

East West Rail Meeting

Wednesday 20 September, 6-7pm

RAFA Club, 93 Ashburnham Road, Bedford, MK40 1EA

Mayor Tom Wootton – Elected Mayor of Bedford Borough

Cllr Jim Weir – Deputy Mayor and Portfolio Holder for Environment, Highways and Transport

Craig Austin – Director for Environment (Meeting Chair)

Jon Shortland – Chief Officer for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Growth

Question: Are residents in the Greyfriars ward at threat of their homes being demolished?

Answer: (Jon Shortland) When EWR put out proposals over two years ago, they did suggest some properties on Ashburnham Road were at threat of demolition. In May 2023, EWR stated that these properties were no longer at threat of demolition, nor any other properties in the Greyfriars ward.

Question: EWR have plans for a multi storey carpark, where will this car park be?

Answer: (Jon Shortland) The current plans are for a multi-storey car park to be built on the current surface carpark at the north end of Bedford Train Station.

Question: Is Ashburnham Road Surgery at threat of demolition?

Answer: (Jon Shortland) Currently, EWRs position is that no properties on Ashburnham Road are under threat of demolition.

Question: What are the plans for traffic when EWR construction is underway as well as when it is in place?

Answer: (Jon Shortland) EWR have not yet produced a construction management plan which should outline the effects the construction will have on traffic. EWR have asked Bedford Borough Council if they can use the current traffic model for the town, which has been agreed. Bedford Borough Council will get the chance to review EWRs proposals to shut roads but there will be no compensation for residents if changes are made within existing road boundaries.

Question: Have EWR got a business case?

Answer: (Mayor Tom Wootton) EWR don't have a business case at the moment

Question: Will there be any efforts for active travel to and from the station once EWR is in place?

Answer: (Cllr Jim Weir) There is currently no active travel team at Bedford Borough Council but I have submitted an application for a new active travel team who I hope can be part of these solutions for EWR commuters. The Town Deal also has lots of new cycle and walking routes in the town.

Question: What is the current position of EWR?

Answer: (Jon Shortland) EWR have said that the statutory consultation is due to take place in the first half of 2024. After this process, EWR need to make a development consent order application which is a planning application to central government. This is expected to happen at the start of 2025 and if approved could lead to construction beginning in 2027.

Question: Where does EWR stand with electrification of the lines?

Answer: (Jon Shortland) Having spoken with EWR, their preference is to have trains powered by electric lines. Bedford Borough Council have always stated their preference is electric. The Department for Transport and Treasury have said electric is the most expensive option so EWR are looking into alternatives such as diesel, bi-mode and tri-mode power. When myself and the Mayor met with the Railways Minister, there was a lot of discussion around tri-mode power. This is still a type of power that is being developed but could be fully developed by the time EWR is in place.

Question: How tall will the multi-storey carpark be?

Answer: (Jon Shortland) It is not confirmed yet but plans show five storeys with up to 750 spaces but at the moment this is not certain.

Question: Why was the EWR route not kept south of the town?

Answer: The Mayor has asked that four routes should be reviewed. The routes being reviewed are the two routes previously promoted by EWR north of Bedford, and the alternatives proposed by BFARe and ERTA. We have employed SLC, an independent rail consultancy who are reviewing the pros and cons of these routes. We have also employed JBA who are a flood risk consultancy to review the flood risks that EWR have suggested some routes impose. Both of these consultancies should provide Bedford Borough Council with reports by the end of 2023.