

**NETWORK RAIL (EAST WEST RAIL BICESTER TO  
BEDFORD IMPROVEMENTS) TWAO**

**Proof of Evidence**

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# Proof of Evidence

1. My name is Alan Francis and I represent the Milton Keynes Green Party. For many years I was the National Transport Speaker for the Green Party of England & Wales. In that capacity I participated in the TWAO approval process for Thameslink 2000 and the Parliamentary approval process for Crossrail.
2. I have been campaigning for EWR since 1980. In that year British rail announced that they were to build a new station at Milton Keynes Central. I wrote to BR suggesting that when the new station opened the passenger rail service between Oxford and Bletchley should be re-instated with an extension to the new Milton Keynes Central station. At that time the Oxford to Bletchley line was still in use for freight and ECS moves. Now, just 39 years later, we have reached the public inquiry stage into the re-instatement of the service.
3. We fully support the re-instatement of the rail line between Cambridge and Oxford via MK (EWR). However we believe that there are some omissions which should be in the TWAO - see below.
4. EWR Western section will greatly improve connectivity between Oxford, Bicester, Winslow, Milton Keynes and Bedford. This will give people better access to jobs and housing in the corridor. Journeys by rail will be quicker, more convenient, safer and less environmentally damaging than by car. This will encourage people to shift travel mode from private car to public transport.
5. It will reduce traffic and hence congestion on the A421 and other roads in the corridor. Even operating EWR as a diesel railway will reduce pollution and overall CO2 emissions. Operating as an electrified railway would reduce them even further. It has a huge benefit/cost ratio, about 11, which means that the rail line will contribute far more to the economy than it will cost to build it.
6. However we believe that there are some omissions which should be in the TWAO. Consequently we make the following objections. These are ordered from west to east with the final one being route wide.

7. A number of our objections concern changes to the Train Service Specification and infrastructure instruction made by Department of Transport (DfT) to Network Rail. This specification appears to have changed on several occasions over the period of the EWR project. We have asked for the various versions of the Train Service Specification and related instructions to be made available to the inquiry so that the reasons for the changes can be evaluated and, where necessary, challenged.

## Princes Risborough to Aylesbury

8. The Milton Keynes Central to Aylesbury service was originally specified to continue to Marylebone via High Wycombe. This should be re-instated. The Princes Risborough to Aylesbury line was originally planned to have a speed increase and some doubling. Now no works are planned as result of the DfT removing the EWR service south of Aylesbury from the specification. NR has stated in Need Case NR53 10.11.2, that this part of the service was removed because of pathing difficulties on the WCML. These pathing problems can be reduced by upgrading Denbigh Hall South Jn, as described below. At the very least the line speed should be increased to 60mph. The first half mile or so at each end should be doubled. This is so that if the single line was occupied by an approaching train this would enable a train in the opposite direction to enter the branch and wait clear of the platform at Princes Risborough or Aylesbury.
9. In their response to our objection NR stated that "... the Department of Transport (DfT) instructed Network Rail to amend the Train Service Specification to provide an Aylesbury to Milton Keynes service, rather than a London Marylebone to Milton Keynes service. Aylesbury." Consequently NR did not intend to do any works on the Princes Risborough to Aylesbury section. However we believe that the service should go to Marylebone (or Old Oak Common) as originally specified and so this section of line should be upgraded.
10. There are plans for two extra terminal platforms at Old Oak Common accessed from the Wycombe line, which joins the line from Marylebone at South Ruislip. A service from MKC to Old Oak Common via Aylesbury and High Wycombe would provide convenient access to Heathrow Airport from those towns, avoiding central London, with

just one change necessary at Old Oak Common. It would also provide access to Crossrail services and to HS2 services at Old Oak Common.

11. The Strategic Transport Forum for England's Economic Heartland (EEH STF) also regards this as essential. In a paper to its meeting on 7th December 2018 it required, "A commitment to ensure that train services operating over the Order scheme support the strategic objective of developing, on the opening of HS2, through services on the Northampton – Milton Keynes – Bletchley – Aylesbury – High Wycombe – Old Oak Common axis."

## Aylesbury Vale Parkway

12. We note that the track between Aylesbury and Calvert junction is no longer proposed to be doubled. Double track should be provided north from Aylesbury as far as Aylesbury Vale Parkway. This would improve resilience and performance, reducing delays to both passenger and freight services. This section will have more trains on it because it is used by Chiltern Railways for their Aylesbury Vale Parkway to Marylebone service as well as EWR and freight trains. Much of it consists of a single main track and a goods loop so it would not require much new track to make all of this section double track.
13. We note that the Goods loop is proposed to be upgraded for passenger use. However for two trains in opposite directions to pass one of them will have to stop for several minutes while the other passes on the other line. The stopped train will be delayed by several minutes. If the line is double track all the way between Aylesbury and Aylesbury Vale Parkway the trains can pass without either stopping and so neither would be delayed.

## Bletchley area

### High Level platforms

14. It is regrettable that the plans for the high level platforms are being shortened to just 4 cars. We note there is passive provision for 8 cars. These platforms will eventually need to be extended to 8 cars and the overall cost of 4 cars now and another 4 cars

later will considerably exceed the cost of providing 8 car platforms now. The platforms should be built to accommodate 8 car, or at the very least 6 car, trains.

15. Immediately to the north of the Bletchley high level platforms shallow ramps and refuge areas are proposed, about 40m in total length on each side. These should be built as extensions of the platforms. That would enable 5 and 6 car trains to use the high level platforms at no significant extra cost. Fire refuge areas can be accommodated elsewhere on the embankment, which is wider than the tracks and platforms at the northern end. Emergency steps down to the Cemex yard and Saxon St could also be provided for those not classed as PRM.
16. In Engineering NR51 at para 8.50.3 NR state, "The original driver for the 212m platform lengths was the single one train per hour in each direction "inter-regional" train service, which required the use of 8-car unit; this no longer forms part of the EWR2 core train service, due to lack of available train paths for it on the West Coast Main Line." While the lack of a suitable path on the WCML may be the case today, that may not be the case just 3 years after EWR Phase 2 opens.
17. The first phase of HS2 is due to start operating in 2026. That will release at least one hourly path, but probably 2 or 3, on the WCML. Thus in 2026 it may be feasible to operate an hourly inter-regional service via EWR, as originally planned. This would be in place of one of the two Oxford - Milton Keynes services each hour. It would therefore seem prudent to build the platforms as long as possible during the initial construction rather than go back and extend them just 3 years later.
18. Despite the EWR specification being for 4 car platforms initially the Need Case NR53 4.3.1 refers only to 3 car trains being used on EWR. Two of these units could be coupled together to provide 6 cars for busy services. The platforms at both Bletchley High Level and Winslow would need to be able to accommodate 6 cars for such a train.
19. The forecasts of passenger numbers for rail re-openings have tended to considerably underestimate ridership. For example the use of the Borders line in Scotland has exceeded the forecasts. When the North London Line was upgraded and integrated into the London Overground it started out with 3 car trains. These quickly became

overloaded and were lengthened to 4 cars. These too became overloaded and were lengthened to 5 cars. These too are often overloaded. However the infrastructure and the design of the trains prevents more cars being added. The message is “provide the service and the passengers will come.”

20. Not only is there unfulfilled demand for rail travel in the EWR corridor from existing residents but the government is planning major housing growth in the corridor. We expect that there will be high demand on EWR once the service is established and that longer trains will be required a few years after the service starts.

## Lifts

21. The lift for platform 8 should go down to Saxon St level, providing passive provision for an eastern entrance to the station. We accept that the provision of the eastern entrance is not part of the TWAO and is being pursued separately by MK Council et al. There seems to be some confusion about the platform 8 lift. It was clearly shown as going down to Saxon St level in the drawings for the 2017 EWR consultation. In the NR reply and at the 2018 consultation we were told that the lift would only go down to the haul road level, contrary to what was shown in the 2017 drawings. More recently we have been assured verbally by NR staff that the lift shaft will go down to Saxon St level. However NR did not confirm this in writing in their response to our objection or in Engineering NR51 8.50.4. Consequently we would like this confirmed publicly at the inquiry.

22. The EWR Consortium and EEH STF both support a commitment to the inclusion of a new station entrance at Bletchley Station - the Eastern Entrance - within the works for the Order scheme.

## Bletchley line and High Level platforms reversible

23. In the short term trains should be able to operate between MK Central and Bedford/Cambridge by reversing in any of platforms 5, 7 or 8 at Bletchley in either direction. Platform 5 already has this capability but is also used for other purposes, including being the only southern access to the carriage sidings and the Bletchley Relief 2 line. Consequently it may not always be available. The new high level platforms 7 and 8

should also be reversible to increase flexibility. In the longer term a North to East chord will be required at Bletchley to allow trains to operate between MK Central and Bedford/Cambridge. We note that this is not in the current proposals but think there should be passive provision.

24. Just to the west of the flyover and viaduct, near Coleridge Close, a pair of crossovers are proposed, one facing, one trailing. We believe this will be called Bletchley West junction. Both Bletchley line tracks from Bletchley West junction to Summit of Flyover junction and on to Denbigh Hall South Jn and from Summit of Flyover junction to Cambridge Flyover Single Line Jn on the Bletchley Chord should be bi-directional. This would enable trains to operate between MK Central and Bedford/Cambridge, and vice versa, by reversing in either of the high level platforms 7 or 8.
25. This would also provide more timetable flexibility for trains calling and not reversing. For example a train from Oxford to Bedford could call at platform 8 at the same time as a train from MKC to Oxford or Aylesbury called at platform 7. The conflicting move, where the train paths cross, could be either to the north or south of the high level platforms, at Summit of Flyover junction or Bletchley West junction. With the currently proposed layout it could only be at the north end of the high level platforms.
26. While the small number of extra signals required, about 5, would increase the cost slightly they would significantly increase the flexibility and thus the capacity and resilience of the layout.

## Denbigh Hall South Jn

27. Denbigh Hall South Jn, where the Bletchley line diverges from the WCML Slow lines, has a maximum speed of 25mph for the diverging route. (NR London North Western South Sectional Appendix, March 2018). Although verbally we have been informed that this may actually be even lower at 20mph. The earlier EWR plans including upgrading this junction to 40mph. This has been dropped, we think on the instruction of the DfT (see para 7 above), but needs to be re-instated. With a speed limit of 25mph the junction will not be able to handle the 3tph (possibly 4tph) in each direction that will be taking the diverging route.

28. As well as increasing the speed the layout of the junction should also be changed from a switched diamond to a ladder type junction. Both Up and Down Bletchley tracks should be bi-directional and have a line speed of 50mph. The facing crossover between the Up and Down Bletchley tracks should be moved about 200m to the south, so that it joins the Down Bletchley just after the Bletchley Relief 2 line turn out rather than before the Bletchley Relief 1 line turn out. It should be bidirectional and its speed should be increased to at least 40mph. The speeds of the diverging routes at the turn outs off the Down Bletchley for Bletchley Relief 1 line and Bletchley Relief 2 line should be increased to the line speeds for those lines, ie 30mph and 40mph. This would all be on NR land.
29. Up trains heading for Bletchley Relief 1 line or Bletchley Relief 2 line would join the Down Bletchley at Denbigh Hall South Jn rather than joining the Up Bletchley and then using the crossover. Up ECS trains heading for the Carriage Sidings could use either route. This reduces the number of conflicting moves in the vicinity of Denbigh Hall South Jn. It would allow, for example, a parallel move with an Up train heading for the flyover or the Carriage Sidings and a Down train departing from Bletchley Relief 1 line or Bletchley Relief 2 line, something not possible with the current layout.
30. The WCML Up Slow line already has bi-directional signalling between Denbigh Hall South Jn and MK central station, ie it can handle trains in the Down direction, as well as the Up direction. The layout proposed in the above paragraphs allows Down EWR trains to take advantage of this if that would assist timetabling or in the event of perturbations.
31. If EWR trains are restricted to 25mph at Denbigh Hall South Jn they will severely reduce the capacity of the WCML Slow lines and impose a performance risk to services, both new EWR services and existing passenger and freight services on the WCML Slow lines. If EWR trains have to slow to 25mph for Denbigh Hall South Jn they will occupy the WCML Slow line tracks north of the junction for much longer than trains remaining on the WCML Slow line which can be travelling at up to 90mph in the Up direction and 100mph in the Down direction. Also EWR trains being DMUs will have poorer acceleration than the EMUs used on the main line. Each EWR service will require about twice as much time for the section between Denbigh Hall South Jn and

MK Central as an EMU on the Euston or Croydon service. Consequently fewer paths will be available and timetabling will be more difficult.

32. Because of the conflicting moves at the junction a delay to one service at this junction could affect other services that go as far as Oxford, Euston or Birmingham New Street. NR has previously been very concerned about delays being exported long distances along the WCML. It should not be exacerbating this problem by failing to upgrade Denbigh Hall South Jn.
33. At Denbigh Hall South Jn the EWR service will be 3tph in each direction. There may also be 1tph Bedford-MK Central service. There was a commitment by London Midland to extend the existing hourly all stations Bedford-Bletchley service to MK Central when the necessary infrastructure became available. Bletchley Relief 2 line was completed about 2 years before the end of the London Midland franchise but because the franchise was coming to an end London Midland did not introduce the extended service. There is still an aspiration from Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership and others to extend the service to MK Central. They are in negotiation with London Northwestern Railway (LNR), part of the new West Midlands Trains franchise. These will also join the WCML Slow lines at Denbigh Hall South Jn.
34. Consequently there will be 3tph or 4tph DMUs in each direction using Denbigh Hall South Jn at 25mph. That will create a huge risk to performance for both new and existing services. It is essential that the junction is upgraded to at least 40mph, as originally planned, or preferably 50mph.
35. We note that switched diamond junctions, such as currently at Denbigh Hall South Jn, are currently out of favour with NR. We believe this is because they are difficult to maintain. Two new double junctions were created as part of EWR Phase 1, at Gavray junction and Bicester South junction. These were both ladder type junctions with a speed of 40mph for the diverging route. Denbigh Hall South Jn should be treated similarly.

## Fenny Stratford

36. The second track and platform should be reinstated at Fenny Stratford station and over the level crossing. Eventually the whole of the single track section from Fenny Stratford Bletchley Flyover jn to the single line Jn east of the A5 bridge will need to be redoubled. However widening the bridge over the A5 will be expensive and can be left until needed because of increased traffic from the EWR Central section.
37. But reinstating the double track through the Fenny Stratford area, from Fenny Stratford Bletchley Flyover jn to a new double to single line junction just west of the bridge over the river and A5, and a second platform at Fenny Stratford station is relatively cheap and straightforward so it should be done now. Fenny Stratford Bletchley Flyover jn would be converted to two crossovers, one facing and one trailing, similar to those proposed for Bletchley West junction. These changes would increase the reliability and punctuality of services because trains stopping at Fenny Stratford station would not hold up trains travelling in the opposite direction.

## Bow Brickhill

38. The level crossing at Bow Brickhill station should be replaced by a bridge. This is straightforward to do with space to the west or east of the existing road. It will need to be done eventually because of increased rail traffic from the EWR Central section and increased road traffic from proposals for housing and employment developments on the south side of the Marston Vale line. These increases in both rail traffic and road traffic would lead to increased barrier down time and long delays for motorists. It should be done now so that residents can benefit from it earlier rather than later.
39. Traffic queues already reach back as far as the A5 roundabout at peak times. The single track section of the Marston Vale line over the A5 bridge will constrain timetabling. It is likely that two trains, one in each direction, will cross Bow Brickhill level crossing in close proximity. A westbound train will enter the station and wait for the single track section to clear. Meanwhile an eastbound train will come off the single track section and pass through Bow Brickhill. Consequently the barriers may not be lifted between the two trains, significantly increasing barrier down time and thus also increasing traffic queue lengths.

40. There is a proposal to develop the land to the SW of the crossing for employment. This will increase pressure on the crossing and should make a contribution towards the cost of the the bridge. NR should lobby MK Council to ensure that sufficient space is allocated for a bridge to be built on the west side of the existing road.
41. MK Council issued the draft South Caldecotte Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document for this piece of land for consultation in March 2018. It is also zoned as Employment land in Plan:MK, the Local Plan for MK, which went to Examination in Public last year and is expected to be adopted in March this year. Yet NR, in Engineering NR51 8.50.6, does not seem to be aware of this. It only acknowledges possible developments to the NW and SE of the level crossing. The longer the bridge is left the harder and more expensive it will be to fit one in amongst the surrounding buildings.

## Woburn Sands

42. Ideally the level crossing at Woburn Sands station should be replaced by a bridge. The existing level crossing is a cause of considerable delay and congestion to road users, including buses. Doubling the number of trains for the western section of EWR will exacerbate this and quadrupling them when the Central section is complete will lead to grid lock in the area. There is a large housing development currently being built at Wavendon to the north of the level crossing. The extra road traffic from this and other nearby developments will also increase the pressure on the level crossing.
43. We accept that replacement by a bridge is not straightforward because there is very little space available. However the longer it is left the more buildings will be constructed nearby and the harder and more expensive it will get. It will need to be done eventually because of increased rail traffic when the Central section of EWR opens. It should be done now so that residents can benefit from it earlier rather than later.
44. If the level crossing is not to be replaced by a bridge then in the short term changes should be made to reduce the barrier down time and increase the capacity for road traffic and pedestrians and improve safety for pedestrians. Considerable congestion is caused now. When the number of trains increases this would become worse. NR argue

that it is not their responsibility to make changes to the level crossing and thus no changes are proposed in the Order. However we would argue that they do have some responsibility because there will be more trains using the level crossing as a result of EWR and there will be more pedestrians using the crossing as result of the proposed closure of the nearby School crossing. NR, together with MK Council, has a duty to ensure that conditions as a result of EWR are no worse than they are now, and preferably that the current unsatisfactory conditions are improved.

45. In the eastbound direction the platforms should be staggered, as at Bow Brickhill. The barrier can then be raised as soon as the train has arrived, rather than having to wait for it to depart. This should save more than 1 minute of barrier down time for each closure for east bound services. This requires the eastbound platform to be relocated to the east side of the level crossing. Instead of lengthening the existing eastbound platform by 73m to the west a new 100m long platform would be built on land on the east side of the level crossing. Most of this land is already owned by NR. Some Highway land owned by MK Council might also be required. The cost would not be much more than that for extending the existing platform.
46. In the westbound direction another signal should be installed a few hundred metres before the level crossing. Currently the barrier has to be down before trains can leave Aspley Guise station, 1 mile to the east. With another signal a train can leave Aspley Guise station on a yellow. The barrier can then be lowered and the new signal set to green. As long as the new signal is green before the train reaches it there is no delay to the train. This should save 1-2 minutes of barrier down time for each closure for west bound services.
47. The level crossing should be altered so that it can accommodate 3 lanes of traffic and a 2m wide footpath on both sides. The 3rd lane is required so that traffic waiting to turn right into Cranfield Rd does not hold up traffic heading towards Kingston roundabout.
48. With the proposed closure of the School crossing more pedestrians, especially children, will be using the Station Rd crossing and the narrow footpaths are not safe and do not have the required capacity. The design must be changed to make the crossing safe and convenient for pedestrians.

49. This might be done by widening the existing crossing, moving the barrier posts on one side of the road further from the other to create space for a 3rd lane and wider footpaths. However we are told by NR that the barriers themselves cannot be lengthened so this may not be feasible.
50. Alternatively it might be done by using the whole width of the existing crossing for 3 lanes of traffic and building new gate-controlled foot crossings on both sides of the road beyond the existing crossing barriers, the opposite side of the barrier posts to the roadway.
51. There should be cycle storage facilities at Ridgmont station and on both sides of the line at Woburn Sands station. However we note that although these are not in the TWAO they could be installed without being included in the TWAO.

## Electrification

52. It is regrettable that electrification of EWR has been dropped on the instruction of DfT. We are now back to the situation that EWR Consortium had reached more than 5 years ago. The debacle over GWML electrification has resulted in the Didcot-Oxford section being put on hold indefinitely. We can accept that there is little point in electrifying Oxford-Bedford before Didcot-Oxford. However NR and DfT should commit to electrifying Oxford-Bedford at the same time as Didcot-Oxford.
53. Meanwhile Oxford-Bedford should be made electrification-ready during this phase. That means ensuring that all overbridges and structures have sufficient clearance for OHLE to be installed later. Any bridges with insufficient clearance should be rebuilt or have the track lowered now, while the Bicester-Bletchley section of the line is not in use, rather than having to close the line later when it is in operation. Going back and doing it in a few years time when the railway is operational would cause inconvenience to passengers because of line possessions and would cost far more than doing it now. We understand that this applies to 6 bridges.