

Questions received from Cllr Atkins

Following the Bedford Town Local Representatives Group (LRG) meeting on 25 October 2022, Cllr Atkins forwarded a list of questions from Protect Poets.

The questions have been grouped together by topic and combined where there is overlap within the response.

If you have any additional follow up questions, please do not hesitate to get in contact with us via:

- localrepresentativesgroups@eastwestrail.co.uk for question relating to the format of LRG meetings; or
- contact@eastwestrail.co.uk for questions regarding the project and wider community engagement.

Format of LRG meetings and engagement with the local communities

Is EWR aware of the lack of confidence the Poets community has with the current local representatives' meetings? When will meetings be opened up to community representatives rather than Councillors as there is a dearth of opportunities for localities to input into meetings?

We are aware that the Poets community has raised concerns about the LRG meetings.

We believe it's important that the elected representatives of every community have a forum to meet with EWR and each other to discuss the project. EWR Co set up LRGs along the full length of the EWR route, to give a regular opportunity for elected representatives from District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils to meet with us, and the agenda is driven by the Group, not EWR Co. Meeting notes are made available on the EWR Co website. If there are specific aspects of the meetings which are causing concern, please do let us know and we can address them directly.

We know that the local community is also keen to discuss the project with us and this year, we held ten route-wide 'drop in' sessions and a number of these were attended by members of your community.

We also held one-to-one meetings to enable residents and businesses to speak directly with us and the team remains in touch with some potentially impacted residents in the Poets area,

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discussing on a one-to-one basis how plans could impact them. We will continue to maintain this throughout the length of the project. Additionally, our Head of Communications is arranging to meet with Protect Poets early next year.

What is EWR doing currently to reduce the stress and anxiety that its inability to progress the scheme is causing to local residents?

We know that people have been waiting for a meaningful update on the project for quite some time and can appreciate how this might impact people's lives.

Following the Government's support for the scheme in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, we are working to provide a substantive project update and more information around next steps for local communities as early as possible. We apologise that we're unable to provide a timeline for this update yet, but we are working to provide this as soon as possible and the offer of a one-to-one meeting with our team remains open, and we would encourage anyone who would like to take up this offer to contact us.

We are mindful that individuals' circumstances may have changed and that owners that need to sell their property may face uncertainty before the proposed introduction of the Need to Sell Property Scheme. We are in discussion with the Department for Transport on the next steps for support for homeowners and landowners. If you are aware of anyone affected by this that hasn't spoken to us, please ask them to contact our Land and Property Team by emailing land@eastwestrail.co.uk or by phone 0330 838 7583 so we can understand their situation.

When will recordings of meetings be made available? And when will you include names to comments in the notes of the representatives' meetings so that Councillors can demonstrate that local views are being expressed?

While we have been open to recording and transcribing LRG meetings, decisions like this need to be agreed by the full group, and this is not something the Bedford Town LRG members have asked for. The terms of reference for the Bedford Town LRG can be found [here](#).

Attributing comments to individual attendees in the summary note was discussed in meeting #3, however Group members requested that the note taking remain [unchanged](#).

What plans are there to support localities during the DCO, planning and implementation stages of constructing EWR?

We recognise that a one-size-fits-all approach to support communities during the planning & delivery of a project like this won't work: every community has different concerns, needs and

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expectations. In addition, the best way to support communities will naturally be impacted by the emerging designs.

As the plans evolve, we will invite local communities to work with us, agreeing ways which support them most effectively. This will of course involve working with LRGs, and Local Authorities, but also with other groups and individuals in the area. We are working on plans at the moment and welcome any suggestions you may have with us.

With regards to submitting the application for the Development Consent Order this is a formal process and so there are a number of requirements that set out how and when we need to engage with communities and stakeholders. More information on this can be found on a website [here](#).

What is actually meant by Agenda Items 2 and 3? What is meant by ‘freight’ and ‘traction strategy’? These terms are so vague it prevents community engagement prior to the meeting.

Thank you for the feedback on these terms: we will consider how to clarify for future meeting agendas.

Traction strategy refers to the approach we are using to determine how the final fleet of EWR trains will be powered. We’ve always been clear that this will be a sustainable solution, but there are many ways this could be achieved - for example, electric, hydrogen, hybrid battery. Because we haven’t completed our assessments yet and therefore can’t say how the final fleet will be powered, we provided an overview of the current situation following the LRG’s request.

Freight refers to the approach we’re using to determine whether on top of the passenger services, EWR could be used to carry freight, over and above the freight already running on part of the EWR line – which we have a specific obligation to maintain.

More information on what was presented and discussed for each of these topics can be found on the Groups Community hub page – [here](#).

What can be done to speed up the delivery of the notes to the community via the hub?

Our meeting summary notes process has recently been reviewed, with the aim that meeting summaries are circulated to attendees within 10-working days and updated on the Group’s Community Hub page in 25-working days.

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Freight

Taking into account the 18-hour freight window, what will the remaining 6 hours be used for and how much of the 18-hour freight window currently signalled by EWR will be used for freight trains? What are you offering to potential freight users in terms of times and levels of use?

We are still developing our operating, maintenance and freight strategies which will inform how the route may be used, so we are not able to answer that question in detail at the moment.

However, it must be stressed that EWR is first and foremost a passenger railway. Although we understand the potential benefits of freight and are obliged to maintain the current freight operating on parts of the EWR line, we cannot jeopardise our ability to operate passenger services, or undertake maintenance on the line in the long-term.

Are the reports in the rail media of 10 freight trains per hour accurate? If not, what number are envisaged?

This figure did not originate from EWR, and as outlined above we have not concluded our work on our operating, maintenance and freight strategies. That being said, our initial view is that ten freight trains an hour is unrealistic: the current network would simply not support this level.

Inclusion

In terms of accessibility, will the trains have guards, ticket collectors or security systems to ensure safety? And will stations have personnel providing a physical presence rather than being remotely controlled?

The details around EWR services including guards, ticket collectors and security systems are yet to be determined. However, EWR Co has conducted research on inclusion and customer experience to shape the project's approach to these. One example highlighted is how the perception of safety can vary from person to person and be influenced by location, with some feeling that rural locations are more unsafe compared to urban ones, while for others it is the reverse.

While the project is at a very early stage, EWR Co's approach is important to ensure those designing the railway are thinking about the needs of different customers. This will ensure a

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design is developed that is inclusive and accessible and enables as many users as possible to use EWR services independently.

What is meant by 'intuitive, safe and simple transport'?

'Intuitive, safe and simple' is about understanding how we design and deliver our services to make them as safe, easy and accessible to use as possible – this includes understanding the barriers our customers encounter and removing these where we can. We are actively looking at how we can make stations, trains, digital services and experiences inclusive for all.

What is the 'Accessibility Advisory Panel' as there appears to be nothing on the website to explain? If it is on the website then can directions be provided?

The Accessibility Advisory Panel (AAP) has been set up to advise on how we lift the barriers to accessible rail travel and make inclusive decisions with a "critical friend" approach.

The panel will consist of up to eight people who live in the area between Oxford and Cambridge, representing the broad range of disabled people and impairments. They will meet on a bi-monthly basis, either in person or via Teams/Zoom. The closing date for applications is 10 January 2023. More information about how to apply to the Accessibility Advisory Panel can now be found [here](#).

Active Travel & First Mile/Last Mile

EWR paperwork discusses providing better transport links to the proposed line. What will be done to prevent these plans having a detrimental impact upon existing commuting routes?

We understand that until plans are progressed significantly, there will be concern about how we'll deliver effective first-mile-last-mile connections. We have committed to engaging with local authorities and communities to help understand how we can ensure communities can enjoy the full benefits that EWR will bring. As above, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to this. We will use engagement with LRGs, and Local Authorities, but also with other groups and individuals in the area to develop the right approaches – and again welcome any suggestions you may have in this area.

In terms of accessibility the current poor route choice limits access due to the remoteness of potential customers to the railway. When will you reconsider the route to ensure that it does serve a potential customer base?

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We're currently looking to balance the needs of existing and future communities, as well as supporting economic growth in the area through sustainable transport. Additionally, we're considering the accessibility of all potential station locations. The exact location of new stations has not yet been decided. We have consulted, and continue to engage with local authorities, and other stakeholders, to make sure the locations work for local communities. As we develop the railway, we'll back-check that the Preferred Route Option is still right for the communities between Bedford and Cambridge.

Our plans don't just include the railway – we also design the other solutions that support the railway, such as road diversions and connections to stations. Whilst we are at an early stage of design with multiple options under consideration, we're carrying out road traffic assessments and modelling to understand how the traffic flows are working and where the congestion is.

In terms of accessibility what will be done to ensure the safety of students attending Kimberley College as they will have a longer walk to the college from the potential relocated railway station

No decision has been made on station locations at this stage and we are not yet at the point in the project where we are able to comment on specific locations such as Kimberley College. However, we are thinking about the variety of connecting journeys people may make as we design EWR so that the new railway is accessible to all – students walking to and from the station and college is a good example of this. We're working hard to ensure any risks or issues are assessed and reduced. Our designs for access to the new stations will take this into account, so that we can try and make the existing situation better than it is today. Our plans don't just include the railway – we also design the other solutions that support the railway, such as road diversions and connections to stations.

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