



Response to East West Rail Consultation

6 March 2019

As Chair and Project Officer for the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership, we have actively participated in East West Rail consultation opportunities.

Our Rail User Group, sitting with the Community Rail Partnership, exists for the protection and enhancement of access to rail services. The Community Rail movement promotes a culture of active and sustainable travel.

On this basis, we support the principle of the Bedford to Cambridge section of the East West Rail line, with an overarching aspiration to improve transport connections and opportunities for rail users, thus reducing car dependency and alleviating the myriad problems associated with high density vehicle traffic.

However, we feel that the five option proposals are fundamentally problematic, as we explain below. Moreover, we strongly believe that in order to best meet National Infrastructure Commission guidance on multi-modal transport corridors, the northern route entering at Cambridge North Station as proposed by the CamBedRailRoad Group should have been included at this stage of route selection. Given the new information provided by CBRR on the detail of its proposal, as well as its even closer alignment with the A428 corridor following the recent government announcement on the A428 upgrade, we would expect the CBRR case to be given new consideration.

GENERAL POINTS

Lack of clarity

Overall, the consultation is beset by lack of clarity on how the East West Rail line would join the West Anglia Main Line south of Cambridge. It is stated that all currently proposed options approach Cambridge from the south and would join the West Anglia Main Line “either at or slightly to the north of Shepreth Junction or to the south of Great Shelford”. However, consultation maps are not clear on this point and the technical documentation states that route options A, C and D would “possibly” connect to the existing Hitchin-Cambridge line.

Clarity is also lacking in terms of the catchment areas for each route option. Maps are unnecessarily vague to the point of being perceived as obfuscating. They should have been superimposed on Ordnance Survey standard maps to provide a clear picture.

Information about principles of access across the railway line under a no-level crossing policy is lacking, presenting the possibility that a new railway line could act as a physical barrier to access and connectivity over a wide area, rather than a facilitator of access.

Cost estimates for all routes lack the context and cost benefit analysis of inevitable accompanying large-scale development, and are thereby impossible to accept at face value.

The EWR case made against the CBRR proposal is thin and excludes any meaningful discussion.

Cycle track along the railway – design principle

Whichever route is selected to go forward should incorporate a cycle track alongside it, on the same principle as the Guided Busway maintenance track.

Step-free station access

If tracks are doubled through Shepreth and Foxton, step-free access to both platforms and between platforms is essential.

Historic railway buildings

If lines are doubled through Shepreth and Foxton on the approach to the new Cambridge South station, we are concerned about the possible impact on historic station buildings. The national Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) strongly supports historic building preservation. We have been working with our communities with regard to regenerating the historic railway buildings at Shepreth and Foxton, and ACoRP has taken a special interest in Shepreth.

ROUTE OPTIONS

Route Options B and E

Route Options B and E would best serve a very significant population, existing or planned, along the A428 growth corridor that currently lacks high quality public transport. A rail service calling at Cambourne Station would provide a clear and much needed alternative to current reliance on car travel for an area that is oriented to both Cambridge and Bedford. This would also alleviate intense vehicle pressures on the A1198 for Cambourne rail users seeking to connect southward to Great Northern Line stations from Royston.

Housing growth in the Cambourne area has been developed according to statutory planning processes and as such sits within a growth infrastructure envelope that includes the A428 and A14.

Options B and E most closely adhere to the National Infrastructure Commission principle of a multi-modal corridor and best complement investments in upgrading the A14 and A428.

However, the southerly dip down from Cambourne to an approach via Cambridge South Station is awkward and fundamentally unclear, raising a multitude of unanswered questions.

Other northern alignments

It is surprising and disappointing that the more northerly Cambourne route option proposed by the CamBedRailRoad group is not offered for public consideration and scrutiny at this critical stage.

Unlike the five proposed options, the CamBedRailRoad option would open up opportunities to develop the potential of Cambridge North Station and its growing Science Park and West Cambridge communities.

The CBRR option aligns most closely with the multi-modal corridor principle and on this basis should be brought to public consultation.

It allows the most sensible routing for regional freight, avoiding busy Cambridge passenger stations.

Route Options A, C and D

Options A, C and D have no winning arguments. These corridors are already served by rail, and the proposed EWR line would create new barriers to access and connectivity.

A new Bassingbourn Station would not connect to London, a key orientation for any new residential population.

Access to Cambridge stations could in theory be achieved through bus and non-motorized user links to Royston, Ashwell and Meldreth Stations (of which none currently exist), if transport connectivity is the goal of the East West Rail project. However, if a new conurbation is created in the Bassingbourn area, its travel-to-work patterns would undoubtedly be oriented primarily toward London. Capacity on the Great Northern line at Royston could not accommodate the extra load – as set out by the Royston and Villages Rail User Group response to this consultation.

Indeed, the fact that a new Bassingbourn Station could be justified only on the basis of a very significant new settlement would mean intolerable pressures placed on existing public infrastructure. The scale of such pressures and costs in infrastructure investment is too great to allow any serious consideration of Route Options A, C and D.

The EWR line would not call at Meldreth, Shepreth or Foxton Stations, but sit alongside the existing railway line, disrupting important rights of way and multiplying pressures on already highly pressured level crossings within the village frameworks of Foxton and Shepreth, which are thoroughfares for the wider area, including traffic flows from Bassingbourn, Meldreth, Melbourn and Barrington.

Changing trains at Cambridge North and Cambridge South

In reconsidering the CBRR proposal, there should be no bias against a necessity to change trains at Cambridge North – because the same will be true with any southern approach to Cambridge Station for passengers headed to employment centres in the vicinity of Cambridge North. It has been confirmed by Govia Thameslink Railway timetable planners that Great Northern trains from King's Cross/St Pancras will in upcoming timetable reconfigurations require a change at Cambridge Station for passengers seeking onward travel to Cambridge North, due to engineering restrictions.

Space pressures on a southern approach

Access to Cambridge from the south is already highly congested with the expansion of the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, associated housing developments and Park and Ride expansion proposals. Growing public pressure for the A10 to bypass Harston puts the spotlight on scarcity of space for very significant new infrastructure required by any new rail line to pass through and cross over or under existing thoroughfares.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we strenuously object to Options A, C and D; give qualified support to Options B and E, subject to information on the Cambourne-Cambridge South connection; and strongly support reconsideration by East West Rail of the northern alignment proposed by CamBedRailRoad.

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