



**Anthony Browne MP**  
Member of Parliament for South Cambridgeshire  
House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 0207 219 8089

Mr Simon Blanchflower CBE  
Chief Executive Officer  
East-West Rail Ltd

*By email only*

8<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Dear Mr Blanchflower,

### **East West Rail (EWR) Consultation**

Thank you for the responses you have provided to the various letters I have sent over the last few months, and for the meetings you and your team have kindly attended.

As the non-statutory consultation period draws to a close, I would like to provide you with a summary of my current position on the EWR project, which is informed, to a large extent, by the many hundreds of emails, letters, conversations and meetings I have had with residents of South Cambridgeshire on the subject of EWR. My contribution to the consultation is as follows:

1. **A full and fair assessment of all approaches into Cambridge should be undertaken.** In order for there to be public trust in the consultation process, there must be parity of assessment on all feasible routes. I am persuaded that there is a sufficiently credible body of evidence to challenge the assumptions upon which EWR Co rejected the northern approach, which would enter Cambridge via Cambridge North station. In my view, a failure to properly consider both northern and southern approaches with the same degree of scrutiny will lead to rising public discontent with the process EWR Co is following and any final decision it takes. Taking the time to consult properly on both options at this stage will give people greater faith in EWR Co's decision-making process as the project evolves.
2. **EWR Co must provide the level of detail required for a truly meaningful consultation and this should be addressed before the preferred route alignment is selected.** Whilst a large volume of consultation material has been produced by EWR Co, there is an absence of detail about many of the aspects of the EWR project that residents are most concerned about, including:
  - a. the size and scale of the proposed physical features (embankments, viaducts, cuttings and grade separated junctions),
  - b. the roads, pedestrian and cycle links that would be severed or altered by EWR and how the impacts of these changes would be addressed; and
  - c. the amount of freight that is ultimately expected to use this line.

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Without further details about these issues, people cannot reasonably be expected to reach an informed view on the best route alignment for South Cambridgeshire. EWR Co intends to select a preferred route alignment before the statutory consultation period and the public must be able to consider and comment on these important details before any such decision is reached. Given the huge scale and budget of the EWR project, and EWR Co's stated ambition to engage with local communities, it is very hard to understand why these have not already been provided. **EWR Co should therefore publish, as soon as possible and prior to the statutory consultation period, indicative illustrations and scaled diagrams of the physical structures being considered.**

On the issue of freight, your published 'Fact Sheet' states 'whether EWR is used for freight does not materially affect choices of alignments'. I think most residents would strongly disagree with this statement. The noise and vibration generated by freight trains is greater than that caused by passenger trains. Furthermore, there is concern that freight will be transported at night to avoid interference with the passenger service timetable. **EWR should provide a clear indication of the reasonable worst-case scenario, including the number of freight trains that can reasonably be predicted per day and the hours of operation.**

The non-statutory consultation should be extended, or re-opened, to allow the public to comment on all of these matters before EWR Co selects its preferred route alignment.

- 3. Communities must not be separated and access to the countryside must be maintained.** The existing links between villages and access to the countryside are essential to daily life in South Cambridgeshire. These roads, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways must be preserved. In particular, the roads between Harston and Newton, Harlton and Haslingfield, and Little Shelford and Hauxton should not be severed.
- 4. EWR must use green technology from the outset and new diesel trains must be explicitly ruled out.** It is senseless to build a brand-new diesel railway to open in 2030, when the government is at the same committing to decarbonise the UK economy. EWR must be electrified from the outset, or the project should be delayed until an alternative green technology has been identified, tested and operationalised.
- 5. The option of using trenching technology should be explored.** I have written to you previously outlining the case for trench technology, which has the potential to mitigate against many of the concerns held by residents, such as the visual impact, noise and air pollution from EWR. It would also offer scope to bridge roads, footpaths and cycleways over the railway at ground level. This should be fully considered with an open mind.

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6. **EWR Co must reduce the height of the embankment, viaducts and other above ground structures.** These features are the most controversial aspects of the current proposals and are causing huge alarm in the communities that will be directly affected by them, as well as wider concerns about the profound damage they will cause to the landscape of South Cambridgeshire. This should include a commitment to tunnelling through Chapel Hill in Haslingfield, rather than using a cutting.
7. **EWR should assess the option of building a new station on the King's Cross line at Harston.** I have previously raised this issue with both Will Gallagher of EWR and the Rail Minister. The village of Harston is one of only two large villages in South Cambridgeshire that is located close to a main railway line but does not benefit from having a station. Harston is in desperate need of a reliable public transport service to alleviate congestion and air pollution on the A10, which runs through the village. Whilst EWR trains would not stop at Harston, a station at this location would give residents a rail link to Cambridge and beyond. The cost of building a station would be relatively inexpensive in the context of the whole EWR project and it is likely that significant savings could be made compared with undertaking this work as a stand-alone project.
8. **EWR Co must commit to undertake deep and detailed coordination with other local and regional transport bodies.** The public rightly expects that taxpayers' money is spent most effectively and productively. Public transport in Cambridgeshire needs major investment and transformation to support the growth we have already experienced and that which is still to come. We must build transport infrastructure that prioritises the needs of existing communities and those developments that are already in the pipeline to be built, such as Northstowe and Cambourne.

There is a widely held (and correct in my view) public belief that there is a lack of joined up thinking about transport in our region. EWR Co should work very closely with the Combined Authority, Greater Cambridge Partnership, County and District Councils and Highways England to identify overlaps, synergies and opportunities to save costs, minimise the detrimental impacts of transport infrastructure and ensure that we have a truly integrated network. It is also essential that EWR Co considers what will happen to the line east of Cambridge and selects a route alignment that will make sense for onward passenger journeys and freight movements. There should be a formal and transparent mechanism through which all this coordination takes place.

9. **The full business case for EWR must be published and this must include an analysis of the long-term impact of Covid-19 on commuting habits.** When EWR was first conceived, a global pandemic was very far from any of our minds. The last 18 months have changed everything and there is growing evidence that homeworking and more flexible working patterns will become a permanent feature of the UK economy, with a consequent reduction and/or redistribution of commuting patterns. As a passenger focused service, EWR must be re-assessed to take these changes into

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account, to ensure that this project, at a cost of billions of pounds of public money, is the right solution to the transport problems we will face in the future.

I hope that these observations and suggestions will be helpful as you consider the next steps in this project. I will continue to work with you to ensure that the residents of South Cambridgeshire will experience real benefits from EWR.

Kind regards,



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