



Anthony Browne MP
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Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
HM Treasury
Sent via email only.

11th May 2021

Dear Chancellor,

Re: East West Rail

I am writing to ask the Treasury to re-evaluate the economic case for East West Rail (EWR).

Since January 2020, the world has changed profoundly. The short-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on commuting patterns has seen a major reduction in passenger numbers on public transport and it is becoming clear that the pandemic has triggered some fundamental changes in our working patterns which are likely to be permanent.

Last week the BBC published research suggesting that 43 of the UK's biggest employers won't bring workers back to the office full-time. YouGov data from September last year suggests that 57% of people want to be able to work from home all or some of the time in the longer term. Employers see the benefits of incorporating home-working into their business models, both in terms of reducing overheads and improving staff well-being and productivity.

Faced with a potential sea-change in the way that we work, we must also re-assess previous assumptions about travel patterns and, consequently, whether the cost of the proposed Bedford to Cambridge section of EWR continues to represent good value for taxpayers' money. For example, I understand that commuting traffic makes up the majority of EWR projected revenues, but if people end up working from home on average two days a week on a long term basis, that will be a 40% reduction in commuting traffic and the revenue from that.

I would also ask you to confirm that any re-evaluation of the costs and benefits of EWR shall include provision for electrification of the line. In my constituency of South Cambridgeshire, there is huge controversy around the EWR project and widespread condemnation of the prospect of diesel trains running on this brand new line. I know the aim of the government is not to use diesel trains, but it is not being built as an electrified line, and there is currently no other technology that will work on a high speed train. It is difficult to explain to voters why the government is at the same time building a diesel railway line train to start operating in 2030 and phasing out all diesel trains by 2040. Our government has set ambitious targets to decarbonise the UK economy and we must back this with a firm guarantee to run our major new transport projects, including EWR, with green technology from the outset.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Browne MP

Cc: Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury

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