



Department
for Transport

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From the Minister of State
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Dear Anthony,

Thank you for your letter of 11 May to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, about East West Rail. Your letter has been passed to this Department and I am replying as the Minister responsible for this issue.

You are right in saying that COVID-19 has required changes to working practices, particularly around virtual meetings and virtual engagement. While no consensus has formed about long-term rail demand in the UK, EWR Co has started testing the possible impact a long-run rise in working from home could have on the route.

EWR is a key project for supporting the delivery of the Government's objectives for the Oxford Cambridge Arc. The Government's vision of the Arc is based upon stimulating economic growth, making it easier for new businesses to start and grow as well as supporting new homes to make it more affordable to live in the local area; this includes providing transport choices for the new businesses and residents. EWR is a long-term project and while the current and future effects of COVID-19 are being monitored, the Government is clear that EWR is an important part of the country's recovery.

East West Rail Company and the Department for Transport are committed to doing the right thing for the communities we serve.

On electrification, it is likely that diesel rolling stock could be used for the first services in Connection Stages 1 and 2 of EWR – Oxford to Bedford. We believe this is the right interim solution to ensure the benefits of EWR for passengers in Connection Stages 1 and 2 can be realised as soon as possible, with the earliest entry into service dates. This would allow EWR Co to explore a wider range of green energy technologies so that they can move closer towards becoming a net-zero carbon railway by the time services run from Oxford to Cambridge.

The case for the electrification of EWR is being considered. A review is being undertaken by EWR Co, which is looking at options including full electrification along the whole route as well as various options for partial electrification using battery / electric hybrid rolling stock, and other sustainable rolling stock options.

Finally, public consultation has been, and continues to be, a crucial part in the development of EWR Co's plans. That is why EWR Co has made great efforts to speak with as many local people as possible and are currently undertaking a non-statutory consultation, due to close on the 9 June, to which I encourage as many of your constituents as possible to take part.

Thank you again for getting in touch. I hope that this addresses your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Minister of State for Transport