railway corridor already existed. It was not the preferred strategy to move mature trees. Most of the mature trees near to the line had been retained and these had been given priority over shrubs. The planting carried out had been appropriate to existing fauna and the walking and cycling paths. The remaining planting would be in the general locality of the line rather than the railway corridor. Planting had made a real improvement to the local habitat. EWR agreed to provide more detail on planting at the request of a Member.

Action: Mark Cuzner

- Members of the committee requested again for EWR to supply figures for how many and what trees had been cut down and for how many trees had been saved by being moved. Members complained that this had been asked for at previous meetings but had not yet been supplied. East West Rail committed to supplying the information.

Action: Mark Cuzner

- Members of the committee expressed serious concerns about pollution resulting from the diesel trains to be used on the EWR. Mention was made of the hybrid flex trains which were to be used when the project was planned. Particular mention was made of Winslow station, which was sited next to a school. The decision was questioned in the light of the aim to reach net zero emissions by 2050. It was noted that diesel trains were at their most polluting when accelerating out of a station. It was confirmed that the rolling stock used on the line would be new.
- All the new and modified structures on the line have taken account of electrification so that it can be installed at a later date. Passive provision had been designed in at the start of the project. Some of the existing bridges were repaired rather than renewed, others had the gauges raised.
- The Cabinet Member for Transport detailed figures from the National Audit Office which showed the cost of the EWR was between £5.7 and £6.6 billion. The estimate to fully electrify the line was up to £1 billion. A range of power options were currently being considered by EWR and the Department for Transport. EWR would present plans for future powering of the line at the consultation on the remainder of the line later this year.
- Diesel trains had been chosen as they provided the fastest way of putting the line in use. They were a temporary measure until another form of power was put in place – EWR and the government were still exploring future plans. All diesel trains would be phased out by 2040. A Member expressed their fear that diesel trains would continue to be used on the line until 2040.

- Members of the committee asked for details of the overall cost savings, if any, due to using diesel trains at the start and then replacing these with electric trains in the near future and at the latest by 2040.
- The bridges had been given an anti-graffiti coating but when graffiti had been noticed, it had taken some weeks to procure its removal. The station tannoy would be tested during the final stages of electrical installation. Communications would be sent out to residents before the middle of 2024.
- The committee discussed its support for the Aylesbury spur to the ERW line, noting it had been part of the original plan. Network Rail had put in passive provision to add the spur at a later date which meant that there was no technical reason why it could not be built in the future with minimal disruption. The representatives acknowledged the desire for the Aylesbury spur but advised that no funding decision had been made by the Government. EWR would let the committee know when the funding was clarified. The Cabinet Member noted that the Aylesbury spur remains on the project plan as a dotted line. The Chairman would write a letter to the Cabinet Member on behalf of the committee expressing its support for the Aylesbury spur. The Cabinet Member would then pass this message on to the government.

Action: Chairman/Scrutiny Officer

- There was mention of the disruption caused by HS2 in the county and a Member pointed out that this line would be of no benefit to residents. The Chairman noted that the next committee meeting was planned for 28th March 2024 which would deal solely with HS2.
- The full benefits of the line would not be realised until Oxford and Cambridge were linked. This would bring new jobs, benefit business and link academia.
- The representatives were confident in the current estimated timings of the project and their associated RAG risk ratings.
- Footbridges over the line had steps and were not designed for access by those with disabilities. As they had replaced rural paths which were mainly accessible for those on foot, this had not been practical. The Chairman noted that some would be disappointed at this.
- Currently, two passenger trains in each direction per hour were planned. There would be one or two freight trains each way per hour. Once the formal announcement of the operator was made by the Government, a new series of communications about the timetable would follow. Information on any freight trains planned to run overnight was requested as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked everyone for contributing and their attendance.

6 CLIMATE CHANGE & AIR QUALITY STRATEGY ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

Cllr Thomas Broom, the new Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, introduced himself and expressed thanks to his predecessor Cllr Gareth Williams, who had overseen substantial progress on the project to lower emissions in Buckinghamshire.

- The Cabinet Member introduced Cllr Jilly Jordan, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and officers Alexander Beckett, David Johnson and Hannah Joyce.
- This was the second update report on the Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy and highlighted that a 73.4% reduction had been made in emissions already. There had been significant progress on air quality and all but one area was under the recommended limit for air pollution.

The following points were made during the committee's discussion:

- The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment supported the spirit of reaching the net zero target by 2030 subject to resources. However, he felt that the overall target of 2050 was appropriate in a period of instability for energy supply and the global economic picture. The annual funding settlement for Buckinghamshire Council and changeability of resources were also a factor. The Council's 2050 commitment would remain however suggestions from Members would be welcomed.
- The Cabinet Member explained that the Council had taken significant action to support Town and Parish Councils to meet net zero targets by 2030 and that all 16 Community Boards now have air quality testing kits.
- It was suggested that supporting the 'green economy' of Buckinghamshire was within the Leader's portfolio.
- A Member pointed out that council's fleet was the second largest cause of carbon emissions in the county. The Cabinet Member for Transport explained that when fleet vehicles were replaced, the vehicle's purpose and the type of fuel was considered. The Highways Alliance partners had committed to convert all the smaller vehicles in its fleet within the next year along with providing charge point infrastructure at depots.
- The report contained an update on the vehicle charging point pilot in Wendover. Cable gulleys to allow residents to charge vehicles outside their houses were being trialled however these might not be ideal if the resident was unable to park outside their home. The use of lampposts for trickle charging was also being investigated. There were now 294 publicly accessible vehicle charging points in the county, a 7% increase on last year, and 1,000 would be installed by the end of 2027. The Gateway charge points had a new contract which had improved performance.
- The effect of domestic log burners on pollution levels was discussed, and the Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment pointed out that pollution was reducing in all five air quality management areas in the county. The Council would continue to monitor and respond if it felt this was a growing area of concern.
- The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment confirmed that there were no substantial changes since the report was published in November 2023, and that Buckinghamshire was taking a delivery-based approach.

The Chairman thanked everyone for contributing and giving their time.

7 ACTIVE TRAVEL AND BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Transport introduced the plan and noted that the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) also included "wheeling", where paths were used by wheelchair and mobility scooter users. The Cabinet Member explained that the report aimed to include improvements in connectivity and that there was still an ambition for a county-wide greenway.

- In all schemes, people may use just part of the route.
- The routes had to comply with national standards as they were built with the aid of national funding. At times, this could prohibit a connection.
- The report detailed the consideration given to users of the routes, for example, wayfinding signs giving journey time by method as well as distance.
- Lighting and seating were factored into the cost of new routes.
- Recently, Cabinet has adopted the High Wycombe transport strategy and LCWIP, meaning that Buckingham, Aylesbury and High Wycombe all had active plans. Chesham had developed a local solution. Community Boards had all been consulted about residents' priorities. This year a public consultation would start on LCWIP proposals.
- To increase the existing level of funding from Active Travel England, there would need to be public consultation and demonstrable support for any LCWIP proposals.

- Since April 2020:
 - £3.3million funding has been received from Active Travel England. Section 106 funds have contributed another £1.5 million.
 - 7km of new routes have been created.
- The Cabinet Member for Transport wished to publicly note the good work of the school travel team in promoting walking and cycling routes to schools, a project in which Buckinghamshire Council was leading the way.

The following points were made during the committee's discussion:

- Scooters which were part of the national trial were permitted on the routes as were electric bikes. Privately purchased scooters were not allowed on public paths and roads as they did not have the necessary safety features such as speed restrictions and geolocation. Canal towpaths were not always suitable for bikes e.g. where paths narrowed under bridges. Wayfinder signs showed where bikes were permitted.
- It was hoped that WIPs could be extended towards the Hertfordshire border. Work had been done with external partners to develop more towpaths. All the work needed external funding.
- Bike busses, where children would be supervised to ride bikes to school, were promoted by the school transport team. Active travel was being encouraged as a means of getting to school.
- All users of paths and roads were expected to be considerate. In some cases, people had been injured in collisions with bikes or scooters. Clear signage could help on a shared route but it would take time to add this to the network. It was hoped that all users of paths could be civil.
- When new developments were ready, blue roundels would indicate whether bikes can use the route.
- The increased range of electric bikes would make them an option for commuting. Bikes had been added to the trial to give riders the chance to build their confidence. Parking for bikes could also be considered.

8 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman explained that a working group would be established in the summer. Flooding might be a suitable topic to explore, and volunteers would be needed for the group.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

28th March 2024.