

Questions raised for the meeting with elected representatives in North Bedfordshire on 19 October 2021

General themes and questions raised by the Parishes present

Next steps

Question:

Ravensden Parish Council

- When will you publish responses from the 2021 non-statutory consultation?
- When are you announcing the preferred route alignment?

EWR Response:

We expect to publish responses from the 2021 non-statutory consultation in the first half of 2022.

The responses to the 2021 non-statutory consultation, alongside ongoing technical, financial and environmental studies, are currently being analysed and will be used to help shape the next stages of design. EWR Co will publish a report summarising the consultation feedback as well as information on how the feedback has been used to inform plans for the railway.

We anticipate that a preferred route alignment will be announced next year, although we do not have a specific date yet.

2019 Consultation

Question:

Brickhill Parish Council

- Why were only 5% of households mailed in 2019 in some of the directly impacted parishes?
- Why were a number the northern parishes excluded from the list of consultees contacted in 2019?
- Why were several Parishes excluded from the consultee list for the 2019 Route consultation?

EWR Response:

Non-statutory consultations, such as that undertaken in 2019, means that there are no requirements as to who must or must not be consulted. Our 2021 consultation was also non-statutory and gave another opportunity for people and organisations to comment on our proposals. We always take account of responses to consultations.

Before carrying out the consultation in 2019 we identified a zone that contained the most likely area of potential benefit and impacts for the section between Bedford and Cambridge and which included those who were most likely to be impacted, or were likely to have the most interest in the project. This zone extended from Bedford through to Cambridge and was based on the area covered by the route options on which we were consulting.

At the launch of the 2019 consultation we sent postcards to more than 120,000 households in the consultation zone alerting people to the consultation, directing them to reference materials, and highlighting consultation event locations. We placed advertisements in key local publications, which provided a brief overview of the project and the dates of consultation exhibitions. In addition to placing advertisements we issued press releases to a broader range of local, national and industry publications. This resulted in almost 7,000 people responding to the consultation, and more than 3,500 people attending our eight consultation events.

With regards the distribution of postcards specifically within the Bedford area, we provided Royal Mail with a shapefile (a digital map) of the consultation area. Royal Mail supplied us with the number of addresses in the consultation area and we arranged for the appropriate number of postcards to be printed and supplied to Royal Mail for distribution.

We received responses from people based inside as well as outside the consultation zone. Responses received were also not limited to those parishes to which notifications were sent. For example, responses were received from parishes across north and northwest Bedfordshire.

Irrespective of the fact that there are no requirements as to who must or must not be consulted, we engaged with each of Ravensden, Clapham and Wilden Parish Councils and took into account all of their feedback.

For example, as part of our 2019 consultation engagement effort, we held a series of Parish workshops, one of which Ravensden Parish Council attended. Parish workshops are helpful tools in both sharing information on the East West Rail project and gaining valuable feedback from each and every one of the attendees. At the workshop, Parish Councils were encouraged to submit further feedback to the consultation. Bernadette Russell and Alison Myers were the representatives of Ravensden Parish Council at the Parish Workshop held on 5 March 2019. In addition, we have had email correspondence with Jane Presland on 7 March 2019 and 8 March 2019 and Bernadette Russell on 6 March 2019. Ravensden Parish Council provided us with a response directly to the consultation and this was included in our Preferred Route Option Feedback Form at page 270. This document can be found [here](#). All of this feedback was taken into account.

In addition, Clapham Parish Council also attended the above-mentioned workshops. Adrian Langley was the representative of Clapham Parish Council at the Parish Workshop held on 5 March 2019. Again, all feedback was taken into account.

Finally, Wilden Parish Council also attended. Brent Fielder was the representative of Wilden Parish Council at the Parish Workshop held on 5 March 2019. In addition, we had email correspondence with Diane Robins on 8 March 2019 and 11 March 2019 and a phone call with Brent Fielder on 19 February 2019. Again, all feedback was taken into account.

Freight

Question:

Brickhill Parish Council

- EWML Consortium are actively lobbying for EWR to be used for as a freight route? Everybody in the world thinks that a railway should be built with both passenger and freight in mind. It is common sense – why have EWR not consulted on freight properly, rather, tried to sneak it in the back door?
- Why have you not designed the railway with freight in mind? Why make the gradient compromises at Clapham? Why not opt for a shorter, straighter, flatter route that avoids Bedford town centre?

EWR Response:

The Project Objectives, set by the Secretary of State for Transport, require that we maintain capacity for existing freight services as well as delivering one freight path every two hours in each direction between Oxford and Bletchley. We are not required to deliver any other freight capability as the railway is predominantly for passenger services, although the designs that we have developed would not in themselves preclude freight operation.

The potential alignments that EWR Co has identified comply with relevant industry standards with respect to the ability to operate freight trains in the future and meet the Project Objectives that we have been set by the Department for Transport, including in terms of the gradient profile.

Electrification

Question:

Renhold Parish Council

- The Electrification Issue - What does this actually mean other than leaving a wide enough track base?

EWR Response:

At present, a decision on whether the new railway will be electrified has not been made by the Government. However, the potential for electrification on East West Rail remains under active consideration alongside other traction power approaches. The Government has further committed to the removal of all diesel-only trains by 2040 and therefore we are taking this into consideration.

Diesel passenger trains already operate on the Western Section of the route between Oxford and London. As such, we are proposing a temporary solution for the first section of East West Rail between Oxford, Bicester and Milton Keynes, which could be diesel powered, so that we can get services up and running on EWR as soon as possible and help to reduce the number of cars on the roads sooner. This allows us to retain full flexibility as we explore options for the long-term fleet, while also unlocking the benefits of the new railway earlier.

To that end, we are exploring how we can introduce new and emerging technologies in our permanent train fleet that will run between Oxford and Cambridge when the line is fully open. Electrification is definitely one of the options we are considering, subject to agreement with the Government, although it should be noted that conventional overhead electrification of the whole route could not be delivered without causing disruption to the existing services and passengers where trains are already operating.

Carbon emissions

Question:

- Will the railway be carbon neutral?

Ravensden Parish Council

- Has EWR Co undertaken an analysis of the carbon footprint and relative construction costs and risks prior to selection of a route between Bedford and Cambridge? What confidence is there that the currently preferred option is best in terms of sustainability, environment impact, and the carbon footprint being within Government guidelines and 'carbon-zero' policy?
- Since issues affecting future climate change have an increasing priority, will EWR Co publish all relevant studies they have undertaken, or sponsored, to determine the best route choice and to ensure the EWR project fully complies with Government guidelines?

Brickhill Parish Council

- What was included in the relative carbon calculations for the 2019 route selection? What was excluded?
- How can a shorter, straighter, flatter route not be more carbon efficient? Please prove the discarded route selections are less carbon efficient.

EWR Response:

Our technical team undertook a high-level appraisal of the different characteristics of the route options during construction, operational and maintenance phases and these matters were considered prior to the selection of a preferred route option in 2020. With respect to the prevailing topography of the areas north and south of Bedford, we were aware that the former is generally more undulating and the latter generally flatter following the course of the River Great Ouse.

However, the fact that an alignment south of Bedford might be flatter does not in itself mean that construction would have a lower carbon impact. In this particular case, there are two principal issues which affect alignments south of Bedford, but not those north of Bedford following the preferred Route Option E selected in 2020. These are the significantly greater extent of floodplains and land at risk of flooding along the river valley compared to the area

north of Bedford, and the ability to re-use excavated material to construct embankments and other earthworks. These issues mean that it is route options south of Bedford would require a greater length of viaducts (including complex viaducts) with higher quantities of concrete and embedded carbon. It would also be necessary to dispose of a greater proportion of spoil elsewhere and to import new material for embankment construction.

EWR Co has already published a significant quantity of information on these and other issues which informed the decision to select a preferred route option in 2020. As we now move forward with the project, we will be undertaking an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), and an Environmental Statement (ES) will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate alongside our application for a Development Consent Order (DCO). Once our DCO application has been accepted by the Planning Inspectorate the documents (including the ES) will be made publicly available.

We aim to become a net-zero carbon railway while making sure biodiversity is left in a better state than we found it. We are absolutely committed to running a sustainable railway in the long term, with reduced emissions, including for carbon dioxide, NOx and particulates. To that end, we are exploring how we can introduce new and emerging green technologies throughout the East West Rail Project.

Environment and assessments

Question:

Brickhill Parish Council

- Why was no full environmental study performed at route selection stage?
- What was the methodology and what was included in the environmental considerations?
- When did EWR first realise there was flood plain south of Bedford that was mentioned in the Doomsday book published in 1048?

EWR Response:

EWR Co has followed the environmental mitigation hierarchy and implemented a decision-making process which seeks to 'design out' potential for environmental impacts. This has been done at the earliest stage of design to ensure that all aspects of environmental sustainability are robustly addressed, through embedding environmental design principles into the design requirements. In implementing this, all alignments have avoided direct impacts on key national features including ancient woodland, listed buildings, scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens. Where it has not been possible to avoid impacts, design development of the alignments has applied a hierarchical approach to minimising and reducing environmental impacts.

The scheme is still at an early stage in the design process. The information provided and the assessments undertaken are appropriate for this stage and accord with standard practice for a linear infrastructure project like East West Rail. It would not be appropriate to carry out a full environmental impact assessment of each and every alternative that has been considered during the optioneering process and this is not required by the relevant environmental impact assessment regulations.

We are undertaking an on-going programme of land and environmental surveys, including assessing potential environmental effects. To help us build a good picture of the existing environmental conditions, we focused over the summer of 2020 on a number of priority surveys which need to be carried out at certain times of the year. We contacted the owners of land where we think specific species or environmental features may be present – this includes great crested newts, bats and rivers. Some of these surveys, such as those for great crested newts and bats, need to be carried out over a wider geographical area than the Preferred Route Option – e.g., some bats species have populations living near the Preferred

Route Option area and we need to identify their behaviour, including their flight paths, to understand how they may be using the area. As a result, we have surveyed in a wider geographical scope than what we will eventually need for the project.

Lastly, we have been aware of this particular floodplain south of Bedford for several years, including when the preferred route option was selected. For example, it was mentioned in the floodplain strategy section of the NR report (from 2018) which we have published on our website.

Route Options

Question:

Brickhill Parish Council

- Why was a route largely based on the Old Varsity line not considered?

EWR Response:

As part of our analysis of route options before the first non-statutory consultation in 2019, we considered whether it would be possible to follow the route of the former London North Western railway between Bedford and Cambridge, but there are a number of reasons why we cannot use the previous alignment, or which would make it difficult and lead to greater adverse environmental impacts. For example, the old railway runs through large areas of floodplain, scheduled monuments and the Priory Country Park.

Furthermore, several properties and also a school in Sandy have been built on top of it. It would also not serve areas that could support growth and new homes, including the area between Sandy and St Neots and around Cambourne. In addition, embankments and cuttings on parts of the old line have been classed as priority habitats, due to a lack of human interaction. Re-using the former railway alignment would result in the almost total destruction of these designated habitats.

BFARe Ltd 'South of Bedford' route

Question:

Ravensden Parish Council

- Have EWR Co considered the recently confirmed merits of a junction at Elstow, south of Bedford, which allows full access to Bedford town centre with the option of faster journey times between Oxford/MK and Cambridge and greater flexibility in routing direct passenger and freight trains?
- Will EWR Co commit professional resources to confirm recent local studies that suggest a route alignment as shown south of Bedford, offers a lower cost/reduced risk route option with improved potential for passenger and freight services?
- Will EWR Co consider the proposed 'South of Bedford' route to confirm the conclusion of recent local studies that it provides a route option which is fully compatible with environmental and sustainability objectives and offers the best route alignment in respect to rail construction and future low-carbon operations? If such studies have been undertaken can EWR Co communicate the results

EWR Response:

The possibility for the new railway to by-pass Bedford to the south, but include a new junction at Elstow with services entering the town from the south and reversing at Bedford Midland, was already considered prior to the selection of a preferred Route Option in 2020. A route south of Bedford would see a significant reduction in services per hour to Cambridge, Bletchley and Oxford from the centre of town, a significant amount of additional infrastructure would be needed, timetabling would be more complex due to the existence of multiple junctions in close proximity and a new railway across the former landfill site at Elstow would be risky, complex and expensive to construct.

Route Option E was selected in part because it would deliver higher transport user benefits by serving Bedford Midland and Bedford St Johns directly, providing convenient access to other rail services, transport modes, local homes and businesses and facilities such as Bedford Hospital.

The environment through which the railway would pass, and the environmental features affected by other Route Options, were also considered. In particular, we had to consider information about the area south and east of Bedford which contains a significant number of

sensitive or complex environmental constraints which would be difficult and expensive to overcome, such as:

- Large areas of floodplain which would require significant stretches of viaducts in order to prevent the exacerbation of flood risk in the area and detrimental impacts on the water environment downstream. Viaducts use a lot of concrete and cost more to build and maintain than embankments. This is not just in cash terms, but also in terms of embedded carbon.
- Large areas of best grade agricultural land. The preferred route option and the route alignments which we presented during our 2021 non-statutory consultation have aimed to reduce the direct impact on the best grade agricultural land. This category of land is also more expensive to acquire in order to not only build the railway, but also if it needs to be acquired to provide replacement flood water storage areas. Alignments in the Route Option E area – running to the north and northeast of Bedford – have a reduced interaction with best grade agricultural land in comparison with alignments running in the area to the south and east of Bedford (such as that promoted by BFARe Ltd).
- designated and undesignated heritage assets and areas of ancient woodland, which the public told us we should avoid where possible.
- either demolition of homes and commercial property in Wixams or crossing the former landfill site at Elstow – building on this contaminated land would be risky, complex and expensive. It would also conflict with plans for the new Green Technology Park on the site, funding for which was confirmed in summer 2020 after the preferred route option was announced.

A route south of Bedford is not fully compatible with environmental and sustainability objectives that we have been set, nor does it offer the best route alignment from construction and operational perspectives.

Design

Question:

Brickhill Parish Council

- What are the precise assumptions used to inform you where embankment vs viaduct can be used?

EWR Response:

This is set out in the Atkins report published on our website relating to the cost estimates on which the decision to select a preferred route option in 2020 was based.

More detailed information will be provided as part of the forthcoming statutory consultation, but we will need to select a preferred route alignment first in order to allow the detailed engineering solutions for each location to be confirmed.

Costs

Question:

Ravensden Parish Council

- Will you be announcing/ publishing the full cost of the Bedcam section and all the full business case?
- Will you publish the embedded and operational comparisons between all the 2019 A-E options? - a 'backcheck' which should be done in the interests of transparency publishing?

Brickhill Parish Council

- Please provide the full Bedford to Cambridge costs for the 2021 Route alignments.
- Why have you not revealed the latest costs with the major changes to the Bedford section?
- Please provide the formal backchecking of these costs versus the Route selection costs of 2019 so that these can be compared to ensure the best value for taxpayers money.
- Please provide the assumptions upon which the costs were calculated in the 2019 consultation that caused the costs of all other routes to inflate by 50% to 80% but not Route E?

Wyboston, Chawston and Colesden Parish Council

- It is now apparent that the Government has made available a grant of £22.6m to Bedford Borough to include the rebuilding/renovating of the Midland road station area. Is this why EWR co were able to remove this large expense from the cost of route E significantly reducing the quoted cost?

EWR Response:

EWR Co is currently developing its Outline Business Case (OBC) to appraise route alignment options and identify a preferred route alignment. The OBC is the next formal stage in the development of the business case for EWR and OBC information is expected to be published in Autumn next year. This is currently under development and the analysis is not complete.

Regarding a 'back-check' it is important to note that back-checking is not a discrete event, task or stage in project development. Instead, it is an approach to optioneering which is used where the detailed design for a project like EWR is being taken forward sequentially, with the

design becoming more focussed as development work progresses. As part of this, new information may come to light or there may have been a change of circumstances since an earlier design decision was taken. The effect or not of this new information or change of circumstances must be taken into consideration. The starting point is that the earlier decision(s) remain sound. Back-checking then entails a three step, evidence-led process where we ask the following sequential questions:

- Has there been a change of circumstances or has new information come to light since the earlier decision was taken?
- If the answer to question 1 is 'yes', does this indicate that the earlier decision needs to be re-opened?
- If the answer to question 2 is 'yes', we look at what our earlier decision would have been if we had known of the new information or the change of circumstances at the time.

We have set out information on the options for both the Bedford and Cambridge areas within the 2021 Non-Statutory Consultation, in order to solicit public feedback from local residents and the wider public. Once we've reviewed the feedback we will be able to produce detailed designs and assessments, including providing updated cost estimates. This is because different sections of the route are at different stages of design. More detail on costs will be available at the Statutory Consultation in 2022.

Lastly, with regard to Bedford Midland Station, the cost estimates on which the preferred route option was based assumed that the full cost of expanding Bedford Midland Station to accommodate East West Rail services would be paid for by the project, not by Bedford Borough Council. This remains the case.

Bedford Local Plan

Question:

Ravensden Parish Council

- Have EWR Co revisited the route options in the Bedford area in the light of the very recent and significant changes proposed in BBC Local Plan 2040 Review, with its emphasis on significant new development to the south and east of Bedford, and the dropping of plans for any major development in north Bedfordshire that EWR Option E was proposed to serve?

EWR Response:

We monitor the progress of emerging local plans across the whole route, including the Bedford Borough Council Local Plan 2040 Review. The plan is at an early stage - whilst a consultation on *Strategy options and draft policies* was held between 29 June and 3 September 2021, a preferred spatial policy for new development has not been selected. However, the emerging plan do not appear to be inconsistent with our proposals and will keep monitoring it as it progresses.

Meetings with Bedford Borough Council

Question:

Brickhill Parish Council

- Why did EWR omit to admitting to meetings regarding the six-track option in Bedford and the BBC land owned between Fairhill and Clapham Green?
- Why won't EWR release the documents (agenda, minutes, follow up e-mails) regarding the meetings with Bedford Borough Council where the six-track option was discussed. Specifically those in July and August 2019?
- Brickhill Parish Council: What is the nature of the “non-public” information that EWR have admitted was shared during that meeting, and why is it appropriate for EWR to share “non-public” information?

EWR Response:

We acted to ensure that the vast majority of land and property owners who might be impacted have been contacted. We have been holding discussions with stakeholders whilst we have been developing plans for the railway over the past few years, including with Bedford Borough Council.

In some cases, this includes talking about work that we are undertaking, but these are often exploratory sessions looking at multiple potential options and issues many of which aren't taken forward for further analysis (especially where the underlying development work is still in progress).

Following the 2019 consultation, we carried out further work to assess if the existing Midland Mainline tracks north of Bedford Midland station would have sufficient capacity to accommodate the new East West Rail services without reducing the existing passenger and freight capacity. After considering a full set of options we found four tracks would not be sufficient, and this is why we presented a six-track proposal during the 2021 consultation.

Whilst discussions did take place with Bedford Borough Council, this would have been a high-level conversation about a number of issues. At that time, there were no firm proposals on tracking to discuss, just areas of work we would need to focus on as we moved forward with designing the railway. In this respect, “non-public” information concerned different potential options in the Bedford area. Some were progressed and some were discounted.

We have already disclosed the recorded information that we hold in relation to these meetings in response to freedom of information requests.

Other questions

Question:

Wyboston, Chawston and Colesden Parish Council

- During a recent meeting between 3 Councillors from Wyboston, Chawston & Colesden Parish Council and 3 members of a team from developers Taylor Wimpey (Senior strategists in land planning and acquisition) who are looking to create a new town/settlement in our area, they were asked what provisions they had in mind for getting people from the proposed residential areas to a possible new station somewhere south of St Neots if the EWR project linking with ECML were to proceed. Their response was 'a cycleway' alongside the rail track!!! When pointing out that this may not be popular in the depths of winter or during heavy April showers, they followed this with 'we are looking at a guided bus-way' also alongside the rail track. When asked how they expected it to cross the A1 & River Great Ouse where EWR were proposing a 19 mtr high by 2.7km long viaduct they thought their busway and cycleway would be included in the same structure! What are your comments and have they discussed this with you?

EWR Response:

Whilst the new railway might be able to provide additional sustainable travel options for new residents and businesses along the line, the provision of additional infrastructure that might be needed for specific developments does not fall the scope of the works that EWR Co has been asked to deliver by the DfT. We have not worked with Taylor Wimpey in respect of any proposed guided bus and cycleway. This is a matter for the local planning authority, the landowners and the developers under the normal planning process.

Question:

Brickhill Parish Council

- Why was no objective mechanism used for scoring the 15 criteria for route selection – rather a subjective “balance of factors” used?

EWR Response:

Early in the process, we identified fifteen key assessment factors to help guide the analysis of options. The fifteen factors were published in the Technical Report (Page 11), which was produced as part of the early non-statutory consultation held in 2019. The topics that most differentiated the route options were highlighted as “Key Criteria” in the Preferred Route Option Report (Page 12). We have consistently used these in our design and specifically asked the public and stakeholders to provide feedback in these areas.

The consultation asked respondents to look at each route option and assess how well each of them performed against the criteria on a scale of 1-5, as well as asking for general comments on each route option. For this reason, the question posed to respondents was not phrased in a binary manner where respondents solely ranked route options.

The final discretionary decision on which route option to select was then made on an holistic basis taking account of all relevant quantitative and qualitative information available, including how each route option performed when considered against the fifteen assessment factors. This method is standard practice and used during the optioneering phase of most large infrastructure projects.