



East West Rail Company
Via email

EEH Business Unit
c/o Buckinghamshire Council
County Hall
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Email: consultation@eastwestrail.co.uk

Date: 24/ 01/ 2025

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Consultation Response: East West Rail non-statutory consultation

Summary

- England's Economic Heartland (EEH), the sub-national transport body covering the area of the core East West Rail project between Oxford and Cambridge, welcomes continued progress to the scheme's delivery.
- Recognising the significant opportunity that East West Rail presents for this region - not just as a rail project but as a catalyst for a lasting legacy that provides local, regional and national benefits for many years to come.
- For EEH, this means realising the role that East West Rail will play in achieving a genuinely integrated transport system across the region and ensuring it is developed as part of a wider sustainable transport network
- This response gives more detail of comments against a number of key areas agreed as important by our Board, with the following key points highlighted:
 - **Ensuring the scheme is delivered in line with EEH Transport Strategy principles and policies, including on connectivity and decarbonisation:** Whilst EEH welcomes the proposal for operate East West Rail under electric traction, more detail needs to be given on the preferred 'discontinuous' electrification option and what this can enable operationally. Further understanding is also sought on the potential of 'future proofing' to allow for full electrification in time. Further detail on rail freight benefits and potential impacts is also sought, recognising the strategic opportunity for EWR to more efficiently carry some freight than by road.
 - **Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise door-to-door connectivity and supporting the on-going legacy for East West Rail:** Planning for excellent door-to-door connectivity should be an integrated part of the EWR scheme, given it will be critical to both the customer journey experience and success of the scheme. The East West Railway Company, supported by Government, needs to work with EEH and local authority partners to plan, secure funding and deliver relevant improvements alongside delivery of the core railway, building on the existing extensive evidence base.

- **Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise the opportunities to deliver improved rail linkages across the region:** EEH has developed an extensive evidence base which shows the benefits of EWR enabling delivery of wider rail connections. We seek assurance that planning for onward rail connections will be given significant priority at all stages of the project, including as the detail of EWR service timetabling is developed. We also seek assurance of how EWR Co intends to work with local and national partners to maximise wider rail connectivity.
- **Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise the opportunities to link with delivery of improved bus and active travel links:** Bus and active travel linkages from stations, developed as part of the 'door-to-door' offer for passenger and residents are critical. This is not only to enable EWR to become a core part of delivering an integrated transport network for our region but also so that EWR becomes the mode of choice for communities across the region – maximising passenger numbers and, ultimately, revenues for the railway.
- **Ensuring that high quality digital connectivity, alongside physical connectivity should be delivered from the outset** for the remainder of core scheme, building on the success of the 'Connecting Heartland' project delivered in Connectivity Stage 1.
- **Addressing these key points will ensure that East West Rail better maximises its potential.**

Introduction

England's Economic Heartland (EEH) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the EWR non-statutory consultation.

STBs play a key role in setting the ambitions for strategic transport connectivity in regions across England as well as setting a direction of travel with the publication of regional transport strategies. England's Economic Heartland's strategic priorities are set out in our Transport Strategy published in 2021¹, supported by a range of evidence base work.²

EEH covers the area from Swindon and Oxfordshire in the west to Cambridgeshire in the east, and Hertfordshire up to Northamptonshire. We have 13 local and combined authority partners within our area who steer our programme of work, led by a Board attended by political leaders from across the area. Importantly our partners include the transport authorities in the region who have a key role in planning and delivering local transport networks, and it will be critical that East West Rail effectively links to and complements these networks, particularly at stations.

EEH plays a key role in identifying transport investment priorities and supporting our local partners in planning and funding infrastructure delivery. East West Rail has long been a critical scheme for transforming connectivity in our region and beyond. In particular, we believe that the project will be key to achieving the ambitions of the planned Integrated National Transport Strategy should it be further developed and delivered in partnership with regional and local partners, ensuring that an effective connectivity legacy is enabled.

However, the region's overarching support for the scheme does not undermine the very significant considerations of individual local authorities, communities and residents along the route of the railway. It is through some of the key areas in this submission that we hope to see some of these concerns addressed more effectively. We recognise in some local places, key areas for improved approaches and solutions will not address the issues, and the response outlined below does not seek to replicate, and particularly does not supersede individual local authority responses.



Policy and evidence base context

EEH's priorities are guided by our Transport Strategy, published in 2021. The strategy was developed by EEH's Strategic Transport Forum (the predecessor to the EEH Strategic Transport Leadership Board) of political and business leaders informed by a robust body of technical evidence and the Integrated Sustainability Appraisal, and shaped by two rounds of public engagement with its partners, stakeholders, residents and businesses, ensuring it represents the priorities of the region. The strategy had a 5 point plan of action, with much of this relevant to delivery of East West Rail, as follows:

- *Focus on decarbonisation of the transport system by harnessing innovation and supporting solutions which create green economic opportunities*
- *Promote investment in digital infrastructure as a means of improving connectivity*
- *Use delivery of East West Rail and mass rapid transit systems as the catalyst for the transformation of our strategic public transport networks*
- *Champion increased investment in active travel and shared transport solutions to improve local connectivity to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to realise their potential*
- *Ensure that our freight and logistics needs continue to be met whilst lowering the environmental impact of their delivery*

This strategy also has a number of policies specifically related to East West Rail as follows, in particular policies 9, 10 and 11 related to 'The East West Main Line':

- *We support the delivery of the East West Rail project (including the 'eastern' section from Ipswich and Norwich to Cambridge), with the expectation that Oxford to Bletchley/ Milton Keynes is open by 2025, with links to Bedford and Aylesbury to follow at the earliest possible opportunity thereafter, and Oxford to Cambridge delivered no later than 2030.*
- *We will work with the East West Railway Company, Network Rail, neighbouring STBs and local partners to identify opportunities to realise the longer-term potential of the East West Main Line in support of economic activity and planned housing growth.*
- *We will work with partners, the East West Railway Company and Network Rail to ensure that where the East West Main Line intersects existing main lines the opportunity is taken to establish regionally significant transport hubs. Priority will be given to the following locations: Oxford Stations, Bicester Stations, Aylesbury Station, Milton Keynes/ Bletchley Stations, Bedford Midland Station, East West Rail/ East Coast Main Line, Cambridge/ Cambridge South Stations.*

In addition, policy 32 on 'Realising the Potential for Rail Freight' is also relevant:

- *We will work with Network Rail and all relevant Sub-national Transport Bodies to develop proposals that increase freight on the rail network with priority given to the following corridors: Felixstowe to Nuneaton, East West Main Line, Southampton to West Midlands, West Coast Main Line (inc. Northampton Loop).*

Since the publication of our transport strategy we have undertaken a number of rail and multi-modal evidence base documents that are relevant to planning for East West Rail. These include:

- Rail: Passenger Rail Study (2021), East West Rail: Strategic Narrative (2022), Mainline Priorities Study (2024)
- Multi-modal: Connectivity Studies (2022- 2024), Bus Technical Documents (2024), Introducing the Varsity Way (2022)
- Economic: Connecting Economies Documents (2024)



- General: East West Rail: A Legacy for the Region (2024), East West Rail: Strategic Narrative (2022)

All of these documents are published on our website and will inform continued EEH input to development of East West Rail.¹

Legacy of East West Rail

East West Rail must be designed in a way that brings a lasting legacy. While EWR will inevitably deliver significant economic growth benefits for the UK, there should be an equal (if not greater) focus on maximising East West Rail's benefit to local communities and businesses.

EEH believes that the best way to achieve this is through a locally-led approach to creating a legacy for East West Rail. By working with partners including local authorities, the Science Supercluster Board, the Oxford to Cambridge Universities group, and East West Railway Company, the region can ensure the government's commitment to East West Rail is focused on its legacy for communities.

This can be achieved through a sustained commitment to investing in four key themes:

1. **Business Investment and Knowledge** - using a spatial understanding of the innovation ecosystem in the region, identifying where investment will be most useful and where knowledge clusters or gaps exist.
2. **Skills and Learning** – ensuring East West Rail is part of the solution to enable better collaboration so the region has the talent pipeline and upskilling needs to meet future regional and industry needs.
3. **Quality of Life, Place, Heritage and Culture** – mapping 'quality of life' across the region and identifying where to prioritise incentives in response to local community and business needs. This will consider social infrastructure provision; heritage and culture; leisure and retail; green space and the natural environment.
4. **Connectivity** - acting as a catalyst for excellent door-to-door connectivity with the railway, increasing access to jobs alongside leisure, health and educational facilities. Making our existing places more sustainable and livable.

The East West Rail 'legacy project' is a vital part of its success. Sustained investment in it is essential if the scheme is to be able to deliver far reaching and sustainable benefits. Confirming funding for this work as soon as possible, including ensuring that this is allocated and managed in a fully transparent way with full engagement at a local place level is therefore seen as critical.

Response to EWR non-statutory consultation

Overall, EEH welcomes further development of the East West Rail (EWR) project, including the recent commitment by central government to progress the scheme between Oxford and Cambridge. However, we wish to ensure that the scheme is developed and delivered for the benefit of all communities along the line, as well as maximising the wider strategic benefits in line with the priorities outlined in our transport strategy.

The EEH Board on 4th December 2024 agreed in particular the following key areas which should guide further EEH input and views on development of EWR:

¹ [Publications - England's Economic Heartland](#)



- Ensuring the scheme is delivered in line with EEH Transport Strategy principles and policies, including on connectivity and decarbonisation
- Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise door-to-door connectivity and supporting the ongoing legacy for East West Rail
- Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise the opportunities to deliver improved rail linkages across the region as per priorities in the Main Line Priorities Report, endorsed by the EEH Board in September 2024.
- Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise the opportunities to link with the delivery of improved bus services (both local and regional), including the proposed Heartbeat network presented to Board in July 2024, and active travel links, including the proposed Varsity Way, and that digital infrastructure is built alongside it (as is the case with the Bicester-Bletchley section).

Comments on the consultation are given below in the context of the key focus areas given above.

Ensuring the scheme is delivered in line with EEH Transport Strategy principles and policies, including on connectivity and decarbonisation:

The EEH Transport Strategy principles and policies are clear that the East West Rail project should be developed as an integral part of a decarbonised and integrated transport system across the EEH area. There are 2 key areas in the consultation where further detail of proposals are given and where further comment against Transport Strategy priorities are relevant- plans for decarbonised operation, and proposals for accommodating rail freight operations:

Decarbonisation

Given our Transport Strategy's focus on developing a decarbonised transport network, EEH welcomes the fact that EWR's consultation documents now give more detail on plans for electrification of the route, which would reduce the need for fossil fuel traction and give the opportunity for trains to be powered by electricity generated by renewable power. We note that use of trains powered by electric traction has the secondary benefit of improved air quality at stations and other key locations along the line as emissions from diesel engine trains are eliminated. However, we note that at present there are still two main electrification options being considered: full electrification and 'discontinuous' electrification. The Company's preference is for 'discontinuous' electrification due to it being 'more affordable' due to less need to change existing structures such as bridges.² We also note that power supply options are being considered in more detail, and that in the short-term diesel operation will be brought in for Oxford to Milton Keynes and probably for Oxford to Bedford as well in advance of the full scheme to Cambridge.

Overall, EEH believes that it is critical that East West Rail is developed in line with decarbonisation principles. However, we are not yet clear from the information presented that EWR will be delivered to be a net-zero carbon project, highlighting the following key points on the proposals to date:

- Whilst we recognise that the Company is reviewing innovative train traction solutions to deliver decarbonised services at the earliest opportunity, we note that hybrid battery - electric trains are at an early stage of development and deployment in the UK. Further detail is therefore needed to set out how their use on EWR would be enabled- for example in relation to maintenance and operations.
- We are also not yet clear if the current preferred plans for 'discontinuous' electrification will allow for decarbonised operation of other services, for example freight trains and

² Consultation document, page 34.



any future through passenger services from other main lines. Without more detailed assessment and clarification we believe that, in the long term, full electrification is likely to be more flexible and fit with allowing for operation of longer-distance services as EWR becomes part of the wider regional and national network.

- Further clarity is required on the timing and phasing of electrification given the expected need to operate diesel trains on part of the route in the short-term. This needs to be confirmed with partners as soon as possible (and well in advance of a Statutory Consultation) so sufficient time is available to assess the trajectory towards delivery of a net-zero carbon railway.
- The decision to support electrification, including discontinuous electrification, is expected bring additional impacts to communities – not just between Bletchley and Cambridge but on the line that is shortly to be opened west of Bletchley. The impact on communities of returning to this part of line to undertake further retrospective construction can not be underestimated and must be managed carefully. EEH is seeking confirmation from EWR Co that discussions are underway with the relevant local authorities as soon as possible.
- Finally, we are not yet clear how the carbon impacts of the scheme delivery will be mitigated and when and how these will be off-set by use of the zero-carbon operated railway in time. This should be set out in more detail in the environmental work at the next stage of scheme development.

EEH therefore welcomes the proposal to operate East West Rail under electric traction. However, we believe that more engagement is required with local partners to fully understand the impact of the preferred 'discontinuous' electrification option and to consider if in the long term fully decarbonised rail operations, including for freight and future through passenger services, could be delivered.

Rail Freight

It is understood from the consultation documentation that the main focus of the current EWR project led by the EWR Company is to enable passenger trains to operate between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge and provide benefits to communities in-between. However, the consultation does also include further detail on the opportunity to provide for rail freight along the line, with figures given on the number of daily freight train paths that could be enabled through the scheme, including a significant increase of freight train paths planned on the 'western section' between Oxford and Bletchley/ Milton Keynes and enabled through further works such as a number of train passing loops on this section.

Planning for appropriate use of freight on the line fits with the policies within our Transport Strategy. However, based on the information contained within the consultation documentation, there are a number of key areas needing further discussion and engagement with us, as the Sub National Transport Body as well as other key local authorities:

- Whilst the consultation does include some facts on how rail freight using East West Rail could reduce carbon emissions, boost business productivity and take HGVs off the road, it does not give full detail of where those benefits would be realised, particularly at the local or regional level and how it links with existing and proposed rail freight interchanges such as Daventry and Northampton.
- As the detail of timetabling and planned freight gauge clearance are not included in the consultation, it is not clear whether the full benefits of providing for freight on EWR are being maximised. This is further complicated by the uncertainty around the plans for electrification on the route. For example, has there been any allowance for potential future opportunities to operate services from the east on to the West Coast Main Line should capacity enhancements come forward between Bletchley and Milton Keynes, or

have the assumptions taken into account other wider planned improvements such as at Ely and Haughley junctions? (the delivery of which are a major priority for EEH) This detail will also be key to understanding the operating assumptions underpinning the proposed rail passing loop locations.

- Finally, and importantly, considerations about freight operations must prioritise the minimisation of its impact on surrounding communities, for example potential emissions and noise at passing loop locations and ensure necessary mitigation to address these impacts is developed in partnership with local authorities and delivered as a matter of priority.

EEH therefore agree that East West Rail brings opportunities to better manage strategic freight movements, where it is appropriate and well managed. However, there are still many key points that need assurance to ensure plans to allow and manage rail freight movements maximise benefits to the region and actively minimise the impact on local communities along the line.

Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise door-to-door connectivity and supporting the ongoing legacy for East West Rail:

For most potential users of East West Rail their journeys will include travelling to or from a station at each end by another mode of transport. Door-to-door connectivity is critical to the success of the rail line and therefore, needs to be an integral part of the scheme- not a bolt on that has been planned retrospectively. Without this, the scheme will not maximise on the opportunities it creates, passenger revenues will not reach their full potential and the scheme will not create a lasting connectivity legacy across the region.

We are pleased to note that East West Railway Company has acknowledged the importance of 'door-to-door' in the consultation documentation with a 'fact sheet' setting out some of the key principles related to 'door-to-door' connectivity, as well as a short summary of some examples including at Bletchley, Camborne and Oxford Parkway. In the main consultation document, there are also references to door-to-door connectivity at certain existing/ planned stations, including Tempsford and Bedford. However, the detail on exact proposals to be integrated into the scheme for improving door-to-door journeys are still being developed, with reference to '*an emerging approach to door-to-door connectivity*' at several stations³, and text noting uncertainty around funding for certain key schemes that could improve door-to-door journeys for many, such as the Bletchley Eastern entrance.

We recognise that the East West Railway Company has been developing door-to-door strategy and engaging local authorities within this process. However, we believe that work on these plans must be significantly enhanced and accelerated so each station (both existing and new or re-located) along the line can be planned as part of a genuine integrated transport system from the outset. **For this to succeed the work must be completed prior to the commencement of statutory consultation. Importantly, this should include detail on how improvements can be delivered and funded alongside and in tandem with delivery of the core EWR rail scheme.** It will also need to take account of final decisions on station location, particularly on the Marston Vale Line. This should include details on active travel, public transport and micro-mobility links, alongside provision for access by car and taxi where this is appropriate and required. A focus on customers should be at the heart of proposals, for example considering opportunities for branding both at stations and on trains where this will help customers, including those with particular accessibility needs, as well as

³ Referenced in the main consultation document on pages 90, 94, 97 in respect of stations on the Marston Vale Line

how to enable through ticketing, better journey planning and alignment of public transport timetabling between rail and bus.

Importantly, as well as being informed by more detail being developed by East West Railway Company - for example on station catchment assessments, the work should also be developed in the context of wider evidence base work and best practice. This includes local, regional and national guidance, policy and evidence base as follows:

- At a national level, the emerging Integrated National Transport Strategy is vital: with East West Rail providing a rare opportunity for the principles of the newly formed Integrated National Transport Strategy to be embedded from the outset of the scheme. It would be inconceivable that a scheme of this opportunity would not be developed in line with these principles. The rail industry also produces guidance on station development and design.⁴
- At a regional level, the door-to-door development should build on the extensive evidence base produced by England's Economic Heartland (EEH) sub-national transport body on sustainable transport.⁵
- At a local level, new Local Transport Plans and their priorities will be important, as well as any supporting strategies, for example the transport hub strategy produced by Oxfordshire.⁶

We believe that the following principles endorsed by the EEH board on 5th December 2024 should also help guide further detailed development of the door-to-door offer at each station:

- Ambitious – to maximise the potential of the middle mile solution
- Innovation led – so that provision for first mile last mile is future-proofed and enabled through forward thinking design and planning
- Customer led – to meet the unique needs of the region's business sectors and communities
- Integrated – to provide seamless end-to-end journeys
- Safe, easy, secure and accessible – so as many people as possible can access the first mile last mile options. This includes the timetable patterns of public transport
- Reflect local and customer needs and opportunities – recognising local needs should be met as well being part of a recognisable network
- Good practice – Draws on good practice of known successful examples of first mile last mile solutions
- Strategic network – Should be part of a wider network (such as the Heartbeat network) as well as providing local solutions.

EEH believes that planning for excellent door-to-door connectivity should be an integrated part of the EWR scheme, given it will be a critical to both the customer journey experience and success of the scheme. The East West Railway Company, supported by Government, needs to work with EEH and local authority partners to plan, secure funding and deliver relevant improvements alongside delivery of the core railway, building on the existing extensive evidence base.

Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise the opportunities to deliver improved rail linkages across the region as per priorities in the Main Line Priorities Report, endorsed by Board in September 2024:

⁴ [Buildings and Architecture design guidance - Network Rail](#)

⁵ [Publications - England's Economic Heartland](#)

⁶ [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan | Oxfordshire County Council](#)



We note that whilst the current non-statutory consultation documentation has a focus on the scheme design and delivery, the consultation documents also include a number of strategic objectives and outcomes which the project is expected to enable. One area identified as important in terms of strategic objectives is the opportunity for EWR to provide wider rail linkages, with the consultation noting that EWR could *'contribute to improved journey times and inter-regional passenger connectivity by connecting with north-south routes and routes beyond Oxford and Cambridge.'*⁷ **This ambition should not be set out as an aspiration, it should be a central and core priority of the scheme.**

East West Rail has the potential to transform journeys across much of England, from the west coast right through to east coast. It will make many east-west journeys possible without the need to travel through London. Given the significant level of investment Government is committing to East West Rail, it is vital that its benefits are maximised as far beyond the route (and region) as possible. It is an area which EEH believes requires significantly stronger analysis and emphasis from the Company, working in partnership with the EWMLP, England's Economic Heartland, Network Rail and Shadow GBR.

EEH has recently published an EEH Main Line Priority report, which recognises the development East West Rail as one of the key Main Lines in our area.⁸ Importantly, it identifies that the East West mainline will in time connect each other Main Line in the EEH area, providing significant opportunity to enhance existing rail connectivity through interchange and on-ward rail connectivity. In particular, the following connections are noted:

Oxford on the Great Western Main Line – for links on to the rest of Oxfordshire through existing and proposed new local services such as on the Cowley branch line, as well as regional services towards Swindon and Bristol and the Cotswolds and Worcester.

Bletchley and Milton Keynes on the West Coast Main Line- for onward long-distance services to the North West, and regional links to Northampton, and south to Buckinghamshire when the Aylesbury link comes forward. An important consideration here will be understanding how EWR can better link to Milton Keynes as a key interchange hub both from the west and east through future infrastructure improvements between Bletchley and Milton Keynes as previously identified as beneficial in national and regional strategic studies.

Bedford on the Midland Main Line- for future long-distance links to Northamptonshire, the Midlands and the North, as well as to the south from Luton and Luton Airport.

Tempsford- links to the **East Coast Main Line** enabled through a new interchange station, in particular linking with services to Peterborough and beyond to the north, and Hertfordshire stations to the south.

Cambridge on the West Anglia Main Line-for links to the rest of Cambridgeshire, and onwards to East Anglia including Ipswich and Norwich (potentially via a new station to the east of Cambridge).

Many of these opportunities have already been identified within wider strategic planning documents, such as the strategic advice produced by Network Rail, and this will be built on in the next stages of the EEH Main Line Priorities Study work.⁹ East West Rail should be further developed in the context of maximising these opportunities, building on wider evidence, not just focusing on services on the core route only.

When planning for onward linkages key stations must be developed to improve and provide for seamless interchange for rail passengers, for example through provision of high-quality information, customer facilities such as toilets, and improvements to ease access through the station such as lifts and overbridges. It will also be important that stations are developed to enable operation of future trains, for example ensuring the right platform capacity and lengths.

⁷ Main EWR consultation document, page 18.

⁸ [Publications - England's Economic Heartland](#)

⁹ Studies available at: [Long-term planning - Network Rail](#) and [Publications - England's Economic Heartland](#)



Timetabling of EWR and main line services will also be critical to ensure customers do not have to wait long for their onward connections, and in line with likely future increases in demand from key regional locations such as potential major leisure experiences and Luton Airport.

EEH is seeking assurance that planning for onward rail connections, in line with priorities identified within wider evidence base studies, must be given significant priority at all stages of the project, including as the detail of EWR service timetabling is developed.

Ensuring the scheme is developed to maximise the opportunities to link with the delivery of improved bus services (both local and regional), including the proposed Heartbeat network presented to Board in July 2024, and active travel links, including the proposed Varsity Way, and that digital infrastructure is built alongside it (as is the case with the Bicester-Bletchley section):

EEH has developed an extensive evidence base, setting out priorities for sustainable transport linkages across our region. Development of the East West Rail 'door-to-door' offer should build on this work and identify how priority improvements can be delivered alongside the core EWR scheme. In particular, the following 2 areas are highlighted as important:

- The proposed Heartbeat bus network as set out in the 'Improving Regional Bus Network' document, agreed by the EEH Board in December.¹⁰ This includes proposals for several bus services enhancements that could link to and provide 'feeder' services to East West Rail stations and provide high quality on-ward connections to other settlements. For example, it identifies that the service between Aylesbury, Winslow, Buckingham and Milton Keynes should be improved with higher frequent services to allow residents to better access the new East West Rail service at Winslow. It is recognised that there will also be other local services that will need to be routed and timetabled to service EWR stations, and the East West Rail company will need to work with bus operators to plan for delivery of such services, including identifying funding required.
- The proposed Varsity Way active travel route, as set out in the 'Introducing the Varsity Way' document, published in 2022.¹¹ This identified the opportunity for an improved strategic active travel route between Oxford and Cambridge, which could also provide first mile/ last mile links between certain East West Rail stations. In particular, the work identified the opportunity to align the varsity route development to better link with stations along the Marston Vale Line. Improvements related to delivery of the Varsity Way will need to complement local active travel links to stations, recognising that getting these right is likely to be key to ensuring high quality walking and cycling access to East West Rail from surrounding communities.

Another key area priority is how delivery of digital infrastructure alongside the railway infrastructure can provide benefits for wider communities over and above improved rail connectivity. For Connectivity Stage 1 EEH worked with central government, the East West Main Line Partnership and local authorities to secure funding to deliver the 'Connecting Heartland' project which will enable 5G connectivity along the line for both passengers and surrounding communities.

¹⁰ [Strategic Transport Leadership Board - England's Economic Heartland](#)

¹¹ [Publications - England's Economic Heartland](#)



Given the relatively small costs involved, we believe that digital infrastructure which benefits passengers and nearby communities must be installed as standard during the construction of the next phases of East West Rail.

However, the current consultation gives little detail on any plans for wider digital connectivity apart from noting that telecommunication masts for train operations '*could potentially be used by mobile operators.*'¹² Digital infrastructure along the line should be a clear priority, building off plans being delivered at present- passengers travelling between Oxford and Cambridge should expect to be able to access 5G as default along all the whole of the line, with communities also benefiting where there is a good case for enhancements.

EEH believe that development of the core scheme should be undertaken to maximise the opportunities identified in wider evidence base work to deliver an integrated transport network, in particular for bus and active travel linkages from stations as part of the 'door-to-door' offer for passengers and residents. In addition, high quality digital connectivity alongside physical connectivity should be delivered from the outset for the remainder of core scheme, building the success of the measures delivered in Connectivity Stage 1.

¹² Technical Report, page 421

