

EAST WEST RAIL LINK - PROGRESS REPORT JANUARY 2013

by the Railfuture Networks Group

Railfuture is Britain's only national independent organisation campaigning for rail passengers and freight. It has several national groups that specialise in certain aspects of the railway. The Networks Group supports and proposes enhancements to the rail network, which includes new routes and stations, removal of bottlenecks, faster routes and so on.

The East West Rail Link is one of Railfuture's key campaigns. Its East Anglia and Thames Valley branches have promoted the reopening since the early 1990s and Railfuture was instrumental in increasing the interest amongst local authorities that led to the setting up of the East West Rail Consortium.

The following is a report by group member Jerry Alderson, written after attending a presentation about East West Rail by the Department for Transport.

EWR presentation in Cambridge on Friday 18/01/2013 by David Sexton

Some rail campaigners have a poor impression of the Department for Transport, unkindly referred to by critics as Daft. It can appear uninterested in passengers' needs and motivated solely by cost with no desire for a growing railway to serve Britain's needs. This impression was immediately and comprehensively dispelled in January 2013 by a presentation in Cambridge about the East West Rail Link. The speaker was **David Sexton**, the **DfT's High Level Output Strategy Development Manager**. A career railwayman through and through he cared passionately for the project and was doing everything he could to make it a success, even considering freight opportunities as destinations on the route itself.

Currently half way through the GRIP process at stage 5 of 8 (stages 1-4 were performed in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009 respectively) they are working on the detailed design for the western section. Although the budget has been set some parts of the scheme will be more expensive than expected, as complications are identified, whilst others will be cheaper. We were surprised at how little other than the route is actually firm. Network Rail has still to determine the route track layout at Oxford to reach the two new platforms and Winslow station is expected to become a P&R station for Buckingham. Some level crossings may become bridges, a freight passing loop may be added at Swanbourne, and most ambitious of all is the possibility of a direct link onto the WCML down fast line. As they are now considering starting the Aylesbury station back at Marylebone an upgrade of the single-track route between Princes Risborough and Aylesbury would be required.

The complexity all parties are tackling at present is the progressive opening of services and route electrification, fitting in with the wider national electrification programme (Oxford 2016) and the delivery of Chiltern's Evergreen 3 (opening between Easter and May 2015). By December 2017 they envisage the following services:

- EMU : Paddington – Reading – Oxford – Bletchley – Milton Keynes
- DMU (fast): Oxford – Bletchley – Bedford
- DMU: Marylebone – Princes Risborough – Aylesbury – Bletchley – Milton Keynes
- DMU (local): Bletchley – Bedford
- Freight (diesel)

By December 2019 the range of services could become

- EMU: Paddington – Reading – Oxford – Bletchley – Milton Keynes
- EMU (fast): Paddington - Oxford – Bletchley – Bedford (could extend northwards, e.g. to Corby, if there is demand and MML paths can be found, and from 2021 when a new link is built it could possibly go via Heathrow)
- DMU: Marylebone – Princes Risborough – Aylesbury – Bletchley – Milton Keynes
- EMU: Bletchley – Bedford local
- Possible Southampton – Reading – Oxford – Bletchley – Milton Keynes – Manchester
- Other passenger services may also possible – for example Luton Borough Council would like to see Luton-MK direct trains and has been looking at three locations for a curve from the MML to the Marston Vale line
- Freight (electric and diesel)

The debate is whether extending the Paddington – Oxford EMUs in 2017 and 2019 is worthwhile or if a smaller train formation is required on EWR from the outset whilst traffic develops. The Southampton – Manchester is one way of gaining the 30 min long distance journey time reduction but the XC service might take a variety of forms. It could be a Reading starter if that's a better path. Mr Sexton is trying to encourage all parties to be realistic about traffic prospects as experience shows it takes several years for new train services to build up demand, especially where it is expected to act as a catalyst for housing and job growth.

The services are expected to attract 2.58m journeys in 2021, which will see 1.47m car trips removed.

Railfuture is keeping up pressure for the entire route into East Anglia to be reopened. The EWR Consortium is being encouraged by the DfT to define the demand requirements for the central section (i.e. the link to Cambridge). This would enable the DfT to provide a train service specification that could then guide on the route, station and track requirements, enabling a cost definition and initial business case appraisal. Railfuture, of course, has ideas on the possible route and Peter raised this during the presentation.

There is no doubt that EWR is on a growth corridor – within the population of all the major towns and cities from Reading to Ipswich expected to increase. Indeed within five years Milton Keynes will have a larger population than Edinburgh!

Further information about Railfuture's Oxford-Cambridge rail campaign can be found at:

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