

SCRG Meeting with Lord Hendy, Rail Minister (Meeting 1) – 2 June 2026

11.40-12.30, Department of Transport Horseferry Road

Attendees:

- DfT: Lord Peter Hendy (Rail Minister), Andrew Towers, Luke (surname unknown), Maryam Anaba, Anisa Alimi
- DSIT: Lord Patrick Vallance (attended virtually)
- SCRG: Liz Hales (Chairman), Andy Martin (Barton PC), Norman Evanson (Comberton PC), John Abraham (Great and Little Eversden PC), Isabel Robinson (Harlton PC), Rupert Pearce Gould (Harston PC), William Harrold (Haslingfield PC), David Revell (Haslingfield PC), Helen Slaski (Newton PC), Lise Jackson (Administrator)
- Fulbourn PC: David Smith
- EWR Co: David Hughes, Tristan Lincoln-Gordon, Adam Lawless
- MP: Pippa Heylings MP, Mark Lunn

The meeting was held in order to discuss the proposed East West Rail project with Peter Hendy.

1. Introductions – Before Lord Hendy joined the meeting, Lord Vallance invited attendees to introduce themselves.
2. Lord Hendy then joined the meeting and Liz Hales introduced the South Cambridgeshire Rail Group (SCRG)
3. Lord Hendy asked Lord Vallance to speak about the Oxford Cambridge Growth Corridor.

Lord Vallance is responsible for the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor (previously known as the Ox-Cam Arc). He spoke about the corridor being the growth corridor for the country and described EWR as essential.

William Harrold asked Lord Vallance why the EWR project would ‘unlock’ housing while there are houses with planning permission currently that are not being built. Lord Vallance replied that the project would provide the ability to take advantage of the intellectual and skills capacity of the whole area. When companies fail, people need to know that they could get another job in the region without relocating. Some councils believed this is a good aim, while Rupert Pearce Gould mentioned that Harston needs affordable housing, not high-tech level housing.

Pippa Heylings asked if there can be a map of transport initiatives across the Ox-Cam region. Lord Vallance agreed there could be. ACTION LPV

Lord Vallance left the meeting.

Lord Hendy said he wanted to focus on two of the questions which had been submitted in advance. Business case and route choice (the other questions, MRAO, E&WW SAC, split DCO, Construction Ombudsman were not discussed)

4. Pippa Heylings stated it is key for the Parish Councils to hear from this Government about this project.

Lord Hendy stated that he has sat in on other issues regarding this project, including water and telecommunications. HS2 was started before it was clear what was being delivered. He wants EWR Co. to be clear on what is being delivered, and he feels confident that it is. Lord Vallance is dealing with this with urgency. He then moved to questions.

5. William Harrold asked for the strategic outline business case (SOBC) to be published, as the consultation has passed. He requested the outline business case (OBC) be published in advance of the DCO.

David Hughes replied that it is standard that the full business case is published after the DCO. He believes the SOBC from 2019 is so out of date it would not be helpful to publish it now. He stated that all of the OBC will have to be part of the DCO and EWR Co. will effectively publish the OBC in advance, but not in the form of the OBC. He confirmed that the figures (including costs, plans and passenger numbers) and the 'why' would be published in advance of the DCO.

ACTION DH

William Harrold and David Hughes disagreed about numbers. William Harrold stated that according to the May 2023 ETR there would eventually be 2000 Cambridge commuters for a capital cost of £8 billion in today's prices – so £4million each. He compared it with the Elizabeth Line which had 300,000 passengers daily one year after opening and was now approaching 600,000 – for a capital cost of £20billion. David Hughes stated that if it was like that they would not sign it off. William Harrold stated that is what the EWRCo. document says.¹ David Hughes stated some passenger numbers are over the entire project from Oxford to Cambridge, not Cambourne to Cambridge. He believes the demand is strong, likely to be 20-25 million ridership on the railway/annually, roughly 80K trips a day across the entire route.

David Hughes stated EWR Co. will set out the demand forecast in the DCO submission. He also said that in the UK, actual demand always exceeds forecast by up to a factor of 3.

EWR Co. stated the DCO application will be available for public viewing in the second half of 2027. It expects the current 2026 consultation to be the last route-wide consultation but not the end of engagement.

Rupert Pearce Gould stated that most small businesses move towards Ely and Haverhill, not out west. David Hughes reiterated Lord Vallance's point that this project will change the geography of the region and that this is the purpose of the railway.

6. David Revell asked if EWR Co.'s main rationale for the southern route is the link to Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC). This route does not link to Cambridge North. He asked if there is a route which links all three stations, would EWR Co. consider it.

The EWR Co. team looked at the northern route but did not believe it would work. David Hughes knows the route is contentious. In 2023, the north vs south route choice was finely balanced, and due to the link to CBC, the southern route was chosen. After the election in 2024, the route was confirmed. He believes the northern route is not cheaper; he now feels it would be more expensive. A change of route would add three years delay to the programme and cost £100Ms. They see no reason to reconsider the route.

Andy Martin asked about light rail routes into Cambridge. David Hughes stated that all sorts of options were assessed in 2021, and his recollection is that none of the other options delivered end to end connectivity. Andy Martin restated that light rail should run alongside. Lord Hendy stated that the Government needs to get on with the project and that, if you keep re-opening options, it will never get done.

Liz Hales raised the issues of the disruptive impact of construction on all the parishes represented today. Lord Hendy stated he understands the concerns about construction and accepts it needs to be effectively managed and done quickly. Pippa Heylings commented that the discussion about construction needs to be had now.

David Smith from Fulbourn raised concerns about the proposed train care centre and asked that it be moved 2-3 miles further along the line. Pippa Heylings asked Lord Hendy that, since all railway operators will use it, he make the decision rather than leaving it to EWR Co. David Hughes said they have to make sure they have a safeguarded a place for the care centre. EWR Co. are working with other rail operators but have not yet agreed a solution. He is optimistic an agreement would reduce or remove the care centre at Fulbourn. Lord Hendy wants to use current railway lines and would agree to assess demands and come back to it. The Government will not agree to build the train care centre at Fulbourn unless they have to.

Both William Harrold and Rupert Pearce Gould raised the issue of water scarcity because it would prevent the level of new housing assumed for EWR. Lord Hendy felt unqualified to reply and stated this issue is being covered by Lord Vallance.

7. Tristan Lincoln-Gordon recognises the schemes are disruptive and have impacts on the community. They will try to minimise disruptions and will work to the Code of Construction Practice. Construction and Traffic Control Plans will be in outline form at the DCO. They will involve consultation with communities.

Pippa Heylings mentioned that on the A14 project, the Local Authority had the power to monitor the project with funding from the builders, but these powers

were not known to the Local Authority at the time. She would like this known up front on the EWR project.

William Harrold asked how this Code would be enforced. David Hughes stated they need to learn from the Bucks/Beds part of the project.

Lord Hendy stated that the EWR project at the western end has been better than HS2. He expects EWR Co. to do a whole lot better.

David Revell proposed an ombudsman and a strengthened citizen's charter. Lord Hendy agreed they will look at the issues in light of HS2, as he is very sympathetic to people affected by HS2. He promised to go away and think about it. He said David Revell can send his proposal 'if he wants'. ACTION DR

8. David Hughes thinks the DCO is likely to be approved in late 2028, but this is not confirmed. He also said that it was possible that construction contracts could be in place before the end of the parliament.
9. Norman Evanson stated that Comberton PC would like a station to serve their village. David Hughes asked him to put this in their consultation response. Lord Hendy stated they would consider it.

ⁱ East West Rail Economic and Technical Report Appendix 4, May 2023