

Briefing note

MKCC Consultation Response to East West Rail (EWR)

Prepared by	Elizabeth Verdegem – Team Leader (Strategic Team) Development Management
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Purpose	To set out the Council's response to the East West Rail Non-Statutory Consultation

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) welcome the opportunity to respond to this public consultation from East West Rail Company ('the applicant'). To date, officers at MKCC have been involved with the pre-application process and MKCC are, in principle, supportive of the evolution of the EWR proposals, including the increased connectivity across the region and enabling of economic growth. The main elements affecting Milton Keynes are as follows:

- A Bletchley West train maintenance depot and passing loops (west of borough boundary);
- An eastern entrance for Bletchley station, including platform extension and improvements;
- Platform extension at Milton Keynes Central;
- Consolidating stations option along the Marston Vale Line (MVL), including closing Fenny Stratford and Bow Brickhill stations, and relocation of Woburn Sands Station to the west;
- Closing level crossings at Fenny Stratford and Bow Brickhill, including provision of a new overbridge at V10 Brickhill Street;
- Electrification of existing MVL; and
- Closure of Aspley Guise and relocation of Ridgmont station to the west of the M1 (east of borough boundary).

Direct connection of the UK's fastest growing city, Milton Keynes, with Oxford and Cambridge, has the potential to create major economic and social benefits for the city and region. It will also strengthen the role of Bletchley, helping enhance the regeneration initiatives already underway in the town, by connecting it directly into cities and towns along the EWR route. Milton Keynes also sees huge economic benefit in improved connectivity with adjacent towns and cities, as well as the Universal Studios project in Bedford which represents significant investment in the region.

The following points set out our brief comments on the main elements of the proposal which affect Milton Keynes. Further detailed comments will be provided at the appropriate pre-submission stages, and through the continuing workshops and technical forums.

An eastern entrance for Bletchley station, including platform extension and improvements

MKCC are highly supportive of an eastern entrance to Bletchley station, improving connectivity to the town, and supporting the Council's wider regeneration aspirations for Bletchley. The applicant must ensure they understand the Council's plans to transform Saxon Street into a multi-modal street. It is

essential that the design and delivery of the eastern entrance are coordinated with the Saxon Street project to ensure alignment in both design and construction phasing.

Proposals including the improved western ticket hall and new accessible footbridge are also supported, which will ease pedestrian congestion at peak times. Given funding arrangements are still in question regarding the eastern entrance, a firm commitment by the applicant to contribute towards the costs of the eastern entrance would be supported and provide assurance that the proposal will contribute to Bletchley's regeneration, as part of the Town Deal programme.

It is noted that the consultation document is silent on a potential connection at Bletchley between EWR east and the West Coast Mainline (WCML) north, which would allow for direct passenger services from Milton Keynes Central to Bedford and Cambridge and for freight services to join the WCML northbound from the eastern section of EWR. MKCC would continue to support exploration of delivering this connection and urges the applicant to consider including this additional connection at Bletchley in the core scheme proposals.

Consolidating stations option along the Marston Vale Line (MVL), including closing Fenny Stratford and Bow Brickhill stations, and relocation of Woburn Sands Station to the west

MKCC are supportive of a new, modern station at Woburn Sands that will provide an active travel hub and enhanced public transport infrastructure. Further discussions are required relating to levels of private car parking, and the timing and delivery of the Woodley's Bridge crossing (within South East Milton Keynes (SEMK)) and the related frequency of use of the Woburn Sands level crossing. The success of the new station will be dependent on the active travel integration with existing communities and new residential development at part of SEMK, where the Council supports maximising housing delivery to ensure a sustainable new community.

The increased frequency of the Woburn Sands level crossing closure may also have an impact on the viability of Woburn Sands High Street, which needs consideration.

Closing level crossings, including provision of a new overbridge at V10 Brickhill Street

MKCC are highly supportive of replacing the level crossing with a new overbridge at Brickhill Street. Continued discussion with Red Bull Group, whose campus at Tilbrook is a national economic asset and a significant local employer, will be necessary in developing these plans. Concern remains that existing travel patterns may be disrupted by the changes, leading to traffic and travel disruption, which needs further consideration.

A Bletchley West train maintenance depot and passing loops (west of borough boundary); Platform extension at Milton Keynes Central; Electrification of existing MVL; and Closure of Aspley Guise and relocation of Ridgmont station to the west of the M1 (east of borough boundary).

MKCC are supportive of the additional rail infrastructure required to deliver a successful EWR service, in particular electrification of the line, and enhancements at Milton Keynes Central as needed. The applicant is reminded that development adjacent and near the borough boundary, such as the proposed train maintenance depot and relocation of Ridgmont station (as well as proposals related to Universal Studios) are likely to also have an impact on Milton Keynes, including visual impacts, noise and traffic considerations. The Council should be kept apprised and involved in discussions in relation to these proposals.

It should also be noted that Ecology officers have objection to the proposed Fenny Stratford East Main Construction compound which, as an established woodland habitat, is not supported by the Council for ecological reasons. Discussions should be had with Ecology Officers at the earliest opportunity to seek alternative location for the proposal compound.

Further environmental considerations

In addition to the above site-specific comments, Council officers point out the full consideration needed for the following technical aspects along the route, and continue to welcome early discussion on the following:

- The landscape/townscape visual impact of the proposal (in particular the Brickhill Street overbridge, and new Woburn Sands Station and multi-storey car park), impact on existing residents, site allocation, Special Landscape Areas, and the associated mitigation;
- The heritage impacts of the proposal, including the effect on the setting on existing heritage assets, including mitigation where appropriate;
- Consideration of the ecological impact of construction including construction compounds, on existing wildlife sites, including priority habitats including for Great Crested Newts;
- Integration of ecological and flood alleviation areas with existing proposals, such as the Grand Union Canal Water Transfer project and, in particular, SEMK where there is potential for an overlap of mitigation areas, giving consideration to existing residents and future use as part of the strategic urban expansion; and
- Continued exploration of traffic and transport modelling due to demand from Universal Studios, including short-term proposals for Milton Keynes Central as a transport hub for the theme park, whilst the impact and diversion patterns for all modes of transport as a result of closure of level crossings need to continue to be explored.

The Council support continuing engagement in further discussions with EWR over all aspects of this proposal, and we hope to continue to work collectively to address any issues raised as the scheme continues to be refined further prior to the Development Consent Order (DCO) application.