

CPRE Bedfordshire Briefing

EAST WEST RAIL - Consultation March 2019

CPRE Bedfordshire's Preferred Route - Route B

Background

The East West Rail project has been established by the Department for Transport (DfT) to link communities and reduce travel costs and journey times by creating direct links between Oxford, Cambridge and the communities in between. It also provides opportunities for better onward connections both north-south and further east and west.

The project is part of Oxford-Cambridge Corridor strategy recommended by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) which is supported by the government. The National Infrastructure Commission projects that the corridor will become host to major hi-tech industrial developments and will be the site to one million new homes by 2050.

CPRE Bedfordshire supports East West Rail (electrified) in principle, but see it primarily as a means of reducing congestion on major road networks, reducing air pollution and carbon footprint, not as a means of creating a massive new urban conurbation stretching from Oxford to Cambridge.

CPRE Bedfordshire has already dismissed proposals for new towns and urban extensions, several of them along the East West Rail corridor, put forward by Central Bedfordshire Council in their submitted Local Plan, because they have not undertaken and published detailed assessments of the evidence base for the locations chosen.

This includes land at Tempsford identified with potential for the development of 10,000+ new homes (almost 3 times the size of Ampthill) which we reject out of hand.

Consultation on proposed Bedford to Cambridge Route Options

There are 5 routes chosen for consultation, identified as options A to E. The consultation document highlights two key practicalities for consideration regarding routes within Bedfordshire;

1. The need to provide an Interchange with the Midland Mainline at the existing Bedford Midland station or at a new station to be located south of Bedford or at Wixams
2. The need to provide an Interchange with the East Coast Main Line at a new station; a) somewhere between Sandy and St Neots, b) slightly north of the existing Sandy station, c) slightly south of the existing Sandy station

CPRE Bedfordshire's response to the consultation on proposed East West Rail route options

Interchange with the Midland Mainline:

CPRE Bedfordshire supports the option which includes a new station at Wixams

The Technical Report states that for routes locating the interchange south of Bedford;

East West rail “....could diverge from the Marston Vale line around Stewartby near Bedford. It could then serve a new split-level ‘Bedford South’ station to the south of the A421, which could alternatively be located near Wixams (i.e. the EWR track and platforms could sit above the Midland Main Line). This could provide a direct interchange with Thameslink services along the Midland Main Line and other Midland Main Line services through a further interchange at Bedford Midland.”

The advantages of locating the interchange at a new Bedford South/ Wixams station are:

- **Solves the serious problem of a station at Wixams** (which Bedford Borough Council have already committed to in terms of funding with some developer support) which will grow by a further approx. +2000 homes in the next few years.
- **Provides good connectivity for both the Thameslink and MML services** - with a very short journey (a few minutes only) to Bedford Midland via Thameslink to get to Bedford town or connect with MML services.
- **Reduces traffic in Bedford town which would result from an East/West rail interchange at Bedford Midland** - avoiding increased traffic flows into the town centre putting additional pressure on already over-stretched parking capacity and adding to congestion and pollution.
- **Prevents disturbance of the tranquillity of small rural villages and countryside north of Bedford** which would result from locating the interchange at Bedford Midland and the line then exiting Bedford Midland station from the north and then diverge in an easterly direction
- **Taking the line to Bedford Midland and then north of Bedford would open up the whole of rural North Bedfordshire to development on a very large scale** - something we should strongly resist.
- **Creates the opportunity to open up proper cycle routes into and out of Bedford town centre to the new Bedford South/Wixams station** by developing a cycleway crossing of the A421.

Interchange with the East Coast Main Line:

CPRE Bedfordshire supports the option which includes a new station located somewhere between St Neots and north of Sandy

The advantages of locating the interchange at a new station somewhere between St Neots and north of Sandy are;

- Serves existing and growing populations in the vicinity of St Neots
- Minimises negative environmental impacts of route options south of Sandy, avoiding locations recognised as challenging due to environmental sensitivities at the RSPB Nature Reserve at Sandy Warren SSSI, Biggleswade Common and Wimpole Hall

CPRE Bedfordshire's preference reflects our priorities for the section of the route within Bedfordshire. We have developed a joint consultation response with CPRE Cambridgeshire and the other CPRE branches within the Oxford to Cambridge Arc which sets out preferred variations to routes within Cambridge. You can see the joint CPRE response at <http://www.cprebeds.org.uk/news/item/2404-cpre-bedfordshire-briefing-document-east-west-rail-consultation>

The route option within Bedfordshire which most closely meets CPRE Bedfordshire concerns is Route B

Bedford South - Sandy (re-located north) / Tempsford area / south of St Neots



FINAL DATE FOR CONSULTATION RESPONSE IS: 11:45pm, Monday 11 March 2019