

Immediate release

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East West Rail calls for people to join accessibility panel

- Opportunity for local people to shape the future of East West Rail
- Disabled people to help embed inclusivity in customer experience
- Panel created in advance of trains operating from Oxford to Bletchley by 2025

East West Railway Company (EWR Co) is inviting disabled people who live locally to apply to join a new panel to help ensure its services can be accessed and enjoyed by everyone as part of its early route planning work.

EWR Co's Head of Inclusion, Caroline Eglinton, is encouraging people to join the Accessibility Advisory Panel, which will provide insights on the different needs of the diverse local communities to help the company build an inclusive service along the route from Oxford to Cambridge.

The Accessibility Advisory Panel will be formed of up to eight people with a range of impairments. It will meet regularly to consider issues such as access to stations and platforms, clarity of customer information, passenger assistance and the on board experience. Panel members must live or work between Oxford and Cambridge. Anyone interested in applying can find out more on our [community hub](#).

EWR Co is establishing the panel whilst the route is in the early planning stages and represents a key part of EWR Co's strategy to place accessibility at the heart of the project from concept to delivery.

Caroline Eglinton lives locally and has worked in the rail industry for 16 years. She is the first Head of Inclusion for EWR Co, which has been clear on its commitment to building a service that meet the needs of its diverse local communities. Caroline has lived experience of disability and is also the [Disability and Access Ambassador](#) for the rail industry.

Caroline champions inclusion across the company, supporting and advising colleagues at every level to ensure the principles of equality, diversity and accessibility feed into all

parts of the business at every stage of the project, and are reflected in its external work with partners and local communities.

Rail Minister Huw Merriman said: “As Rail Minister, an important goal of mine is to reduce the hurdles people face when accessing transport, which is why it’s so important that accessibility panels such as this exist.

“By directly listening to the needs of disabled people living along the route, this fantastic initiative will help to ensure that the future railway is designed to work for the people that will use it on a regular basis.”

Rachel Elson, Customer Services Director of EWR Co, said: “I’m delighted that we have been able to appoint one of the foremost experts in the field to the role of Head of Inclusion. As well as her considerable professional acumen, Caroline also has an incredibly powerful personal story that we can all learn from as we deliver on our promise to put customers at the heart of every decision we make.

“By building a railway that is inclusive of all our communities, we have the chance to extend our impact across the region, improving prosperity and wellbeing where it’s needed most by widening access to jobs, businesses, housing and education. Caroline has established herself as an integral part of our organisation, and I know she will continue to enable us to deliver a railway that all our communities, and colleagues, can be proud of.”

Caroline Eglinton said: “It’s a privilege to be working with EWR Co and I’m really excited to be using my experience to change lives for the better in the place I live. The ability to access public transport can be a huge boost to quality of life and can open up many opportunities for people, yet there are still too many who are excluded from rail travel. As EWR is a brand new railway, we have a rare opportunity to build a service from the outset that will be easy to access – and enjoyable to use – for everyone, no matter who they are.

“I’m particularly looking forward to working with passionate local people via our Accessibility Advisory Panel. They will play a unique and vital role in shaping the service from the start, so that it meets the needs of all our potential customers, helping turn our vision of a fully accessible railway into a reality.”

-ENDS-

Notes to editors

About the Accessibility Advisory Panel

Applicants for the EWR Co Accessibility Advisory Panel must be over 18 and have lived experience of disability (or any long-term condition). Panel members will be selected to

ensure a range of experiences of disability and representative of the geographical areas across the route.

Applicants are welcome to email AccessPanel@eastwestrail.co.uk to request or discuss adjustments to the application process detailed below.

The closing date for applications is 23.59hrs on Tuesday 10 January 2023. Further information and details of how to apply are available on our [community hub](#).

About Caroline Eglinton

Caroline was appointed by The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work as the Disability and Access Ambassador in July 2021, a voluntary position which she holds alongside her role at East West Railway Company. Disability and Access Ambassadors are leaders in their industry who aim to make their industries more inclusive and accessible and are supported by the Cabinet Office Disability Unit.

Caroline has worked in the rail industry for 16 years and is passionate about disability advocacy and inclusion. She has the genetic condition Cystic Fibrosis and identifies as disabled and neurodivergent.

About the East West Rail project

East West Rail intends to create a new direct connection between Oxford and Cambridge. Serving communities across the area, it intends to bring faster journey times and lower transport costs as well as ease pressure on local roads.

East West Rail is planned to be delivered in three Connection Stages:

- Connection Stage One: Oxford to Bletchley and Milton Keynes
- Connection Stage Two: Oxford to Bedford
- Connection Stage Three: Oxford to Cambridge

Network Rail was responsible for developing the first part of the East West Rail, connecting Oxford with Bicester, and is a partner in a construction alliance to deliver Connection Stage 1 of the project, where East West Railway Company (EWR Co) and Network Rail are acting as the Department for Transport's joint sponsors.

EWR Co is now developing the route to enable services to run to Cambridge via Bedford and plans to seek statutory powers under the Planning Act 2008, following a period of extensive consultation.

About East West Railway Company

East West Railway Company (EWR Co) was set up by the Secretary of State for Transport in 2018 to develop East West Rail, a railway with customers and communities at its core.

We have a mission to innovate and challenge the status-quo in the rail and construction industries, leading to a more efficient and cost-effective project delivery, and a great experience for passengers and the communities we serve. Our vision is delivery of a safe and secure railway that is better for the customer; cheaper for the taxpayer; delivered quicker than before and is greener for the environment.

Our distinctive outlook and commitment to doing the right thing for our customers and local communities runs through everything we do and every decision we make.