



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
& PETERBOROUGH**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY

# CPCA: East-West Rail Non- Statutory Consultation Response

24<sup>th</sup> January 2025

## Introduction

The Combined Authority welcomes the opportunity to respond to the East-West Rail Company's (EWRC) non-statutory consultation. As the strategic transport authority for the region, we are committed to ensuring that infrastructure projects, such as the East-West Rail (EWR), align with our objectives to promote sustainable, inclusive, and integrated transport solutions. This response aims to provide constructive feedback, highlight key considerations, and advocate for outcomes that maximise benefits for communities, businesses, and the environment across the region. We look forward to continued collaboration to deliver a transport network that supports economic growth and connectivity while addressing the challenges of climate change and local priorities.

EWR is a major infrastructure project designed to establish a strategic rail connection between Oxford and Cambridge, two of the UK's most significant economic and academic hubs. By linking these cities and the surrounding areas, EWR aims to create a fast, reliable, and sustainable transport corridor, facilitating access to jobs, education, and housing while reducing car dependency and supporting economic growth across the region.

As a vital component of the region's transport infrastructure, EWR represents a significant step forward in supporting sustainable growth, economic prosperity, and enhanced connectivity. The Combined Authority is broadly supportive of the project, which aligns with our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and Corporate Plan's aims, aspirations and objectives. However, there are a number of critical points that we request the EWRC to consider, ensuring that the project delivers maximum benefits while mitigating potential risks and disbenefits.

## Alignment with Strategic Objectives

EWR is a key component of the Combined Authority's vision to deliver an integrated, sustainable transport network that supports economic growth and tackles climate change. The project aligns with our LTCP objectives, which prioritise connectivity, accessibility, and sustainability. In this context, it is essential to underscore the importance of ensuring that the EWR project is designed to complement and enhance existing transport strategies. This includes fostering integration with other transformative initiatives, such as bus reform programme, the development of active travel networks, and the A428 improvement scheme. A coordinated approach will ensure these efforts collectively support a seamless, multimodal transport system that maximises accessibility and sustainability.

EWR directly supporting the objectives of the emerging Local Growth Plan by enhancing connectivity, driving economic growth, and enabling sustainable development across the region. By linking key employment hubs, educational institutions, and growth areas, EWR will create new opportunities for businesses and residents, fostering innovation and improving access to jobs and services. The railway aligns with the Combined Authority's vision for a greener, more inclusive economy by promoting sustainable travel and reducing reliance on cars, contributing to decarbonisation targets. Additionally, EWR will act as a catalyst for strategic housing and commercial development, ensuring that growth is well-distributed and accessible, reinforcing the region's role as a driver of national economic prosperity.

There is a critical need to align with complementary projects that will unlock the region's full potential. This includes the Eastern Gateway initiative at Cambridge Station, which presents an opportunity to establish EWR as a central pillar of the region's transport ecosystem.

## Environmental and Biodiversity Concerns

Whilst the Combined Authority supports the principle of EWR, there remain a number of significant concerns about its potential environmental impacts, particularly on biodiversity, tree canopy and natural habitats. The proposed route traverses areas of high ecological value, including habitats critical for protected species and sites designated for conservation. Therefore, the Combined Authority strongly recommend that the following measures be prioritised by EWRC:

- **Rigorous Environmental Assessments:** A thorough Environmental Impact Assessment must be conducted, with transparent reporting and public consultation to address biodiversity loss, tree canopy loss and habitat fragmentation.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain:** The project must commit to achieving an aspirational level of biodiversity net gain (20% as a minimum), aligning with national policy and best practices. However, it is strongly encouraged that EWRC go above and beyond national biodiversity policy by supporting the Combined Authority's Doubling Nature vision. This should include habitat creation, restoration, and long-term monitoring.
- **Full Electrification from Day One:** Fully electrifying EWR from the outset ensures long-term sustainability, maximises operational efficiency, and aligns with national net-zero carbon targets. It avoids future retrofitting costs, enhances reliability, and supports a modern, decarbonised rail network critical for reducing transport emissions and meeting environmental commitments. In addition, it would also play a key role in improving air quality by reducing transport emissions, supporting healthier communities, and meeting broader environmental commitments.
- **Minimising Disruption:** Construction activities should be carefully planned to reduce disruption to sensitive areas, with consideration given to innovative engineering solutions to avoid ecologically significant sites.
- **Comprehensive Ancillary Land Use Planning:** EWRC must incorporate thorough studies of ancillary land uses into their planning, ensuring adequate provisions for workforce accommodation, equipment storage, and other temporary facilities during construction. Lessons from projects like the A14 highlight the need to plan for workforce needs proactively, including avoiding unanticipated land take and the emergence of informal caravan sites. By addressing these aspects within their studies and proposals, EWRC can minimise disruptions to local communities and landscapes while ensuring a well-coordinated and efficient delivery of the project.

## Connectivity and Integration

A key strength of EWR lies in its potential to enhance east-west connectivity across the region. However, this potential can only be realised if the project is planned with integration and accessibility at its core.

- **First and Last-Mile Connectivity:** To maximise usage, it is essential to address first and last-mile connectivity as part of the Development Consent Order, rather than leaving it as a post-decision matter. This includes ensuring seamless integration with local transport networks, providing safe and accessible walking and cycling routes, and delivering adequate bus and other multimodal transport connections to link communities to the railway effectively. Crucially, the EWRC should also assist in funding these improvements and their ongoing maintenance, recognising their pivotal role in enabling equitable and sustainable access to the railway. Other issues to address in relation to first and last-mile connectivity include:
  - **Active Travel:** Ensuring that all stations are accessible via well-designed, high quality and safe walking and cycling infrastructure, with secure bicycle parking

and seamless links to links to local active travel networks in both existing and future communities. The Combined Authority is pleased to note that all crossings will be grade-separated and seek that EWRC also support the inclusion of an active travel route along the entire length of the East West Rail corridor.

- If opportunities are explored to assess the potential for an **eastern access to Cambridge station**. This approach should be developed in a way that prioritises sustainable modes of transport, ensuring there is no increase in vehicle movements or congestion in the surrounding area and developed with a thorough and meaningful public consultation.
- **Bus Integration** to include:
  - **Seamless Transport Network:** EWR should prioritise creating a truly integrated transport network, enabling passengers to transition effortlessly between rail and bus services. This requires careful design of platform-to-platform transitions using a bus for last mile convenience whilst the train service allows faster end to end travel.
  - **Through Ticketing:** Implementing a unified ticketing system that allows passengers to purchase a single ticket covering both rail and bus journeys. This will require detailed collaboration on ticket design as the ticketing technologies need to remain aligned in years to come.
  - **Alignment of Timetables:** Coordinating bus and train schedules to minimise waiting times and ensure smooth connections at key hubs.
  - **Proximity of Interchange:** Ensuring bus interchanges are as conveniently located as possible to station entrances, reducing walking distances and improving accessibility for all users.
  - **Accessible for All:** Designing infrastructure that caters to passengers with mobility challenges, including step-free access and clear wayfinding.
  - **Comprehensive Information:** Providing real-time travel information for both rail and bus services through digital and physical displays, helping passengers plan their journeys effectively.
- **Regional Connectivity:** The Combined Authority stresses the importance of extending the benefits of EWR beyond its immediate corridor:
  - **Eastward Extensions:** EWRC must examine connections to the east through increased capacity to include Newmarket, the rest of Suffolk and Norfolk, including options like dualling the line. Due consideration needs to be given to the potential of a new station at Cambridge East, and other emerging growth areas. This ensures EWR contributes to a truly regional transport network. Opportunities should be explored to examine how the proposed eastern turnback could be further developed into a new station. Such a station would provide enhanced connectivity, supporting existing and future businesses and residents in Cherry Hinton, Fulbourn, Peterhouse Technology Park, the Marshall's site, and the Fulbourn Hospital site.
  - **Integration with Other Rail Routes:** EWR should complement existing rail services, such as onwards connections to Peterborough and planned upgrades, avoiding duplication and ensuring robust connections to national and regional rail networks. Ultimately this could benefit interchange between EWR and ECML, creating enhanced travel for a substantial population.

## Alignment with Key Schemes

EWR must be strategically aligned with other major infrastructure projects to ensure coherence and cost-effectiveness. Notable examples include:

- **A428 Improvements:** As the A428 corridor undergoes significant enhancements, there is an opportunity to align EWR planning to reduce duplication, coordinate post-construction nature restoration and ensure complementary connectivity.
- **Cambridge to Cambourne (C2C):** EWR should be seamlessly integrated with the Cambridge to Cambourne (C2C) scheme to deliver a cohesive transport solution for this rapidly growing corridor. This could include innovative design elements, such as “step-across” facilities, where EWR trains align with C2C vehicles at shared platforms, enabling passengers to transfer effortlessly between services. Such integration would not only enhance accessibility but also provide a user-friendly, multimodal transport experience. By prioritising alignment between these schemes, EWR and C2C can collectively support sustainable growth, reduce car dependency, and offer a practical alternative to private vehicle use, thereby contributing to the region’s environmental and economic goals. This approach should underscore a commitment to best-in-class infrastructure that meets the needs of both current and future communities.
- **Ely Area Capacity Enhancements (EACE):** Delivering the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements is crucial to unlocking the full potential of EWR (and vice versa). Without these improvements, existing bottlenecks in the Ely area could limit connectivity, reduce network resilience, and restrict the ability to accommodate the increased freight and passenger services that EWR will enable. By addressing these capacity constraints, EACE will not only enhance the operational efficiency of EWR but also support wider regional growth, improve multimodal transport integration, and contribute to achieving long-term sustainability goals.

## Mitigating the Impacts of the Delivery Phase

The Combined Authority is keenly aware of the potential disruptions caused by large-scale infrastructure projects. To mitigate these impacts, we recommend:

- **Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Robust and transparent engagement with constituent Councils, relevant ward councillors, and affected communities, ensuring clear communication about construction timelines, mitigation measures, and safeguarding of land. This collaborative approach builds trust, aligns project goals with local needs, and supports the successful integration of the railway into the surrounding area.
- **Traffic Management Plans:** Robust plans to minimise disruption to local transport networks, ensuring access for residents and businesses during the construction phase.
- **Noise and Vibration Control:** Implementation of state-of-the-art techniques to limit noise and vibration impacts on nearby communities. Residents must be provided with sufficient notice of planned works, enabling them to make necessary arrangements. The scheduling of works will also be carefully planned to minimise disruption, taking into account the specific needs and routines of the local community. Furthermore, reassurance will be given that maximum use is made of rail solutions for both construction and installation of the rail infrastructure.
- **Support for Local Communities:** Establishing a fund to address unforeseen impacts and to support affected communities during the construction period and consult with National Highways to learn lessons from the construction of the A428 along the same east-west corridor. In addition, the development of EWR presents a valuable opportunity to address the longstanding issues associated with the Fen Road level crossing. It is essential that EWRC prioritises resolving these challenges as part of the project to enhance safety, connectivity, and local access.

## Addressing Community Severance

One of the most significant risks associated with EWR is the potential severance of communities. The Combined Authority is particularly concerned about:

- **Physical Barriers:** Rail lines and infrastructure can create barriers that isolate neighbourhoods, limiting access to schools, healthcare, and employment opportunities.
- **Social Impacts:** Severance can exacerbate social inequalities, particularly in areas already facing economic challenges.

To mitigate these risks, the Combined Authority propose the use of:

- **Underpasses and Overpasses:** EWRC must ensure strategic placement of pedestrian and cycle-friendly crossings to maintain community cohesion.
- **Station Accessibility:** Ensuring that new and existing stations are designed to maximise accessibility for all users, including those with disabilities.
- **Community-Led Design:** Involving local residents in the planning process to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed. Development of a best-practice-informed matrix to systematically evaluate landowner concerns alongside potential opportunities for optimising the use of requisitioned land, thereby creating added value and maximising the benefits of land acquisition.

Therefore, EWRC should actively engage with local communities to ensure that the impact of its projects is minimised at the local level. Local residents possess valuable knowledge of their area, including insights into specific challenges such as severance issues, that may not be immediately apparent to external stakeholders. By fostering open communication and collaboration with these communities, the EWRC can better address concerns, identify practical solutions, and deliver outcomes that are both effective and sensitive to local needs.

## Delivering a Sustainable Transport Network

The Combined Authority views EWR as an opportunity to set a benchmark for sustainable transport infrastructure. Key recommendations include:

- **Decarbonisation:** Prioritising the use of electrified rail to support the national goal of net-zero emissions.
- **Green Infrastructure:** Incorporating green infrastructure into the project design, such as green bridges and planting schemes to enhance the natural landscape.
- **Freight Considerations:** EWR presents a significant opportunity to reduce road freight dependency by offering efficient, non-diesel and sustainable rail freight options aligned with the Combined Authority's emerging Freight Strategy. At present, substantial freight flows exist along the East-West corridor, including the movement of goods by ship from the Port of Felixstowe to the Midlands. Leveraging EWR to support these flows could enhance logistical efficiency while alleviating pressure on the region's road network. Another promising opportunity lies in rail's role in supplying materials for the proposed reservoir in the central Fens. The development of rail infrastructure to support these large-scale projects would offer significant environmental and operational benefits, ensuring that freight movements are both efficient and sustainable. By capitalising on these possibilities, EWR can play a pivotal role in transforming regional freight logistics, supporting economic growth, and contributing to the wider goal of sustainable transport solutions.

## Local Planning Considerations

In terms of strategic planning for Huntingdonshire, several substantial parcels of land identified through a recent Call for Sites process are situated in close proximity to the proposed route sections 5 and 6. The potential development of a Wintringham station would significantly enhance the sustainability of these prospective new communities. It would also provide proximate access to the line for the existing population of St Neots and the large urban expansion already underway at St Neots East.

Improved rail connectivity would not only align with local and regional objectives for sustainable development but also provide essential infrastructure to support the growth envisaged and underway in these locations. However, it is important to note that Huntingdonshire District Council's Local Plan review remains at an early stage, and further analysis will be required to fully assess these opportunities.

Additionally, the Combined Authority identifies St Neots as a Further Education "coldspot" that underscores the critical need for accessible post-16 educational facilities in this region. Addressing this gap in provision will be inherently more sustainable if rail connectivity is integrated into the solution. A station at Wintringham could play a pivotal role in enabling students to travel to and from educational institutions efficiently, thereby supporting both educational attainment and sustainable transport objectives.

At a minimum, it is crucial for the EWRC to proactively safeguard land adjacent to the proposed rail line near St. Neots and Wintringham. This strategic measure will not only preserve the potential for future development but also ensure flexibility as we refine and advance our collective vision for the area's growth and connectivity.

In addition, the inclusion of stations at Harston and Comberton would significantly enhance accessibility for residents, connecting these rural communities to the wider Cambridge area and beyond. Harston and Comberton, home to a large sixth form centre, would greatly benefit from improved public transport links, reducing reliance on car travel and easing congestion on local roads. These stations would also support sustainable travel options for students, employees, and residents, fostering greener, more inclusive growth in the region.

A station at Comberton would provide direct access to the sixth form college, making it easier for students and staff from surrounding areas to commute efficiently and sustainably. Meanwhile, a station at Harston would serve its population and connect the village to key employment and education hubs in Cambridge and beyond. By including these stations, EWR can deliver a transformative infrastructure project that promotes accessibility, reduces car dependency, and supports equitable development across the region.

Therefore, EWRC must collaborate closely with Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to ensure that land required for the railway is appropriately safeguarded and integrated into local development plans. This proactive approach would help prevent potential conflicts with future land use, ensuring that the railway's infrastructure and surrounding developments can coexist harmoniously. Developing design and policy principles in partnership with LPAs would enable the alignment of EWR's objectives with local planning strategies, supporting sustainable growth while minimising disruption. By fostering this collaboration, EWR can contribute to well-planned, resilient communities that benefit from enhanced connectivity and the long-term opportunities provided by the rail network.

## Legacy Implications

EWRC has a significant opportunity to contribute to the local community by establishing a robust programme for ongoing engagement with schools, colleges, and other educational institutions to promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects. Such a programme would inspire interest in transport, engineering, and infrastructure careers, helping to build a pipeline of local talent for future job opportunities, including apprenticeships.

By working with schools across all age groups, EWR can create an education legacy that fosters skills development, aligns with local economic needs, and raises awareness about the career pathways linked to the project. Additionally, EWR should outline a clear strategy for sourcing its labour force locally at at least the real living wage, ensuring the project delivers economic benefits to the region while addressing potential skills shortages. This commitment would demonstrate a long-term investment in the area's social and economic growth, contributing to a positive legacy for education and employment.

## Conclusion

To conclude, the Combined Authority reiterates its strong support for the East-West Rail project as a transformative initiative for the region. However, its success hinges on addressing the concerns outlined above to ensure that the project delivers long-term benefits while minimising risks and adverse impacts. By prioritising environmental stewardship, connectivity, integration, and community cohesion, EWR can become a cornerstone of a sustainable, inclusive, and prosperous transport network.

The Combined Authority look forward to continued collaboration on this project and are committed to supporting its successful delivery. Should you require further input or wish to discuss any of the points raised in this response, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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