

# Delegated Decisions report



8 June 2021

## Response to East West Rail Public Consultation 2021

Name of Cabinet Member	<b>Councillor Jennifer Wilson-Marklew</b> Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainability
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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	<b>No</b>
Council Plan reference	<b>Commitments 19, 20 &amp; 65</b>
Wards affected	<b>All wards (Specifically; Bletchley East, Bletchley West, Bletchley Park, Danesborough and Walton)</b>

### Executive summary

This report seeks approval for an official Milton Keynes Council response (Annex A) to the public consultation on the developing plans for East West Rail (EWR) released on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, which will link Bedford and Cambridge and complete the new rail link between Oxford and Cambridge serving Milton Keynes.

The consultation response reaffirms the Council's support for the project acknowledging the benefits it will deliver for Milton Keynes generally and Bletchley in particular which will serve as an interchange on the line with the West Coast Main Line. The consultation response also expresses the Council's views and preferences for improvements to the existing railway and stations for 'Section B' which covers Bletchley and Marston Vale Line. The consultation covers specifically customer experience and railway operations for EWR, as well as a range of infrastructure proposals such as route alignments, stations and level crossings.

The response comments on the two service level options outlined. Whilst Concept 2 has much to commend it, it is felt that there is insufficient detail in the consultation material for the Council to express a clear preference. In particular there are concerns at Fenny Stratford Station closing with no detail on how this impact will be mitigated.

The response also highlights support for the expansion and upgrade of Bletchley station as well as the relocation of Woburn Sands station and Ridgmont station which supports growth ambitions for the Milton Keynes South East Development areas as well projects such as a Mass Rapid Transit system.

In addition, the response presents the Council's views on options provided in the EWR consultation for level crossing closures at Fenny Stratford, Bow Brickhill, Browns Wood, Pony and Woburn Sands. The response includes the Council's preferences of the options provided where deemed appropriate and offers alternative options for EWR to consider.

It should be noted that the Council are also intending to agree and prepare a joint statement with Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council in response to the East West Rail consultation.

## 1. Decision to be made

- 1.1 That the Draft Milton Keynes Council response (as contained in Annex A) to the non-statutory public consultation held by EWR be approved for submission. This will contribute to the decisions to be taken on the East West Rail project delivery and improve the prospects that the final project provides maximum benefit to Milton Keynes and its residents.
- 1.2 That authority be delegated to the Interim Director of Planning, Strategic Transport and Placemaking to approve any minor amendments to the consultation response if required in advance of its submission.

## 2. Why is the decision needed?

- 2.1 To draft the Council response, cross service engagement was undertaken to draw together professional viewpoints from several departments including Strategic Transport, Highways, Planning, Passenger Transport, Rights of Way, Placemaking, Public Realm and Flood Management. In addition, viewpoints were obtained from the Milton Keynes Development Partnership and Central Bedfordshire Council. Comments received were collated to form the Council's consultation response with the main points and recommendations for options highlighted below.
- 2.2 EWR provided two concepts for consideration. Concept 1 would involve retaining the existing hourly service on the Marston Vale Line that stops at all current intermediate stations and introduces fast limited-stop Oxford to Cambridge services alongside it. Concept 2 involves merging the ten existing intermediate stations, creating five new modern stations with better facilities in locations more suitable for many existing needs and future travel patterns.

Concept 2 would result in Fenny Stratford Station closing. The potential impact of this on the local communities means the Council cannot support this, and there is a lack of detail in the consultation material on how this impact will be mitigated. Any mitigations to access new stations for residents affected by station closures must be clarified and communicated with the Council prior to decisions being made on a choice of the concepts.

- 2.3 The response endorses the expansion of Bletchley Station and how it supports the delivery of the transformational redevelopment and regeneration of Central Bletchley. The consultation also includes the development of an eastern entrance at the station which the response welcomes and supports.
- 2.4 The response favours the option to relocate Woburn Sands station as the current site is heavily constrained by surrounding development which presents a challenge for any future demand growth and opportunities for expansion. The relocation of Woburn Sands Station offers a new and modern station and benefits the proposed Milton Keynes South Eastern development. The relocation of Woburn Sands also fits the Council's aspirations for Mass Rapid Transit.
- 2.5 The relocation of Ridgmont station is also favoured as it offers a modern station and supports the Milton Keynes proposals for a park and ride and improved public transport connectivity to Milton Keynes for longer distance trips (Milton Keynes Mobility Strategy, 2019). It also could support future areas of growth to the south east of Milton Keynes.
- 2.6 The EWR consultation document provides several vehicular options and pedestrian and non-vehicular options for the closure of the Fenny Stratford level crossings. Overall, the Council response does not favour any of the vehicular options provided and suggests that alternative options are explored and discussed with the Council. This would include an option for the level crossing to remain in place.
- 2.7 Bow Brickhill level crossing closures and the mitigating four options provided presents land take issues as well as grid road status issues and deviation away from road design standards. The response hesitantly favours Option 4 as it is an online option and has less land take but is not ideal. The response makes it clear that Option 4 should only be considered ahead of the other three options if these remain the only choices, but it is suggested that another option of a V11 extension should be investigated which would negate the need for level crossing mitigations in Bow Brickhill apart from a possible footbridge. An invitation to discuss this option with the Council is included in the response.
- 2.8 The level crossing closure at Browns Wood presents a preferred option of a new footpath under the railway, but similar to Bows Brickhill, suggests that a V11 extension is preferable and should be considered further with the Council's engagement.

- 2.9 The response highlights Option 3 as a preference for the Pony level crossing closure which would provide an underpass in the same position as the current level crossing. This would support future south east Milton Keynes developments where the route will likely change from a relatively rural path to one with increased usage by all ages and abilities and level of mobility.
- 2.10 There are a number of level crossing closures in Woburn Sands making a decision on potential mitigations quite complex, however from a strategic point of view the option of a bypass is favoured as it supports future potential growth to the south east of Milton Keynes and provides future opportunities to become a Mass Rapid Transit route. The bypass itself presents several issues which are highlighted in the response which EWR are asked to consider and clarify.
- 2.11 Other general comments in the response include; no objection to the additional track required between Bletchley and Fenny Stratford, the welcome inclusion of electrification of the railway with an objective to not use diesel powered trains, and other highlighted potential issues and opportunities to engage with the Council on such as freight and highways matters.

**3. Implications of the decision**

Financial	No	Human rights, equalities, diversity	No
Legal	Yes	Policies or Council Plan	Yes
Communication	No	Procurement	No
Energy Efficiency	No	Workforce	No

**a) Policy**

EWR forms a key part of the Council’s Mobility Strategy for Milton Keynes 2018-2036 (Local Transport Plan 4). It supports delivery of all four of the strategy’s objectives. The consultation response submitted is in line with the existing position outlined in the Mobility Strategy.

**b) Financial implications**

The consultation response has no resource implications and does not commit the council to any further action. There are not considered to be any financial risks associated with the proposed consultation response.

**c) Legal implications**

The consultation is open to the public, local authorities and other public bodies to respond to. The decision is required to ensure that the response put forward by the Council has undergone due governance process and reflects the approved view of Milton Keynes Council. The request for delegation to the Director of Planning, Strategic Transport and Placemaking is permissible under the Council’s constitution.

## d) Other implications

The consultation response reflects existing Council policy and will not directly result in any changes to existing or proposed infrastructure or services. The decision to approve the consultation response is therefore not considered to have any other implications.

## 4. Options

- 4.1 Approve Milton Keynes Council response (as contained in Annex A) to the non-statutory public consultation released by EWR on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. This will contribute to the decisions to be taken on the East West Rail project delivery and improve the prospects that the final project provides maximum benefit to Milton Keynes and its residents.
- 4.2 Do not submit a Council response. This increases the risk that the project will fail to deliver its full potential in Milton Keynes with regards to improved connectivity, support for economic and population growth, and in encouraging modal shift to rail.

## 5. Timetable

A draft response (as contained in Annex A) has been submitted in advance to EWR as the consultation closes on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021, one day prior to the Delegated Decision of 8<sup>th</sup> June 2021. It has been agreed with EWR that the Council can submit any amendments resulting from the Delegated Decision and during the call-in period prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

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## List of Annexes

Annex A – Draft Milton Keynes Council response to: East West Rail Consultation (March 2021)

## Background Papers

EWR Consultation Document: [Consultation Document.pdf](#)

EWR Technical Report: [Consultation Technical Report Full.pdf](#)