



Response to East-West Rail Consultation

This response to East-West Rail's 2021 Public Consultation has been prepared by Bourn Parish Council, a parish potentially affected by the new railway line. The Council has consulted with its residents and the contents of this response has been shared with residents for comment.

The response principally covers the **Clapham Green to Eversden section** and the option of a northern approach to Cambridge. The response covers seven main areas which impact residents in Bourn, either directly or indirectly:

1. Location of the Cambourne station
2. The northern approach to Cambridge
3. The southern approach to Cambridge
4. Public rights of way
5. Zero-carbon railway
6. Freight
7. The business case for the new railway

1. Location of Cambourne station

Bourn Parish Council and local residents favour a Cambourne north station (route alignments 1 and 9) for the following reasons:

- A Cambourne north station would be easily accessible to the people living in 'greater Cambourne' (West Cambourne, Cambourne and Bourn Airfield). Most residents would live only 10 minutes by bicycle from the proposed station. Access by bus and car would also be straightforward since the existing pattern of roads leads easily to the Old St Neots Road and the proposed station site.
- A north station could integrate easily into any future park and ride/bus route into Cambridge to provide a transport hub for residents in the area, including surrounding villages such as Bourn.
- Since a Cambourne north station would be located alongside the A428 trunk road, people from other parts of Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire could get there easily without driving through local villages. People from a wide area are likely to be attracted to drive to the station to access train services to Oxford, Cambridge, East Anglia and London.
- A north station would offer EWR the option of locating passing loops and sidings nearby, which is not possible with a south Cambourne station.
- While we do not welcome the progressive "concretisation" of valuable countryside along the A428 corridor, we agree with EWR's argument, that there is more potential for housing development near a station to the north of Cambourne than to the south. This would result in an oval shaped town with the potential to link the new houses to the north with West Cambourne, Cambourne and Bourn Airfield to the south using pedestrian/cycle bridges and greenways over the EWR and the A428.
- We are aware that a north Cambourne station is favoured by Cambourne residents and Cambourne parish council.

Bourn Parish Council and the residents of Bourn are strongly against route alignments 2, 6 and 8 which require a station south of Cambourne for the following reasons:

- A Cambourne south station would be difficult to reach for people living in the 3,500 homes planned for Bourn airfield. By bike it would take 15+ minutes and by car, it would involve exiting Bourn Airfield and travelling along Old St Neots Road and then either via the A428 west and the A1198 south, or by driving through Cambourne. Alternatively, drivers could drive down Broadway and turn right into Caxton Road and reach the station via Caxton, a route that adds significantly to the traffic through Bourn.
- While there is some potential housing land close to the proposed south station, most of it is west of the A1198. In view of this, a Cambourne south station would result in an elongated, ribbon development of contiguous settlements more than 5 miles long and 1 mile deep, stretching from Childerley in the east to Eltisley in the west. This pattern of development would make it difficult to travel between neighbourhoods and would limit the scope to develop an effective town centre and sense of community.
- The railway line will cut straight through Bourn at the Broadway, demolishing seven houses and a children's playground. Many other houses will be blighted by noise and vibrations. This will incur direct cost to residents: loss in house value, difficulty in selling homes etc. and significant disruption to all Bourn residents during the construction phase. We request details of which houses EWR intend to demolish, if one of these route alignments is chosen.
- The line would cross through historic land with significant Roman and Iron Age archaeology, still to be discovered.
- The line would pass within 500m of a conservation area, including the historic Bourn Hall clinic, where IVF was pioneered.
- A south Cambourne station would be located close to Bourn's historic open trestle post windmill, over 400 years old and one of the oldest in England. The station would seriously impair the rural aspect of the windmill.

- The station would also be located in valuable recreational land used by walkers, cyclists and horse-riders and is considered a valuable part of Cambourne's green space.
- The line would sever all four public rights of way between Bourn, Cambourne and Caxton all of which are frequently used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. It would also sever the bridleway between Bourn and Caldecote at The Drift, which links directly to the Harcamlow Way, a long-distance footpath and the only safe off-road cycling route to Cambridge. See section 4: Public Rights of Way
- The approach of the line to the south station from the west passes over a groundwater source protection zone, which would be avoided by a north station.
- The south station railway line beyond Bourn would cross the B1046, Caldecote Rd and Church Lane (into Kingston) via a large and unsightly viaduct and it may also impact negatively on the Kingston Cutting Nature Reserve, a protected area where the old Varsity line used to run, and which features an historic old railway wagon.
- There is considerably less scope for housing development around the south station, without merging Caxton, Bourn and Cambourne and destroying the nascent Cambourne Nature Reserve¹, a 90-hectare site featuring a mix of wildflower meadows, wetlands full of wildfowl and woodlands harbouring rare and special species. Developing in this area would result in settlement convergence and significant loss of habitat that would clearly destroy the character of the separate villages.

2. The northern approach to Cambridge

While we appreciate EWR's efforts to compare northern and southern approaches to Cambridge, many local people and organisations are still not convinced that a southern approach is the only viable option.

¹ <https://www.wildlifebcn.org/nature-reserves/cambourne>

Bourn Parish Council would thus request that EWR undertake a full, detailed and transparent comparison of the two approaches. This should include:

- A detailed comparison of the costs and benefits of each approach, including social and environmental impacts
- A careful consideration of the arguments put forwards by CamBed RailRoad and Cambridge Approaches in its response to the arguments put forward by EWR in its opposition to the northern approach².
- Consideration not just of the number of houses which would need to be demolished, but also the impact of noise and vibration on people living close to the railway.

3. The southern approach to Cambridge

Bourn Parish Council is concerned about the potential for significant environmental damage associated with a southern approach. A key aspect of the southern approach is the number of viaducts and the distance the railway line will be raised above ground level on embankments. The line will also pass through a cutting through Chapel Hill.

One of those viaducts crosses the new and old A428 roads, passing very close to Highfields Caldecote. Quite apart from the blight this will place on local residents, we are concerned about the height this viaduct would have to be built, in order to pass over the new and old A428 roads and would ask that consideration be given to move the crossing further east if that could reduce the height of the viaduct and the negative impact of Caldecote. We note this viaduct would not be needed at all if the line approached Cambridge from the north (section 2 above).

As users of the roads, bridleways and paths in the countryside between the A603 and Harston, we are concerned by the impact on the environment by these proposals:

² <https://cambridgeapproaches.org/category/route-alignments/>

- It would create 11km of elevated track between Kingston and Harston, which would be a major eyesore and create far more noise than a track at or below ground level.
- We ask EWR to evaluate the costs and feasibility of tunnelling under Chapel Hill and lowering the heights of the proposed embankments. Consider also building a road bridge for the A603 to pass over the railway line, rather than using a viaduct.
- We are concerned that the line would sever footpaths and bridleways, and even if culverts are built through the embankments, some of these tunnels could be up to 70m long and be dark, frightening and dangerous to walk/cycle through.
- We are concerned for the ongoing preservation of the barbastelle bat colony near Wimpole and notwithstanding the comments in EWR's fact sheet on these bats, we want more assurance than the consultation document offers that "we are confident that we can mitigate the risks" – such "assurance" is simply not good enough.
- We also understand that around 200 acres of valuable farming land could be lost, significantly more than is the case with the northern approach.
- The line passing through Kingston/Toft to Harston will fundamentally change the character of this part of South Cambridgeshire. People have chosen to live in this area because of the rural character of their neighbourhood and easy access to their place of work. There are no benefits at all for these residents as there is no nearby station. Residents in these villages would probably choose to travel directly into Cambridge, rather than travel back to Cambourne to catch the train.

4. Public rights of way

The consultation document is not clear about how many roads and public rights of way would be permanently severed by the railway. Having said that, EWR indicated in an online webinar that it would sever just one road (between Harston and

Newton). However, the consultation document is silent on how many public rights of way (paths, bridleways and byways) would be severed. South Cambridgeshire is well-served with an excellent network of public rights of way. For example, the proposed route alignments all cross the Harcamlow Way, part of a very popular bridleway from Bourn to Cambridge, via Caldecote, Hardwick and Coton; it is the only off-road walking and cycling route into Cambridge from the west.

This network of paths and bridleways provide an alternative to using cars and contribute to a greener and healthier lifestyle for residents of South Cambridgeshire. Specifically:

- We ask that EWR provide bridges or culverts such that **all** public rights of way crossed by the railway are accessible to walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.
- As part of its commitment to the environment and compensating residents directly affected by the railway, we ask EWR to upgrade the bridleway between Bourn and Cambridge, referred to above, into a high-quality gravel-tracked cycleway.

5. Zero-carbon railway

EWR is committed to a zero-carbon solution to its railway, yet it will continue to run diesel trains without any date committed to electrification or alternative carbon-free solution. We want EWR to describe what “zero-carbon solutions” it is considering for the new trains. As a minimum commitment, we ask that EWR only operate non-diesel passenger trains by the time it opens the Bedford to Cambridge section of the line. As diesel trains will be banned by 2040, it makes no sense for EWR to be running diesel trains on a brand-new line for just ten years. This will create a very poor public image of the company and its railway.

There is no assessment of the emissions resulting from building the railway, which could easily exceed the total emissions from operating the railway for twenty years. Published life cycle assessments of railway construction suggest that the

approximately 24km of new railway line will result in the release of the order of 120,000 tonnes of CO2 into the atmosphere.

6. Freight

We understand that EWR is not in control of the freight usage on the line. While residents support the principle of freight travelling by train rather than road, they are concerned about how frequent the trains will run and during what times of day and night. They are also concerned by how long a train will be and its speed and vibration characteristics. We want EWR to make certain commitments to placing limitations on the amount of freight the line will be allowed to carry. At a minimum these would be:

- No freight traffic between the hours of 11pm and 7am.
- No more than the current freight-load on the Oxford-Bedford section (24 trains per day).
- While travelling, no train should take longer than a minute to pass any particular location

7. The business case for the new railway

The absence of a business plan makes it difficult to understand what parameters EWR is working to. For example: what level of passenger numbers are required? How much freight is needed? What impact will Covid have on commuter usage? How much flexibility is there in developing alternative, perhaps more costly solutions which may be more acceptable to local residents (such as tunnelling under Chapel Hill)? It is also unclear from the consultation document what the economic benefits of the new railway are; it references faster journey times, reduced road congestion, and vague benefits of the "Arc". But there is no economic or financial case of the railway and residents are left wondering why this needs to be constructed at all.

It is also unclear how the different assessment factors are weighted. For example, the rationale for the emerging preference for a north Cambourne station suggests

that scope for housing development near the railway is weighted more highly than, say, environmental factors, yet there is no explicit weighting described in the document. The Technical Report says: "A decision-maker (like EWR Co, in making its recommendation) and the Secretary of State (in making a decision) can apply weight to Factors in this way, and the amount of weight it decides to apply is a matter of discretion.". This implies EWR can choose to weight factors any way it wishes and change the weighting depending on what answer they want. This is neither objective nor transparent.

The assessment factors EWR has included cover cost, benefit, environment etc. But there are no factors that take into account the impact on local residents. We want EWR to include a weighting factor to take into account the impact (e.g. extent of blight) experienced by residents during the construction phase and once the railway is operating.

Specifically:

- We request EWR make public its business plan at the earliest convenience and by the latest before the statutory consultation.
- The benefits case needs to argue the financial and economic case for the railway compared with not building it and to justify how it will operate profitably in the post-Covid era.
- We request EWR is more explicit about how it weights its assessment factors in deciding which route alignments are more favoured over others.
- We request EWR include an assessment factor to account for the negative impact on local residents during and after the construction phase.