

RENHOLD PARISH COUNCIL

Lizzie Barnicoat
Clerk to the Council
PO Box 1548
Bedford, MK44 5AX
Tel: 01234 771702

January 2025

Dear East West Rail Consultation Team

RE: EAST WEST RAIL CONSULTATION

Renhold Parish Council and the community they represent remain in opposition to the selection of an East West Rail route north of Bedford. However, the Parish Council are aware that it is important to engage in this consultation process and recognise that East West Rail have produced open minded proposals which are being considered as part of this engagement process.

Milton Keynes to Bedford

It is felt the Marston Vale section of the EWR route should be served by road bridges rather than level crossings being retained. The Terms of Reference state the barrier down times would be up to 34 minutes in an area, which for users from the local community that will include Renhold residents it will challenges such as extensive delays in journey times due to waiting excessively at level crossings. It feels antiquated that level crossings remain a proposal given the associated health and safety challenges of them in such a modern society

Renhold Parish Council feel that those immediate parish communities served by the Marston Vale line are best placed to comment on which local station options they prefer.

Bedford Car Park Access

It is important that any new car park work done does not disrupt or reduce parking capacity with the number of spaces available to the users of Bedford Hospital at any point during the construction/development phase. It is absolutely expected that all individuals needing to access the hospital should have full access to a suitable parking provision that meets all accessibility and capacity needs with it simply not being good enough for lengthy routes to be in place when it comes to accessing the main healthcare facility in the local area.

The Parish Council are exceedingly concerned to learn at a very late stage of the public consultation that the proposed car park changes will in fact impact on an intended expansion of healthcare facilities and services at Bedford Hospital which already has funding committed to from central government. Improvements such as this are welcomed and desperately needed, they must not be lost. It is also concerning to hear that EWR intends to charge and seek money from a healthcare authority, effectively taking money away from vital healthcare treatments and services needed for the Bedford community.

Renhold Parish Council are worried that congestion in the vicinity of Bedford Hospital and the Mainline station during construction must not put the care and treatment of patients at risk, in particular for time constrained treatments such as strokes.

The Parish Council also has reservations regarding the knock on effect with the proposals for Bedford Mainline station car park. When reviewing the proposals they note it is proposed to have the car park some 650 metres away, which seems an excessive distance for a range of users who might have accessibility needs as well as for families using the facility.

Impact on Renhold

Renhold Parish Council feel that the fundamental biggest challenge during the delivery of EWR will be the detrimental impact on the local highways network throughout the Marston Vale and entire Bedford Borough areas during the duration of the construction phase which is documented to take several years. There are numerous examples that will be given by others engaging in this consultation process, who are concerned about the challenges that will be faced by Bedford Borough residents.

The Parish Council would like to highlight when strategic highways changes have been made to the local highways infrastructure to try and upgrade various junctions, it is well documented that they have in fact ended up causing more congestion and tailbacks for little improvement afterwards.

The most pertinent and local example to Renhold of how changes to the local highways flow impacts has been seen in abundance was during the recent Cleat Hill gas incident where the B660 Kimbolton Road was closed at the Ravensden crossroads for just two months, from end of October to early December 2024. The displacement of traffic during this closure was catastrophic on the nearby villages, like Ravensden and Renhold. With Renhold receiving the brunt of the vehicles through the unclassified rural village roads. The highways surface rapidly deteriorated, heavy good vehicles movements became a regular feature, vehicle volumes were unacceptably high, with therefore a significant highways safety risk in the village for all users.

Renhold Parish Council feel that EWR must take responsibility for the damage that will be caused to the local infrastructure such as the highways network during the construction phase. As a very small under resourced local highways authority, Bedford Borough Council should not be expected to put right the inevitable damage that will be caused during construction, as the only way of doing this is by off setting and increasing the cost through council tax charges to residents, who do not deserve to, and must not pay for repairs resulting from a national government directed project. As a small rural village the enjoyment of the open countryside is much appreciated and enjoyed by many members of the Renhold community. Severance of these public rights of way will impact recreationally as well as with local wildlife and habitats being adversely affected. There really needs to be more robust mechanisms in place for safeguarding this wonderful assets.

Mitigation

Mitigation measures must be of the highest quality to minimise the impact of EWR on those in the immediate vicinity of the route along with those in nearby communities.

Safety

- The highest and latest standards must be met at all times in terms of rail safety, and construction
- There must be exceptional scrutiny of the technical designs and engineering plans for the project
- Train speeds for both passenger and freight movements at all times must be regulated and be ensuring safety of all users along the entire the alignment.
- There must be clear adjustments made in terms of train speed limits inline with the gradients rises and terrain challenges

Environment

- There must be as much safeguarding of the local environment as possible
- Wherever possible improvements to enhance the local landscape with additional planting including trees and opportunities for new habitats to form
- Bunding and other suitable noise reduction work must be included
- Use of technology that reduces noise and vibration wherever possible

Construction

- Clear routes for construction traffic to not use the local road network which are already in a poor condition
- Robust and enforceable restricted hours of operation

Local Impact

- Improved compensation scheme for residents to access
- Suitable Forum or stakeholder group where local representatives have direct and monthly meetings with East West Rail

Conclusion

Renhold Parish Council look to East West Rail to deliver the project in a way that minimises impact not only to Renhold parish, but all those all the route line, not just for in the near future but for generations to come, regardless of the resources needed to deliver.

Yours sincerely,

Renhold Parish Council