railfuture

Campaigning for better services over a bigger rail network

please reply to:
70 Dynevor Road
Stoke Newington
London
N16 0DX

Freepost EAST WEST RAIL

contact@eastwestrail.co.uk

roger.blake@railfuture.org.uk

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Dear Sir/Madam,

East West Rail central section – Bedford-Cambridge – route option consultation

Railfuture is Britain's leading national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users in order to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. Railfuture seeks to influence decision makers at local, regional and national level to implement pro-rail policies in the nation's transport planning.

Section 1 – Background and Route Option Selection

1.1 Following the closure of the former 'Varsity Line' in the late 1960s, the re-establishment of a rail connection between Oxford and Cambridge via Bedford (which we see as a vital link in the national rail network, performing a strategic as well as a local role) has been one of our longest-running campaigns. Indeed, by bringing this issue to public attention our efforts helped to create the political environment that has now – in a possibly unique transcendence of regional boundaries – witnessed the establishment of the East West Rail Consortium of local authorities to take the project forward. The tenacity of this consortium, often in the face of considerable scepticism, has now been rewarded with the creation of the East West Railway Company by the government.

Long overdue as the project may be, we are delighted that its growing ambition and scope doesn't seek merely to put back what was lost, but instead creates an entirely new railway built to modern specifications. It has our full support.

1.2 The current consultation documentation published by the East West Railway Company refers to the creation of a 'mixed traffic' railway. We fully support this ambition, having been concerned at some earlier references to the line being merely a commuter railway between Oxford and Cambridge.

The ambition of Railfuture (and indeed of the East West Rail Consortium) is for this line to form part of the strategic passenger rail network which will be used by services between Ipswich and Norwich, via Cambridge and Bedford, and Milton Keynes, Oxford, Swindon, and Bristol. In so doing it will provide an outer orbital rail route beyond London linking the seven main lines radiating from the city – from the 'Great Eastern' round to the 'Great Western'.

As we see the shortest overall end-to-end journey time as being a key attribute of this, we support Route Option A which both achieves this objective and meets more local needs.

1.3 We fully support the inclusion of **freight** capability within the current scope of this project. The growth of intermodal traffic between the distribution depots in the Midlands and north of England and the principal ports of Felixstowe, Southampton and Thames Gateway places increasing pressure on the rail network around London to accommodate sufficient train paths at a time of growing passenger demand. Distribution depots at Daventry (existing), Blisworth (approved) as well as other sites in the Midlands are examples of additional demand that could be served by East West Rail. Additional capacity must be found for new and diversionary freight flows and we see East West Rail as playing a vital role in the nation's distribution logistics.

1.4 In coming to our conclusions we are also mindful of the difficulty of providing connections with the main lines at points such as Bedford, Sandy and Cambridge which are also served by high-frequency services as part of the Thameslink network. For East West Rail to operate successfully, it must neither compromise the performance of other services nor have its own performance adversely affected by capacity constraints at key nodes. We believe that the creation of interchange stations with the Midland and East Coast main lines are ways of achieving this without the huge cost and disruption associated with rebuilding existing stations. It is for this reason that we support the reference to 'East West' services extending beyond Cambridge to Ipswich and Norwich, as this would distribute the pressure on platform capacity.

1.5 Railfuture fully supports the conclusion reached by the East West Railway Company, namely that the route into Cambridge from Bedford should be from the south. As well as avoiding reversal at Cambridge for services continuing further east, East West Rail services will also call at the new station at **Cambridge South**. This station will serve the travel needs of staff, visitors and patients to Addenbrooke's and Papworth hospitals, as well as businesses such as AstraZeneca which are located in this part of Cambridge. With four platforms accommodating services from London's Liverpool Street and King's Cross, Thameslink, Stansted Airport, and 'East West', Cambridge South could, with the scale and density of employment in its catchment, reach an annual footfall of two million passengers.

Section 2 – Costs

2.1 Railfuture sees the inclusion of longer-distance and freight services as vital to the success of the East West Railway. We therefore support **Route Option A** as having the **lowest upfront capital cost** as well as being the best-performing in terms of journey time. In experiences by no means confined to the rail industry, recent major capital schemes have shown a tendency for costs to increase during the project's lifetime. In addition, the more expensive the chosen option, the greater the risk of 'de-scoping' to fit within a budget. The risk of the long-term benefits of this railway being compromised or cancelled altogether as a result of inflating costs is one which we wish to avoid. We would also wish to see the line electrified at the earliest possible opportunity, and the case for further investment is more likely to be heard if the initial costs can be kept under control.

2.2 As well as the lower upfront capital cost, we note the potential savings in operating costs which can be achieved with shorter journey times. With, say, four trains per hour in each direction, a journey-time saving of one minute is multiplied by 128 over a 16-hour working day, which translates to more than two hours of train crew and rolling stock leasing costs.

The following table shows the impact of this for options B, C, D & E compared with option A:

Route Option	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**
Extra journey time (mins)	***4***	***4***	***7***	***6***
Over a working day (hrs/mins)	***8h 32m***	***8h 32m***	***14h 56m***	***12h 48m***

As well as reduced staff costs, the table demonstrates that Route Option A would also require fewer train units.

2.3 Route Option A avoids wasteful duplication with other projects. There is a lobby for the route to pass to the north via Cambourne. Railfuture supports the establishment of the 'Cambridge Metro' and sees this as a better way to service housing growth along this corridor. As the 'Oxford to Cambridge Expressway' (being promoted at the same time as East West Rail) will use the A428, it will already serve Cambourne. The potential for new development at Bassingbourn, however, will require additional transport infrastructure if it is not served by rail.

Section 3 – Connectivity benefits compared with other options

3.1 In supporting Route Option A, Railfuture is conscious of the need to demonstrate how the needs of even those communities and hubs which may appear to be better served by alternative options can in fact be met by Route Option A.

3.1.1 Cambourne: As stated above, we believe that the main flows from this development into Cambridge can be met by the Cambridge Metro, which will link it with the city centre and rail station. The convenience of residents wishing to enjoy direct access to East West Rail needs to be balanced against the increased journey times for greater numbers of potential passengers from across East Anglia and the 'England's Economic Heartland' regions.

3.1.2 Tempsford: As with Bassingbourn, Tempsford is being pencilled-in for significant housing development. A station service at Tempsford would need to be situated on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) as shown in options B, C, D & E. This settlement would be served by high-frequency Thameslink services which also call at the interchange station at Sandy. There is probably a greater propensity for residents of this new settlement to be London commuters than the more Cambridge-centric flows at Cambourne and Bassingbourn. Average waiting time for connections at Sandy would be 7.5 minutes with a 15-minute frequency. This still offers better generalised journey times than those experienced by road.

3.1.3 St. Neots: Already served by Thameslink services between London and Peterborough, St. Neots would enjoy connectivity with East West Rail at Sandy.

3.1.4 Bedford Midland: Options D and E show East West Rail directly serving Bedford Midland. On the face of it this appears to offer the best connectivity with other services calling at Bedford. However, Bedford Midland is the northern terminus for one of the Thameslink service arms. In the peak hours, there is insufficient platform capacity to accommodate calls by longer distance services to/from Leicester, Sheffield, Nottingham and Derby alongside the Thameslink services. The addition of East West services is likely to impact on capacity throughout the day unless hugely expensive and disruptive rebuilding of Bedford Midland were undertaken as part of the East West project.

Provision of a new interchange station at Bedford South served by both East West and Thameslink services would maintain connectivity with the Midland Main Line (MML). Establishing such a station near the A6 and A421 would not only provide an attractive parkway station served by the expressway, but would also offer a potentially more attractive option for commuters travelling to London than their current one as they could avoid congestion in central Bedford. We would therefore suggest that Bedford South be designed with sufficient MML platforms to permit inclusion in the calling pattern of longer distance services.

3.1.5 The Marston Vale Line: We envisage the current service pattern into Bedford Midland via Bedford St. Johns being retained although certain key stations along the line would also be served by East West services and offer interchange opportunities.

Section 4 – Other matters

4.1 Passive provision. Railfuture looks forward to making further comment during the later stages of the Development Consent Order (DCO) process when we consider the **Route Alignment** stage. For the purposes of **Route Option Selection** we would like assurance that the option chosen allows for further development. This should include (but not be confined to) the following:

4.1.1 Physical turnout connection with the East Coast Main Line. While this might not feature as part of the initial business case, a west-to-north junction would permit the movement of freight from Southampton to Leeds and Teesside to be achieved via a four-tracked mainline to Peterborough and access to the 'joint line' via the Werrington dive under. It might also permit some Thameslink services serving Bedford to extend along East West Rail to Peterborough, thereby developing a rail market between Luton, Luton Airport, St. Albans and Leagrave on the MML with cities on the ECML via a single change at Peterborough.

4.1.2 East to North connection at Bedford. As well as permitting occasional freight movements from the east to access the MML facing north, there could be a market for extending Marston Vale stopping services towards Cambridge with reversal at Bedford Midland.

4.1.3 East to South connection at Bedford. This would permit freight from east coast ports to access the distribution centre at Radlett.

Section 5 - Conclusion

Railfuture considers that Route Option A should be taken forward to the Route Alignment stage of the DCO because it:

5.1 is most capable of delivery
5.2 is the least-cost option, making it the most resilient against potential de-scoping
5.3 produces lower operating cost
5.4 balances the needs of local and long-distance travel
5.5 offers the best potential for future development to satisfy changing markets for both passenger and freight traffic.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake BA, MRTPI (Rtd), MTPS
Railfuture
Director for Infrastructure & Networks