

Consortium hails East West Rail progress – 2019 a ‘pivotal year in scheme’s history’

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The East West Rail Consortium has hailed progress being made on East West Rail, describing 2019 as ‘a pivotal year in the scheme’s history’.

This year has already seen a hat-trick of important developments – the public inquiry into the Western Section between Oxford and Bedford and Aylesbury and Milton Keynes; the route options consultation by the East West Railway Company for the Central Section between Bedford and Cambridge; and publication of the Consortium’s own Eastern Section Prospectus which makes a powerful case for direct services on East West Rail from Ipswich and Norwich to Oxford.

East West Rail Consortium Chairman Cllr Mark Shaw described the mood amongst members at its AGM in Cambridge on Wednesday (March 13) as ‘one of excitement and optimism combined with a strong sense that our work is not yet done’.

He said: “The Consortium was set up in 1995 and it is fair to say there have been many twists and turns in getting to this point. Our work over those years has played a fundamental role in getting trains on tracks in the near future – with 2019 looking to be a pivotal year in the scheme’s history.

“Frankly, the rationale for East West Rail in its entirety – from East Anglia across to the west of England – has only grown stronger and stronger. The scheme will transform travel choices, open up new opportunities and provide a practical alternative to the car. That’s why it enjoys unprecedented support amongst the public.”

The East West Rail Consortium is a grouping of local authorities and local enterprise partnerships broadly located along the route which has campaigned for the scheme for more than 20 years. It continues to be a major partner to the Department for Transport, Network Rail and – more recently – to the East West Railway Company, which was set up by Government to accelerate the scheme’s delivery.

Cllr Shaw added: “It’s so important that the Consortium continues to work with partners in order to unlock the full potential of East West Rail. That means making sure East West Rail’s potential to carry more freight is realised, ensuring passenger services directly link key urban centres right across the core scheme from Norwich and Ipswich to Oxford, while also exploring how services could be extended to the west of Oxford. East West Rail can be a game-changer for our economy, environment and our residents’ quality of life – but we have to think big in order to maximise its benefits.”