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East West Rail
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9 June 2021

Dear Mr Sparrow

East West Rail Consultation May 2021 : Response from the University of Cambridge

The University welcomes the progress being made by Network Rail to develop the much needed East West Rail (EWR) link between Oxford, Cambridge and beyond and agrees with the project's strategic objectives. The opportunity to shape the scheme ahead of formal statutory consultation later this year is also welcomed as is the continued engagement of the Network Rail project team.

As a major employer within the Cambridge region, we are aware that around 50% of our 12,300 staff commute to the city from outlying areas. This has resulted in door-to-door journey times for many that are in excess of 1.5 hours due to congestion on the highway or poor connectivity/services on public transport. Based on the University's travel to work data we estimate that between 30-40% of our staff living outside of Cambridge could benefit from the opportunities EWR has to offer in terms of reduced journey times, improved accessibility and access to affordable homes. We see significant potential benefits to the University through the widening of its local labour market, and for existing students and staff through improved partnerships and knowledge exchange programmes that could be made possible by the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

Our response seeks to provide feedback where appropriate to the specific questions identified in the consultation and provides an insight into the University's key priorities for the development of this corridor. These include:

Linking Oxford and Cambridge: The University of Cambridge strongly encourages the selection of any route capable of facilitating *both*:

1. Direct access to and from Oxford and Cambridge, which considerably reduces overall journey times.
2. A service capable of facilitating economic and housing growth and addressing rural connectivity whilst maximising sustainability.

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The University agrees that all the proposed southern entry routes into Cambridge offer considerable journey time savings over current arrangements amongst other benefits. Therefore, we must support those route(s) which give priority for the greatest potential housing growth and improvements to rural connectivity. With this in mind, we have identified the following as our key priorities:

Building door-to-door connectivity: The University welcomes the opportunities provided by EWR. In particular:

Generally: It is critical to the University and many other employers that our staff have the opportunity to live within reasonable door-to-door travel times. EWR should therefore aim to enhance homes-jobs connectivity across the Cambridgeshire area. This will widen the net of affordable homes for the Cambridge Labour market and reflect a central tenet of Cambridge's 2014 Devolution Deal. In time, EWR should also be firmly aligned with the forthcoming ARC Spatial Framework for the Oxford-Cambridge corridor.

This is particularly relevant to key workers and other low paid staff across Cambridgeshire but also specifically those based on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC) for whom ease of access is currently limited.

Specifically: We support the potential EWR brings to address the public infrastructure deficit to the West of Cambridge, where nationally significant housing sites of over 20,000 people are growing without adequate public transport. EWR could provide a solution to this as well as the knock-on congestion problems on the A428 and A1309 and other key corridors should suitable interchange and first/last miles facilities be provided. It is important that EWR accounts for local transport improvement initiatives along both these routes.

Area for further investigation: - The University has numerous operations across Cambridge and would like to specifically highlight the operations of the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory (MRAO) at Lords Bridge which is located in an area of protective development due to the vibration and electromagnetic sensitivities of the nationally important activities undertaken here.

The existing consultation documents do not provide enough information for the University to fully assess the impact of the proposals or the possible mitigation opportunities that may exist.

We **strongly urge** continued engagement with the EWR project team to ensure we can undertake a comprehensive assessment of the proposal's impact on the activities of the MRAO. Once this information is available both the University and Network Rail would be in a position to understand what mitigation opportunities could be applied to ensure the activities can continue.

Integrating existing transport systems: The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) are together delivering £1.6bn of devolution agreements, principally focused on transport infrastructure. EWR will need to work carefully with our regional and local partners to ensure its final route compliments existing regional projects that, at our end of the central corridor, already include Cambridge South Station, the developing integrated public transport network and specifically the improvements along the A428 and A1307. This will be critical for achieving integrated transport access to Cambridge's key employment & research sites, including; West Cambridge, The Science Park to the North as well as Granta Park and Babraham Research Campus to the South East.

In addition to large infrastructure integration EWR must also enable first/last mile sustainable travel solutions for existing and new communities along its route to facilitate door to door sustainable travel. This should be achieved through route and train design and station locations that maximise housing development (including affordable and key worker housing) and reduce to the need for further rural traffic generation.

Supporting existing corridors: Our most economically productive transport corridor is that connecting Cambridge to London and we have no evidence to suggest that this has or will change in the future. Linking EWR into this corridor, preferably through a Cambridge entry-point at Cambridge South, will be essential for connecting the “Golden Triangle” of London, Oxford and Cambridge. There are also important but less well-developed corridors between Cambridge and Norwich (specialising in Agri-Tech) and between Cambridge and Ipswich (specialising in IT), both of which would benefit from the Eastward expansion of East West Rail in the future. In addition, a fast and frequent connection to the East Coast Main Line will be extremely valuable for linking Cambridge and its hinterland more effectively with northern parts of the UK. Indeed, existing models suggest that current patterns of growth will facilitate the northward, eastward and southward expansion of the Cambridge Cluster. The final alignment of EWR route entry into Cambridge should be selected with this in mind.

Enhancing the environment: EWR should consider how it can realise its objectives with a net gain to the natural capital of the region. We welcome the proposed additional work to fully assess the impact of the scheme on the environment.

In addition the University would like reassurance that Network Rail will work with Central Government to enable a zero-carbon fuel solution from day one of operation and the design of the project should reflect this ambition as it develops.

Utilising technology: We encourage EWR to consider how it can incorporate cutting-edge data and transport technologies from both Cambridge & Oxford to make the rail connection a “living lab” for commuters and emerging innovations. This will help ensure the Oxford-Cambridge ARC delivers on the government’s construction and rail sector deals while simultaneously improving cross-country infrastructure.

The investment in the EWR and associated infrastructure along the corridor is welcomed and will support existing and future investment by the University and others. It will help to ensure that Cambridge remains a growing and sustainable centre of excellence and a world leader in the fields of higher education and research. It will help the city to nurture its growing industries and will facilitate a further expansion of its knowledge-based economy, while retaining the high quality of life and place that underpins our city and supports its standout economic success. It will help spread access to Cambridge’s many opportunities to communities across its hinterlands.

We fully support and remain committed to the overriding aim of the EWR. This task is more important than ever if we are to sustain Cambridge’s pace of growth and ambitions for sustainability.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the points raised in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Matthews', written over a light grey grid background.

Graham Matthews