



**Anthony Browne MP**  
Member of Parliament for South Cambridgeshire  
House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA  
Tel: 0207 219 8089

Friday 5 February 2021

Dear Resident,

## **East West Rail**

Thank you for taking the time to contact me regarding East West Rail (EWR). Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding. My office is dealing with a large volume of urgent enquiries relating to the pandemic and this has unfortunately meant it is taking longer than usual to respond on other matters.

I have had many emails from residents who are very concerned about East West Rail (EWR). These vary from concerns about the consultation process to the suitability of the proposed route corridor and the impact it will have on our villages, natural environment and quality of life. Due to the volume of correspondence, I have received on EWR in recent weeks I am unable to respond to every enquiry individually, so I am instead providing an update on all of the key issues, setting out what I am doing about them and outlining the next steps of the project. I recognise that this is not perfect but hope that this letter will cover the most commonly raised concerns. If there is anything I have not mentioned below that you would like me to address at this stage, please do let my office know at [anthony.browne.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:anthony.browne.mp@parliament.uk).

## **Route alignment options**

The most frequently raised concern I have received relates to the proposed route corridor selected by EWR. Corridor E would see a new station at Cambourne (the location of this is still be determined – I have pushed for it to be north of the town) and then the line would drop down to the south east and approach Cambridge via the new Cambridge South station (you can see an interactive map of corridor E [here](#)). The exact alignment of the route within that corridor has not yet been decided. Several options will be put out to a further public consultation, which is due to commence shortly.

There is, however, a growing call from residents, local campaign groups (most notably Cambridge Approaches and CamBed Railroad), parish councils, environmental and business groups to push EWR to give full consideration to an alternative route. This route would align with the A428 after Cambourne and then head north of the city, approaching Cambridge via Cambridge North station. It has been suggested that this route would be less environmentally damaging and would make a better business case because it would support the current and planned development to the north of Cambridge. It has also been suggested that this route would make more sense for freight movements between Felixstowe and the midlands, which I will say more on below.

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I have heard the arguments in favour of the northern approach option and find them persuasive. I certainly think that it warrants full consideration, and that the public should have a say on this option. I cannot say whether a northern or southern approach will be best for EWR. That is a decision that must be made by EWR depending on the evidence, detailed scoping work and outcome of public consultations. My aim is to ensure that both the northern and southern options are properly considered and consulted on. This will not only ensure that the best decision can be made, but also that the public can have confidence in the process. To this end, I have taken the following actions:

In January 2020 I wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport and raised the matter of the northern approach being considered. You can see a copy of his response [here](#).

In October 2020 I wrote to EWR's Chief Executive Officer to ask what consideration had been given to the northern approach. My letter and his response can be seen [here](#). Mr Blanchflower confirmed that a northern route had been considered at an early stage and in 2019, but EWR concluded that a southern approach was preferable. He also stated that EWR will 'back-check' their decisions at appropriate points to confirm that the southern approach continues to be the best option.

I am concerned that a 'back-checking' process does not give a strong enough commitment to providing the public with the opportunity to consider the merits of the northern approach. I therefore wrote to Mr Blanchflower again in January 2021 to request clarification of what this process involves. I will publish this correspondence when I have received a response.

In January 2021 I also wrote to the Rail Minister to urge him to ensure that EWR consults on a northern approach. Again, I will publish this correspondence when I have a response.

Over the last few months, I have facilitated and attended many meetings with local residents, representatives, campaign groups and EWR officials so that I can better understand the views of local people. I am keen to facilitate a dialogue between EWR and residents and will continue to do so. I am also committed to pushing for proper consideration of the northern approach for EWR and adding my voice to the call for this to be included in any public consultation.

## **Freight**

There is understandable concern about EWR being used for freight movements and the consequent impact of noise and vibration on nearby homes. EWR is quite definite that the line will be passenger focused, with four trains an hour. With this frequency of passenger services, it would be difficult to run freight trains (which travel at lower speeds) throughout the day. It is important to note that EWR has been created to build a passenger service and it does not fall within its remit to decide how much, if any, freight would be transported on the line. What they have been instructed to do is build a line that is *capable* of transporting freight. Given the

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environmental advantages of shifting freight from road to rail, this makes sense, but it also means that the issue of freight must be a key determinant in choosing the best route alignment for EWR.

Last year, Network Rail published a study on freight that mentioned the possibility of 50 trains per day being diverted via EWR. I wrote to Network Rail in January 2021 to ask for clarification of this report. My letter and Network Rail's response can be seen [here](#). It is not clear from Network Rail's response what the anticipated volumes of freight might be. This is an important matter and I have therefore written to the Rail Minister to ask what his department's plans and aspirations are for freight. I will publish this letter and the Rail Minister's response when I have it.

EWR has confirmed that the issue of freight will be included in the next phase of the consultation process, which is due to start in the next few weeks. I will continue to push for clarity on freight and to ensure that it is a crucial consideration in any decisions about route alignment.

### **Electrification**

Similarly, I have heard from constituents worried that EWR is planning to use diesel engines on the line, to the detriment of environmental targets. EWR has confirmed that the initial usage of diesel engines has been considered, particularly for the earlier phase of the project that will be operational before the Bedford to Cambridge section opens. My view is that to deliver on commitments to be carbon neutral, EWR should be electrified from the outset unless there is a clear plan to adopt an alternative green technology that does not require electrification. EWR's Chief Executive Simon Blanchflower has confirmed that they are actively engaged in looking at new technologies to enable this. I am also highlighting the importance of this matter with the Rail Minister.

### **Consultation**

The final matter I would like to address is consultation. Concerns have been raised with me about a lack of prior consultation with communities affected by EWR's preferred route E corridor. EWR's process to date is set out on their website [here](#). It included a number of events, details of which can be seen [here](#). This exercise pre-dated my election as an MP, but I am aware of local parish councils that did engage with this process.

There will be two further public consultations. The next will be a second 'non-statutory' consultation to help to choose a route alignment. EWR has advised me that this will include a leaflet delivery to all areas affected by the proposed route alignment options. Following that, there will be a statutory public consultation on the selected route alignment. The whole process is set out by EWR [here](#). For my part, I will continue do whatever I can to ensure that the

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consultation process is as full and transparent as possible as decisions on this important project are made in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Browne". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

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