



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

Mr Simon Blanchflower CBE
Chief Executive Officer
East-West Rail Ltd

By email only

18th May 2021

Dear Mr Blanchflower,

EWR Consultation

Since the launch of EWR's non-statutory consultation, I have been talking to local residents, councillors and campaigners to hear their views on EWR's proposals. I am writing to alert you to some of the concerns I have heard from them and to ask you for clarification of a few matters.

It is fair to say there is widespread alarm at the prospect of very large embankments, viaducts and cuttings that would change the landscape of South Cambridgeshire and impact profoundly upon many of our cherished villages. The size and scale of these proposed structures have come as a shock to me, the local residents I have spoken to and the many who have written to me. There is huge frustration that the consultation documents lack detail about these controversial features of the scheme. There are no artists impressions, visualisations, diagrams or schematics of any kind to show us what the proposed new railway line would look like. This is critical information that is needed to inform respondents' views on route alignment options. Given the amount of time EWR has had to prepare these documents, this is very puzzling. Leaving it to the statutory consultation to publish this information, when you have already selected a preferred route alignment is, in my view, far too late.

The consultation documents give little detail about how EWR's proposed route alignment options will impact upon existing roads, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways. There is a lot of concern that villages will be severed from their neighbours and access to local facilities will be cut off. Parents are worried that their children's route to school will be blocked or that they will be required to walk or cycle through gloomy underpasses. Farmers fear that their land will become inaccessible and unviable.

On the important issues of freight and electrification, there continues to be a lack of clarity, which makes meaningful consultation impossible for residents. They simply cannot reach an informed view on a proposed route alignment if they don't know whether there will be noisy and polluting diesel and freight trains passing near their homes and villages throughout the day and night.

Whilst I welcome the fact that your consultation document sets out the reasons why EWR has rejected a northern approach and offers the opportunity to comment on this decision, it is disappointing that you have stopped short of a full assessment and consultation on a northern

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approach. Many people have said to me that this seems to be a missed opportunity on EWR's part. You will not be surprised to hear that local campaign groups, such as Cambridge Approaches and CamBed RailRoad will be challenging a number of the assumptions and assertions made in Appendix F of the Technical Report and they have asked me to raise these with you (I will be writing to you separately with specific questions on this).

Residents living in villages north of the A428 are concerned that they have been neglected in this and previous consultation exercises. EWR's emerging preferred alignment now includes a station north of Cambourne, which falls outside the Corridor E option area published in early 2020. This has raised major concerns about what this might mean for future housebuilding and development in the area, but these communities are only now becoming aware of the EWR's proposals and have had little time to organise themselves and meet to discuss their responses to the consultation. This is, of course, further compounded by the challenges of this whole consultation exercise being carried out whilst Covid restrictions remain in place and face to face meetings cannot be held.

In recent days, I have noted an increasing number of calls questioning the economic case for EWR in view of the changes to working patterns and the possibility of a long-term reduction in post pandemic passenger numbers. This is a fundamental consideration for the future of the EWR project. We must have confidence that taxpayers' money is well spent, for the benefit of our communities.

In view of the above concerns, I would be grateful to receive your response to the following questions:

1. Is EWR willing to extend the non-statutory consultation period beyond 9th June to allow local communities to meet, (after Covid restrictions have been relaxed) discuss and prepare their responses to the consultation? If not, why not?
2. Will EWR publish, before the end of this consultation period, any visual illustrations of the proposed structures including the embankment, viaducts, cuttings and grade separated junctions? If not, why not?
3. Will EWR confirm, before the end of this consultation period, which (if any) existing roads, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways it expects to close and, in each case, provide details of the mitigation (if any) that will be put in place to compensate for any such closures. In particular, can you confirm in writing that the road from Harlton to Haslingfield will not be severed?
4. Will EWR confirm, before the end of this consultation period, details of the green technologies it is exploring as an alternative to electrification and state what stage of development any such technology has reached?

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5. Will EWR, before the end of this consultation period, provide any further information concerning the projected freight volumes and hours of operation of freight trains that will or could use the new line?

6. What analysis is being undertaking to re-assess the economic case for the Bedford to Cambridge section of EWR, given the evolving evidence that significant levels of homeworking will continue in the longer term and the consequent reduction in passenger numbers?

I look forward to hearing from you and would ask that you please respond at the earliest possible opportunity, given that time of the essence to get answers to these questions whilst the current consultation is still live.

Kind regards,

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