



## Meeting note

|                           |                                                                |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Project name</b>       | East West Rail - Bedford to Cambridge and Western improvements |
| <b>File reference</b>     | TR040012                                                       |
| <b>Status</b>             | <b>Final</b>                                                   |
| <b>Author</b>             | The Planning Inspectorate                                      |
| <b>Date</b>               | 28 March 2023                                                  |
| <b>Meeting with</b>       | East West Railway Company Limited                              |
| <b>Venue</b>              | Microsoft Teams                                                |
| <b>Meeting objectives</b> | Project Update Meeting                                         |
| <b>Circulation</b>        | All attendees                                                  |

### Summary of key points discussed, and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

### *Project Update*

East West Railway Company Limited ('the Applicant') provided an update on the route for the proposed East West Rail – Bedford to Cambridge and Western improvements. The Applicant explained that the construction phase for the Bicester to Milton Keynes section of the route is on time and on budget. The Applicant is seeking to open this section of the route by early 2025. The remainder of the route will follow the existing railway line between Bletchley and Bedford. There are currently no passenger services on this line. The Bedford to Cambridge section of the route (which is the subject of this Development Consent Order), will be subject to significant improvements. The Applicant explained that associated matters will include upgrades between Bletchley and Bedford, and some minor improvements along the route elsewhere.

The Applicant provided a brief update on its non-statutory consultation held in 2021. The Applicant consulted on nine alignment options between Bedford and Cambridge, and it explained an emerging preference for two options: option 1 and 9. The Applicant explained that post consultation, a minor alignment alteration (1A, 'Tempsford variant') has been considered.

The Applicant, in conjunction with the Department for Transport, has reviewed the scope of the Proposed Development following non-statutory consultation, to determine if there is a more affordable solution which helps unlock the potential for regional economic growth, including consideration of matters raised during the NSC 2021 and the approach to

Cambridge and Bedford. The Applicant advised that the Route Announcement will likely be published in May 2023.

The Applicant explained that the Scoping Report will likely be submitted to the Inspectorate later this year. Statutory consultation is programmed for Q1/Q2 2024 and the DCO submission is expected to be made in 2025.

The Applicant advised that the scope of the proposed DCO, the new line between Bedford and Cambridge, is development for which a DCO is required under Section 35 of the Planning Act 2008. The Applicant advised that the proposed DCO may include provisions to close stations or move them to different locations nearby and noted that the approach to station closure is subject to further consideration. The Applicant explained that at this stage, the intention is that the geographic scope of the DCO will cover the whole route between Oxford and Cambridge.

The Inspectorate queried whether there are any known contentious issues at the present time. The Applicant raised that the redevelopment of existing stations may be potentially contentious and explained that it is looking to provide an optimal solution. The Applicant also raised the potential closure of Bicester London Road as a potential issue. The Applicant is looking at bridging the London Road Level crossing or replacing it with a new bridge and explained that this decision will be made at a later point.

The Applicant also outlined the potential demolition of properties north of Bedford, as it is intending to add two additional tracks to a four track railway which requires additional land beyond the railway boundary. The Applicant explained that the number of residential and commercial properties subject to potential compulsory acquisition and demolition has been reduced through further consideration of the design since the last Project Update Meeting.

In addition, the Applicant explained that the alignment on the approach into Cambridge is a contentious issue. The Applicant is aware of environmental issues on the approach and the impact on local villages on the south side of Cambridge and has received feedback from the local community on this. The Applicant explained that it has looked for a new route into Cambridge, and explained that the southern route remains the best solution following further consideration of the economic benefits, engineering and design works

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to fully record work on alternatives including the Cambridge alignment options and explain it in the application documents. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to keep the public updated on project changes. The Applicant confirmed that it will publish technical documents providing detail on the further consideration of options since NSC alongside its Route Announcement in May 2023. The Applicant advised that it did not consult on the northern line, and that it considered that it had demonstrated why it was not a suitable option within the technical documents to be published.

## ***NSIP Reform and Opportunities***

The Applicant raised the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Planning (NSIP) Reform Action Plan issued by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, on 23 February 2023. Reform areas were discussed including the new National Policy Statement and proportionate statutory consultee involvement. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant that this could involve initiating meaningful consultation with statutory bodies as soon as possible and engaging in an evidence plan process and sharing draft application documents with parties as and when they mature. The Applicant confirmed that it had spoken to Natural England about designated sites and that there has been substantial work in the alignment stage.

The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to look at similar projects to see who they have involved to ensure robust consideration of good design including engagement with the local community. The Inspectorate suggested that the Applicant could consider how design has been approached on other DCO applications, for example onshore energy generation infrastructure and at other linear projects. The Inspectorate recommended that drone flyover footage would be potentially helpful for the local community to understand how the proposals might fit into the receiving environment.

The Applicant asked whether it could receive additional support, akin to the enhanced support and additional resource provided on the A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to email the project mailbox with its queries, including those related to its interest in a fast track Examination, which will be forwarded onto the National Infrastructure Reform Team.

The Applicant asked how much time it would have to build into its programme for sharing and commenting on draft documents with the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate explained that the time needed to respond depends on the number and maturity of documents that are shared.

The Applicant explained that there is an approximate 16 km interface with the proposed A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Road Improvement scheme. The Applicant explained that differences in programme mean that discussions between National Highways and the Department for Transport are necessary to ensure a coordinated effort and a reduction in the cumulative environmental impacts of the schemes. The Inspectorate advised that this was a sensible approach.

The Inspectorate asked whether the Applicant is planning on including digital mapping for the Proposed Development. The Applicant advised that there is no fixed commitment currently but that it is hopeful this can be achieved. The Applicant want the public to be able to view all documentation and the expectation is that this will happen as part of the consultation stage.

### ***Next Steps***

The Applicant reiterated that the Route Announcement is upcoming for East West Rail. Public engagement is due to take place around the route update announcement, and the Applicant anticipated keen interest in the proposals in the wider community and that it will be active around stakeholder engagement.

The next milestone for the Applicant is for the EIA Scoping Report to be published in due course and a request for an EIA Scoping Opinion to be made to the Inspectorate.

### **AOB**

The Applicant requested a discussion on the level of detail in design for East West Rail. The Applicant also requested a conversation around work plans. The Applicant advised that they will confirm the dates regarding scoping at the next meeting held.

### ***Specific decisions/ follow-up required?***

The following actions were agreed:

- The Inspectorate to arrange an update meeting in May/June 2023.