

Bedfordshire Local Representatives Group for East West Rail

Terms of Reference

Welcome to the Bedfordshire Local Representatives Group (The Group) for East West Rail (EWR).

The Group will offer an open forum for discussions – a place to share information and have two-way conversations about any issues affecting the local community.

The Group, which we plan to be in place throughout the planning, building, and running of the new railway, is being set up at this early stage so the project can improve and benefit from collaboration with your community, who will see a greener, quicker, and more affordable way to travel across the region.

There will be Local Representatives Groups across the route, stretching from Oxford to Cambridge.

What is the main purpose of these Local Representatives Groups?

The Groups will focus on the areas where we will deliver EWR between Oxford and Cambridge, via Bedford. Your Group will look at any issues related to the planning, construction, and operation of the railway in your area – as well as the impact on local communities in Bedfordshire.

We will listen and carefully consider all opinions. We want everyone to be able to share their views of what EWR will mean for their local community and provide their local knowledge as we take the project forward together. As well as answering questions, we will bring any supporting information that will help the conversation. These meetings will also let us give major updates and details of all relevant local issues. We will always try to provide as much information as possible at every stage of the project – and be completely transparent when we do not have an update or specific details to share.

Who can join this Group?

Members will include representatives of all the Parishes and Wards within Bedfordshire. Parish councillors can be supported by a technical expert.

The Bedfordshire Group brings together all the Parishes and Councillors from this broad Bedfordshire area centred around the EWR alignments north of Bedford towards the East Coast Main Line, and the wider local connectivity in and out of the town.

Membership of the Group will consist of:

- Parish Councils – Up to three representatives from each Parish Council. These could be three parish councillors, or two parish councillors supported by one technical expert. Technical experts will need to indicate their areas of expertise prior to joining meetings.
- Local Authority Councillors – Representatives of the Wards and Electoral Divisions

- EWR Co – We will provide relevant specialists and representatives to attend meetings. We will also open and close meetings and ensure they run effectively

You can see maps of all the Parishes and Wards as well as the list of representatives included in the Group – [here](#).

We will also be keeping the following people informed about the Group and sending them the agenda and other supporting materials:

- MP for Bedford;
- MP for Mid Bedfordshire;
- MP for North East Bedfordshire;
- Mayor and Leader of Bedford Borough Council;
- CEO of Bedford Borough Council.

There is separate Group for Bedford Town but as and when overlapping issues would benefit from being discussed in a wider forum, both Groups could meet together. This can be agreed as and when relevant. Similarly, on occasion, technical experts may be invited to attend a meeting subject to other members not expressing any objections to it either ahead or at the start of such meeting.

There will also be separate engagement planned with local residents.

Will there be an independent facilitator?

All voices will be heard. The Group has chosen not to appoint an independent facilitator at this stage; however, this decision can be reviewed if required. Should a facilitator be appointed, such as to assist when contacting impacted communities in the future, they will be independent of the Group membership (including EWR Co) and other elected representatives. They will have an in-depth understanding of the local area and will be aware of the issues that matter most to the community.

How often will we meet and through what format?

We believe the success of these meetings will depend on regular and open dialogue – in line with the Group’s request, we will aim to hold meetings more frequently than once every quarter at the beginning. Our suggestion is to hold these meetings approximately every six weeks.

However, a degree of flexibility in relation to the timing of the meetings will be required so that meetings align with public announcements and project updates to ensure they are informative and an efficient use of time. We will review the frequency of meetings with the Group over time. We will also review Bedford Borough Council’s calendar when identifying potential future dates for the Group to avoid unnecessary clashes. Dates will be arranged using software sharing date options with you in advance of the meeting. Dates will avoid public holidays, school holidays and half terms, as well as local elections or Council’s meeting dates as far as possible.

The meeting type will be determined by the groups preference as indicated in polls, choosing from face-to-face (with hybrid joining options) or virtual attendance. However, if fewer than four people confirm they will attend the meeting in person, we’ll adapt the meeting from hybrid to fully virtual. Meetings will be held in the evening.

Each meeting will focus on covering one or two topics in depth, and members will be given a window of opportunity to suggest topics for discussion ahead of each meeting.

Members are always encouraged to propose topics for discussion at future meetings. However, we will have to check and revert back on the timeframes for when some of these discussions can take place.

The actions and matters of interest will be captured at meetings and addressed. They will be recorded in an action tracker that will be available on the Group's Community Hub site, together with all its other relevant documents, including meeting notes.

Who will manage the Group?

We will provide administrative support. This will include organising meetings, providing agendas and materials, as well as compiling all meeting notes. We will circulate the meeting notes with attendees two weeks after each meeting. Those members will then have a window for comment of two weeks. Following this feedback period, we will amend the notes to correct any errors or omissions before making the amended versions publicly available via the Group's Community Hub site. Requests for changes to style or formatting will not be made.

Is there a code of conduct?

Yes, it is important that the Group always treat each other with courtesy and respect. We want everyone to be able to speak freely and honestly.

In addition, we encourage all members to disclose any roles, employment, memberships or affiliations to other organisations, charities or groups that could result in a conflict of interest for them.

Finally, members should not act, in or out of the meetings, in a way which could disrupt the running of the Group – or restrict attendance by any members.

If anyone does not follow these guidelines, they may be suspended from the Group, or removed. This decision would not be taken lightly and would have to be agreed by the Group, or by the agreement of EWR Co.

How will any disputes be resolved?

The Group has been created to encourage discussion among all members. That said, it is not a requirement for the Group to reach total agreement on all topics. Differing views will be heard, respected, noted and carefully considered.

If an issue arises resulting in disrespectful behaviour, or if discussions are not making headway, the EWR Co Lead (or independent facilitator should one be appointed in due course) may call for the meeting to move on or end. They will then look to resolve any outstanding issues in another forum.

Where can I find information about the meetings?

We will keep details of meetings on a dedicated section on our website – Community Hub. There, you will find everything – including agendas, approved meeting notes, presentation materials for this Group and others.

Any media requests relating to this Group and its membership, please send them to press@eastwestrail.co.uk, addressed to our Media Manager.