



Meeting note

Project name	East West Rail
File reference	TR040012
Status	FINAL
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	17/01/2024
Meeting with	East West Railway Company Limited
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project Update Meeting
Circulation	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) explained they continue to conduct engagement on a quarterly basis with 15 local representative groups.

The Applicant discussed the proposed development and that they are currently working towards a single option for the railway route although optionality currently remains. It is intended that all optionality is removed before the Development Consent Order (DCO) is submitted. The Applicant noted that presently, they are reviewing stopping patterns and associated station locations for the Martson Vale Line and is looking closely at work to stations at Oxford, Bedford, and Cambridge to reduce disruption. The Applicant is engaging with Local Authorities (LA), statutory consultation bodies and statutory undertakers including National Highways and Network Rail.

Statutory Consultation

The Applicant explained it is planning to conduct a two-staged statutory consultation process, with the first stage taking place in June 2024 for approximately 8 weeks and the second stage taking place in 2025. The Applicant stated the statutory consultation will include face to face and pop-up events, as well as two online webinars.

The Inspectorate queried the progress made with the Applicant's Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC), whether the stage approach is addressed therein and whether any views have been provided by the Local Authorities (LAs) regarding their statutory

consultation. The Applicant stated they have a meeting with the LAs at the end of January 2024 and aim to have weekly discussions with LAs. The Applicant also explained they are planning to have a 28-day period by which the LA can provide responses to the draft SoCC, which will take place from February to March 2024.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping Report

The Applicant stated that it intends to submit an EIA scoping report in June 2024, concurrently with the first stage of statutory consultation. The Inspectorate noted that running two consultation processes at the same time has potential to create confusion. The Inspectorate advised that careful consideration should be given to proceeding on this basis, and that it would be important to have clarity for all parties that they are separate processes and have different purposes. It needs to be clear to statutory consultation bodies that comments on the EIA scoping need to be submitted to the Inspectorate and to members of the public that their comments should be provided to the Applicant, and that they cannot comment on the EIA scoping. The Applicant stated that it had been in initial discussions with several statutory consultation bodies about the approach, and they were content and considered it would provide them with some efficiencies.

The Applicant explained it plans to engage with statutory bodies to share drafts of the scoping report to draw out any key issues before submission. The Applicant aims to do this by Q1 of 2024.

The Applicant confirmed that the EIA Scoping report would include optionality and that it would explain how any remaining optionality is proposed to be assessed in the environmental statement (ES).

The Applicant stated that it is proposed to submit the EIA scoping report in two parts, with an overarching summary document and a series of technical reports for each aspect. The Inspectorate referred the Applicant to Advice Note 7: Environmental Impact Assessment: Process, Preliminary Environmental Information and Environmental Statements, which has guidance on EIA scoping requests, including file limits. The Inspectorate advised that, if possible, fewer files would be preferable, i.e. combining the technical reports into one document. The Inspectorate confirmed that a GIS shapefile is required 10 working days in advance of the EIA scoping request.

Programme and DCO Submission

The Applicant reiterated that the 2nd stage of statutory consultation will commence in 2025.

The Applicant stated that the project programme is subject to impacts of general election and potential change of government.

Early Adopters Program (EAP)

The Inspectorate summarised the EAP and explained scope for the Applicant to develop one or more of the range of components being trialled within the programme to optimise the application and smooth the experience at post-submission stages. The Applicant

indicated that it would be interested in the pre-application process being supported by the Inspectorate in a more facilitative role, as proposed in government's consultation on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) service reforms. The Inspectorate summarised the timeline for reforms to be established in its service and would explore options with the applicant in more detail after the new service is 'switched on' in April 2024.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The Applicant will contact the Inspectorate in April to set up a new project update meeting the light of the new advice notes due to be published.