

Fenny Stratford to Kempston Enhanced LRG- Meeting note

Meeting #2

Date: 09/10/2025

Time: 6:00pm

Type of meeting: Virtual (Microsoft Teams)

Key discussion points and outcomes


1.Introduction, housekeeping and agenda

- 1.1 Sarah Jacobs (SJ) welcomed everyone to the meeting, introduced herself and the EWR Co attendees on the call then ran through the housekeeping and agenda.
- 1.2 Nick Burton (NB) flagged that he had asked for Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) work to be added to the agenda and SJ confirmed that this would be addressed later in the presentation.

2.Review of actions from the last meeting

- 2.1 SJ presented the actions from the first Fenny Stratford to Kempston Enhanced Local Representative Groups meeting (*See slide deck for the full list of all actions*).
- 2.2 SJ explained that the first two actions had already been completed and were covered in the previous set of meeting notes as post-meeting clarifications.
- 2.3 SJ provided an update on the third action, noting that additional meetings about level crossings will be set up when there is more information available so that action is still ongoing.
- 2.4 SJ provided an update on the fourth action, noting that EWR Co are now informing residents of nearby ground investigation work and will continue to do so, meaning that action is now complete.
- 2.5 SJ provided an update on the fifth action, noting that the Update Report that will be published later this year will include a geographic breakdown.

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- 2.6 SJ noted that the sixth action is now completed as the Terms of Reference for these ELRG meetings have been updated and posted on the EWR Community Hub webpage.
- 2.7 Ryan Robertson (RR) provided an update on the seventh action, noting that EWR Co are in discussions with Network Rail (NR) about TWAO consents on the MVL acceleration works. EWR Co are looking at when is best to invite NR into these meetings to give an update on the acceleration works. NR are also impacted by Universal and the works that will form part of that acceleration are still being developed and defined.
- 2.8 RR noted that the TWAO consent was 8 years ago and EWR Co are operating in a very changed environment along the Marston Vale line since then. Need to make sure what is provided is still suitable.
- 2.9 NB asked when RR would be able to share more information on this.
- 2.10 RR said he couldn't give a date, noting that the Universal announcement and their impacts has meant that EWR Co need to have a further look at what the requirements are and what the proposals will be. This involves ongoing work that EWR Co would like to announce as soon as possible but nothing is confirmed at this stage.
- 2.11 NB asked if any works had started.
- 2.12 RR responded that no construction works have started yet, but land acquisition and survey works have begun. RR confirmed that EWR Co will be in contact with the ELRGs before any construction work begins.
- 2.13 SJ provided an update on the eighth action, noting that this action is ongoing as EWR Co continue to use updated information to inform the business case and this will continue up until DCO submission.
- 2.14 SJ provided an update on the final action, explaining that this action was completed during the last meeting.

3. Project updates

- 3.1 SJ shared project and engagement updates since the last round of LRG meetings.
- 3.2 SJ flagged the other ELRG meetings scheduled during this round of ELRG engagement.
- 3.3 SJ provided a political engagement snapshot from across the route, noting that engagement has ramped up and that EWR Co are working through issues and impacts with MPs, Local Authorities and other political stakeholders.

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- 3.4 SJ then gave a community engagement update. Following feedback that some areas have not heard as much about the project as they would like, EWR Co are proposing hosting 'pop up sessions' along the route.
- 3.5 SJ requested the group share any suggestions of potential venues or locations to host these sessions.
- 3.6 Alex Poppleton (AP) noted that they could find a location for Woburn Sands once more details are shared. This suggestion has been shared with the community team managing this activity.
- 3.7 NB commented that Husborne Crawley – Reading Rooms or St James Church could be used as venues. This suggestion has been shared with the community team managing this activity.
- 3.8 NB then asked if EWR Co will be recording what is shared at these events and Jo Branson-Budd (JBB) noted the importance of collating any questions that are repeatedly raised to generate accurate project FAQs.
- 3.9 SJ noted that these are 'pop up' information points rather than formal feedback channels but that she would feed these points back to EWR Co's Community team (ACTION).
- 3.10 Post-meeting note: The above feedback has been shared with the EWR Co Community Team who have explained that the purpose of these 'pop up' sessions is to introduce people to East West Rail who may otherwise be unaware of the scheme. High-level project information will be provided, and people will be signposted to channels where they can find out more about EWR. As such, designs won't be shared during these sessions, and feedback won't be explicitly recorded. If any frequently asked questions emerge, then EWR Co will consider compiling a set of FAQs and sharing these alongside answers via the EWR Co newsletter or website.
- 3.11 SJ gave an update on the landowner engagement that EWR Co have been doing – EWR Co are writing to people across the route whose land or property could be affected by the proposals.
- 3.12 JBB requested that Bedford Borough Council are kept informed of any landowner engagement so that they can also manage relevant communications with communities and landowners.
- 3.13 SJ confirmed that EWR Co are currently working through the engagement plan and will share that with JBB when finalised (ACTION).

4. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill

- 4.1 SJ provided an update on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (PIB), noting that it presents an opportunity to modernise and enhance engagement outside of formal consultation periods. When EWR Co have more information, they will come back to the ELRGs on this.
- 4.2 AP asked how the PIB will affect EWR Co's approach to consultation.
- 4.3 SJ responded that EWR Co are looking towards having more iterative engagement and see PIB as an opportunity for engagement to be more agile.

5. Environment


- 5.1 Heidi Hutchings (HH) gave an environment update, noting that initial environmental information was shared in the non-statutory consultation 2024 Environmental Update Report. Since then, EWR Co have been reviewing feedback, engaging with stakeholders and undertaking surveys to inform design development.
- 5.2 HH then discussed EWR Co's approach to Design Integration and Mitigation. This involves a proactive approach to avoid, minimise, rectify or compensate for any potentially negative impacts.
- 5.3 HH then gave an update on the surveys work that EWR Co have been undertaking. All the data collected from the various surveys will feed into the environmental assessments and help to inform the design.
- 5.4 HH shared EWR Co's Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) commitment and discussed how EWR Co are working to fulfil that commitment.
- 5.5 AP asked who is in attendance at the BNG Forums, noting that there is both a community and landowner interest in BNG and that local people can help to inform these discussions.
- 5.6 HH responded that the BNG Forum currently has around 40 members. It is primarily made up of local wildlife groups, local interest groups and statutory bodies. Local representatives have been providing valuable local input and ecological representatives from the Local Authorities have also been involved. SJ and HH took an action to review the BNG Forum attendance list and confirm with AP who the representatives from the Milton Keynes / Woburn Sands area are (ACTION).
- 5.7 **Post-meeting note: Milton Keynes City Council, Forest of Marston Vale and the Greensand Trust are all members of the BNG Forum.**


6. The Accessibility Panel

- 6.1 Georgina Taylor (GT) explained that EWR Co have been doing a lot of work to embed inclusion and accessibility into proposals and design.
- 6.2 The EWR Accessibility Advisory Panel (AAP) had previously fed back that this work was not coming through strongly enough during the last consultation which is why GT is presenting on it today.
- 6.3 GT discussed EWR Co's legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 as well as the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process.
- 6.4 NB asked if EWR Co are considering accessibility for every footpath and road closure that they are proposing to make.
- 6.5 GT said these considerations will be covered in the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) mitigations process.
- 6.6 NB asked if schoolchildren will also be considered and GT confirmed that they would.
- 6.7 AP flagged the impact that the closure of the level crossing would have on the Woburn Sands community and asked if this would be taken into account.
- 6.8 GT confirmed that EWR Co look at level crossing closures and the potential impact this could have – anything that impacts people and communities will be incorporated into an EqIA.
- 6.9 GT then discussed inclusive design and how this is incorporated into the scheme, spotlighting inclusive design at stations and noting that designs are being reviewed on an iterative basis.
- 6.10 GT provided further details on the EWR AAP and explained how the Panel helps to ensure that inclusive design is understood through the lens of lived experience.
- 6.11 JBB asked if Bedford has been represented on the Panel.
- 6.12 GT confirmed that there are Bedford representatives on the AAP and that the group have conducted a site visit to Bedford. There are biographies of the AAP members on the EWR website (*GT shared a link to this in the meeting chat*).

7. Area Manager Update

- 7.1 RR provided a brief summary regarding ongoing work in the area, noting that there was not much to update on as most of the work is still work-in-progress.

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- 7.2 RR noted that Universal has been out to consultation - EWR Co provided a response and are assessing the high-level impacts of Universal on the whole scheme but also working through what Universal means at an individual infrastructure level e.g. with level crossings.
- 7.3 RR explained that future engagement with ELRGs will likely be on a piecemeal basis rather than waiting to present as a single presentation as work will be completed at different stages.
- 7.4 NB asked if LRGs will be presented with level crossing options again in the future, as was the case previously.
- 7.5 RR responded that there had been some changes to level crossing proposals since the last non-statutory consultation. EWR Co have been incorporating consultation feedback into those decisions but there are other external factors involved so this will be a case by case basis. RR noted that EWR Co have already received feedback on level crossing options and that this is being considered.
- 7.6 JBB asked if anything can be shared in relation to station proposals at Stewartby and Kempston Hardwick.
- 7.7 RR responded that there is nothing finalised that can be shared at this stage but that EWR Co have been reviewing and assessing the impact of Universal on footfall in this area and how that is managed.
- 7.8 SJ informed the group that EWR Co are planning to come out to communities in areas where there are significant changes since the non-statutory consultation before it is announced in any upcoming update or formal reports.
- 7.9 Jennie Thomas (JT) asked when the ELRGs and communities will be informed of any changes to level crossings, noting that they have not had any clarity on the options for individual crossings.
- 7.10 RR said EWR Co are working to get these answers as defined as possible before coming out with any further announcements.
- 7.11 JT mentioned accessibility and inclusion and flagged that if level crossings are closed then some people won't be able to get over a bridge without certain facilities.
- 7.12 RR said that access to stations is being considered and GT confirmed that the EqIA process will cover this.
- 7.13 AP asked for clarification on why level crossings are closing and what exactly the impact is.
- 7.14 RR responded that the demand caused by Universal will likely increase service density and may require longer trains. This will impact the safety ratings of these level crossings and EWR Co



also need to consider the impact that it has on the local road network and on pedestrian access.

7.15 RR noted that EWR Co's position is to keep as many level crossings open as possible but it is about making sure that they are safe and not detrimental to the local communities.

7.16 AP asked when there will be further updates on these pieces of outstanding work.

7.17 SJ said some of the updates could be by the end of the year but this is dependent on DfT approval and RR noted that he expected announcements of level crossings to be later.

8. Discussion, Q&A

8.1 NB asked how community separation is considered in discussions of level crossing closures.

8.2 RR responded that EWR Co are undertaking active travel work to look at accessibility to and from stations.

8.3 GT noted that any severance impacts are also incorporated into the EqIA - if a level crossing is closed then something else will have to be put in place.

8.4 Sunisha Tharappan (ST) clarified that any reference to active travel means a route used by any non-motorised users including pedestrians meaning community separation is incorporated into active travel work.

8.5 Philip Ball (PB) asked if there were any updates on when the Chiltern train service between Bletchley and Oxford would start.

8.6 SJ responded that it was sitting with Chiltern to start the service.

8.7 AP asked if Chiltern were bound to delivering trains by a certain timeframe.

8.8 SJ responded that EWR Co were not privy to union conversations and until discussions are resolved, this will stall any set timeframes.

8.9 NB noted that Chiltern is going to be rolled into Great British Rail and asked if this will also be the case for East West Rail.

8.10 SJ responded that EWR Co are currently focusing on the construction of the railway so that is not a discussion at this stage.

8.11 SJ closed the meeting, noting that she would share Shehab Choudhury's (SC) details as he will be the group's point of contact moving forward.

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Summary of Actions

- **ACTION 1:** ELRG attendees to provide EWR Co with suggested venues to host future ‘pop up’ sessions.
- **ACTION 2:** SJ to feed back NB and JBB’s points about recording any questions raised at ‘pop up’ sessions.
- **ACTION 3:** SJ to liaise with JBB regarding upcoming landowner engagement communications in the Bedford Borough Council area.
- **ACTION 4:** SJ and HH to confirm with AP who the BNG Forum attendees from the Milton Keynes / Woburn Sands area are.

Attendees

EWR Co attendees

- Sarah Jacobs (SJ) - Senior Engagement Manager - Central (EWR Co)
- Ryan Robertson (RR) – Development Programme Manager (EWR Co)
- Heidi Hutchings (HH) - Environmental Area Manager - West (EWR Co)
- Georgina Taylor (GT) - Accessibility Manager
- Joe Harris (JH) - Statutory Stakeholder Engagement Team
- Sunisha Tharappan (ST) – Stakeholder Lead (Marston Vale line)

Parish councillors

- Philip Ball (PB)– Bow Brickhill Parish Council
- Nick Burton (NB) – Husborne Crawley Parish Council
- Jennie Thomas (JT) – Millbrook Parish Council
- Alex Poppleton (AP) – Woburn Sands Parish Council

Local authority attendees

- Jo Branson Budd (JBB) – Bedford Borough Council
- Tracey Bailey (TB) – Councillor for Danesborough and Walton in Milton Keynes City Council
- David Hopkins (DH) - Councillor for Danesborough and Walton in Milton Keynes City Council

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