

Bicester Town group - Meeting notes

Meeting #5 - Details

Date: Wednesday 14 June 2023

Time: 7:00PM

Type of meeting: Virtual meeting (Zoom)

Documents discussed in this meeting

The following documents were discussed during the meeting and are available on the Group's dedicated Community Hub site - [here](#):

- Action Tracker
- Agenda
- Slides.

Key discussion points and outcomes

1. General updates

- 1.1. HS noted that since the last meeting the May local elections took place, meaning new members have been elected and invited to the Group
- 1.2. HS noted that the Accessibility Advisory Panel (AAP) met for their first session in April.
- 1.3. HS explained that the route update announcement on 26th May confirmed the route alignment preference between Bedford and Cambridge. Additional information can be found on fact sheets on the website [here](#).

Introduction

- 1.4. HS explained that since the non-statutory Consultation in 2021, EWR Co have carefully reviewed feedback, alongside a strategic review of the Project and technical environmental work, to guide developing plans to design a railway that meets the needs of communities between Oxford and Cambridge.
- 1.5. HS noted that changes have been made to the proposals, which take account of the feedback received during and since the 2021 non-statutory consultation.

What have we announced?

- 1.6. Four key reports have been published, including the Route Update Report (RUR). The Route Update Report describes how the proposals for EWR have developed since the 2021 consultation and what our preferred plans for certain sections of the railway are, including: route preferences, route-wide matters, and what happens next.
- 1.7. HS added that alongside the RUR, EWR Co published the Consultation Feedback Report (CFR), the Economic and Technical Report (ETR) and the Need to Sell Property Scheme (NTS Scheme). The Economic and Technical Report (ETR) provides a technical summary of the work over the last year and a half, looking at strategic case and future economic growth within the region.

A little more on the Need to Sell Scheme

- 1.8. HS explained that the NTS Scheme Guide has been published to support home and property owners who have a compelling need to sell but are unable to do so as a result of the EWR proposals, other than at a substantially reduced value. The scheme will support people to sell their home or small business to EWR while the Project is in development and delivery.

2. Topic – Route Update Announcement

Updated service pattern

- 2.1. Shaun Fisher (SF) introduced himself as the Programme Manager for Oxford.
- 2.2. SF ran through the updated service pattern for EWR trains; 4 trains per hour will leave from Oxford, with two going to Milton Keynes and two continuing onto Cambridge. At Bedford another 2 trains per hour would join the 2 trains coming from Oxford/ Bletchley, for a total of 4 trains per hour between Bedford & Cambridge.

Oxford station

- 2.3. SF explained that Network Rail work is underway at Oxford station. In 2021 EWR Co presented plans to add new platforms to the station, build new infrastructure to the south of the station and make improvements to the station itself. These plans have since developed.

- 2.4. SF noted that there are various different interfaces between EWR and Network Rail that need to be considered and this work is ongoing. SF explained that EWR Co is also looking at additional track work to the north to boost capacity between Oxford station and Oxford North junction.

Oxford to Bletchley

- 2.5. SF noted that construction work is underway between Bicester and Bletchley (CS1). However, EWR Co is still considering the work that will be required at Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village stations, including forecasting demand and options for the London Road level crossing. Work is continuing to identify locations for passing loops between Oxford and Bletchley to allow faster trains to overtake stopping services.

London Road level crossing

- 2.6. During the 2021 non-statutory consultation EWR Co presented six concepts for the London Road level crossing, all of which involved the closure of the crossing. SF explained that based upon the expected service patterns, there would be an increase in barrier down time, and therefore further analysis is required to understand the impact on local roads.
- 2.7. SF expressed that five of the six concepts have been discounted, and feedback has led EWR Co to look at potential options to retain the crossing. Work on an alternative solution is focusing on three aspects:
- Identifying locations for an alternative road bridge to the south and east of the current crossing
 - Retaining the existing crossing for local traffic
 - Maintaining connectivity for pedestrians and non-motorised traffic with either an accessible overbridge or underpass at or near the current crossing; or an accessible overbridge at a different location.

What happens next?

- 2.8. HS outlined what further work would be undertaken to help EWR Co build the design alongside the feedback from the non-statutory consultation.
- 2.9. HS highlighted that there is future opportunity to comment at Statutory Consultation in first half of 2024.

- 2.10. HS encouraged attendees to attend the drop-in events over the next few weeks in the Group's area for residents to find out more about the route updates.

Questions

- 2.11. An attendee expressed surprise that options to keep the London Road level crossing were being considered and asked for the estimates for barrier down time. SF explained that a desktop base study has been conducted which estimates that will be four additional trains per hour, which could result in a barrier down time between 25-40 minutes with the worst case scenario being closer to 50 minutes. Further analysis is required to understand the impact on congestion and risk assessments will also be carried out.
- 2.12. Another attendee noted that within the Works Act Order (TWAo) barrier down time of 26.4 minutes is referenced. The CS1 Transport and Works Act Order (TWAo) is already consented, and the application considers a barrier downtime of 26.4 minutes per hour to be comparable to other busy level crossings around the UK. It is likely that running either three or four EWR trains per hour will result in an average barrier down time each hour which exceeds the TWAo value of 26.4 minutes. The attendee asked for confirmation if it was realistic that a barrier down time below the TWAo could be achieved. SF explained that the TWAo is an example figure, so further analysis & risk assessment is required. HS reiterated that everything presented in the documentation is a viable option.
- 2.13. An attendee asked about the capacity at London Road level crossing. The attendee shared the example of Lincoln Central, where there are 200 train movements a day and the level crossing is kept open with a pedestrian overbridge. The attendee suggested tighter signalling control could help to manage barrier down time. HS noted that there are challenges with pedestrian overbridges and underpasses due to tight space and visual impacts. SF thanked the attendee for raising this, as he was not familiar with Lincoln Central. He explained that in terms of signalling controls, these are already configured to achieve a minimum downtime.
- 2.14. Another attendee asked which stakeholders are involved within the decision making. HS explained that as part of the DCO pre-application period a strict process must be followed whereby EWR must demonstrate meaningful consultation. There is a broad spectrum of people, groups and organisations involved including engagement with the general public, local authorities, planning and archaeological teams, environmental groups, and utility services to name a few, The CFR provides examples of how EWR Co has taken this feedback on board. Further details of the DCO process can be found [here](#).

- 2.15. The attendee asked what the timescale for this process is. HS highlighted that the scheme is still within the planning stage. There will be a Statutory Consultation in the first half of next year (2024), and feedback analysis and design alterations will follow this. The duration of that depends on the amount and type of feedback received. There are a few more years of the planning cycle to go through, but the project is aiming to be up and running before the end of the decade.
- 2.16. The attendee noted that documentation shows that services between Oxford and Bedford will begin running from 2025. HS explained that 2025 refers to the section of the route that is currently under construction (CS1) and is Oxford to Bletchley/ Milton Keynes not Bedford. HS explained this was consented in a different way and is on track to be running by 2025. The rest of the route is anticipated to follow by the end of the decade.
- 2.17. The attendee queried the frequency of trains in 2025. SF confirmed that in 2025 there will be two train services to Milton Keynes per hour from Oxford.
- 2.18. Another attendee queried the use of freight along the route, and whether EWR Co will consider future freight connections. HS reiterated that EWR is predominantly a passenger railway, however EWR Co has been tasked by Government to ensure that (1) current freight running on the EWR infrastructure can be maintained – IE at Bedford and on the Marston Vale Line, and (2) that nothing in the infrastructure being build precludes freight in future. Current modelling suggests that there could be the ability to run two freight paths per day on EWR.
- 2.19. An attendee raised concern that the Aylesbury Spur has not been considered, as this opens up opportunities to connect to the Birmingham Mainline. HS reiterated that the Aylesbury Spur is still under consideration.
- 2.20. Another attendee asked whether infrastructure, drainage and tracks will need to be replaced under the HS2 tracks. HS said that at this current stage the plans for this area are still in progress and encouraged the attendee to send any questions to the East West Rail Alliance team.

Post Meeting Clarification:

For queries relating to current construction please contact EWR Alliance:
publicinformation@ewralliance.co.uk

- 2.21. An attendee asked if the two freight paths per day were going to be in each direction, and in addition to the Bicester MOD freight and Calvert bins freight. HS confirmed that this is an additional two freight paths, but she would need to check if it was two in total or two each way.

Post Meeting Clarification:

In relation to the above question about freight this would be 2 per day, per direction. You can find more information on our approach to freight in [this factsheet](#).

- 2.22. Another attendee asked for clarity as to whether Chiltern will be running the services from Bicester to Milton Keynes, and what rolling stock would be used. HS noted that EWR Co is in talks with Chiltern Railway. The initial stock won't be from Chiltern's fleet. A new fleet will then be used on the full service.
- 2.23. Another attendee raised concern that the offline options for London Road level crossing were ruled out and no alternative location for a road bridge had been provided. The attendee encouraged EWR Co to be open to other options. SF noted that the busy infrastructure around the crossing, gradients required for a bridge and road alignments mean that some of the options were not technically feasible. EWR is still open to exploring locations to the south and east of the crossing. The attendee noted that it would be helpful to view elevation rise maps showing the engineering calculations would be useful. HS noted that this will be looked into ahead of the drop-in events.

3. Closing remarks, future meetings and topics

Next steps

- 3.1. HS suggested the next topic for future meetings could be to discuss how EWR Co can best engage with the communities. This could be an in person, discussion session if the group wanted. HS encouraged attendees to provide suggestions and thoughts on other topics to the team email localrepresentativesgroups@eastwestrail.co.uk.

Summary of actions

- **Action 1:** EWR Co to consider the use of design drawings at community events to establish why certain options were ruled out.

Attendees:

EWCo attendees

- Hannah Staunton, EWCo lead
- Shaun Fisher, Programme Manager: Oxford
- Sarah Jacobs, Local Representatives Groups Engagement Manager
- EWCo production and support team.

Parish Council representatives

- Roy Seaward, Ambrosden Parish Council

Local authority councillors

- Donna Lynn Ford, Bicester East in Cherwell
- Tom Beckett, Bicester East in Cherwell
- Symon Lytton, Bicester North and Caversfield in Cherwell
- Callum Miller, Otmoor in Oxfordshire County

Apologies

- Bicester Town Council
- Blackthorn Parish Council
- Bucknell Parish Council
- Caversfield Parish Council
- Chesterton Parish Council
- Chesterton Parish Council
- Godington Parish Council
- Godington Parish Council
- Launton Parish Council
- Merton Parish Council
- Piddington Parish Council
- Stratton Audley Parish Council
- Stratton Audley Parish Council
- Stratton Audley Parish Council
- Wendlebury Parish Council
- Sandy Dallimore, Bicester East in Cherwell
- Nicholas Mawer, Bicester North and Caversfield in Cherwell
- Lynn Pratt, Bicester North and Caversfield in Cherwell
- Nick Cotter, Bicester South and Ambrosden in Cherwell
- Dan Sames, Bicester South and Ambrosden in Cherwell

- Christopher John Pruden, Bicester South and Ambrosden in Cherwell
- Michael Waine, Bicester Town in Cherwell
- John Broad, Bicester West in Cherwell
- Les Sibley, Bicester West in Cherwell
- Harry Knight, Bicester West in Cherwell
- Les Sibley, Bicester West in Oxfordshire County
- Barry Victor Wood, Fringford and Heyfords in Cherwell
- Nigel Simpson, Fringford and Heyfords in Cherwell
- Simon Holland, Launton and Otmoor in Cherwell
- Julian Nedelcu, Launton and Otmoor in Cherwell
- Gemma Coton, Launton and Otmoor in Cherwell
- Ian Corkin, Ploughley in Oxfordshire County