EIA Quality Mark Case Study

EAST WEST RAIL PHASE 2 EIA

Key Issues
The East West Rail Phase 2 extends over 78km from the eastern edge of Bicester to Bedford via Bletchley and from Claydon Junction to the southern extent at Aylesbury. An assessment was required to understand the effects of the construction and operation of the railway. The project covers five local authority areas and the existing environment is variable across the project. Construction methods and scale are also different throughout the project areas and so an approach to reporting was required that would assess the Project as a whole whilst also considering the different scale and nature of potential effects in each route section.

Purpose of the project
Atkins is part of an alliance partnered with Laing O’Rourke, VolkerRail and Network Rail responsible for the design and construction of the East West Rail Phase 2 (EWR2) scheme. The East West Rail scheme involves upgrading and reconstructing underused and mothballed sections of the railway linking the Great Western, Chiltern, West Coast and Midland main lines north of London, providing a strategic east-west route connecting key centres. Current east to west rail connectivity from Oxford to Cambridge is limited with roads already at or over capacity. The work is part of a wider strategy to connect East Anglia with central, southern and western England. With Phase 1 (Oxford to Bicester) already complete, East West Rail Phase 2 (EWR2) will provide new services between Oxford, Bicester, Milton Keynes and Bedford without the need to travel via London. There will also be a new station at Winslow, bringing rail connections back to this part of Buckinghamshire. Without EWR2, and given the housing and predicted economic growth, rising traffic levels would increase pressure on the already congested roads. EWR2 will offer new sustainable public transport options for those who live and work in the region.

Description of the project
An Environmental Statement was prepared to support the application to be submitted under the Transport and Works Act. The application covered the construction, operation and maintenance of the railway between Bicester, Bedford and Aylesbury. The Project was split into six route sections based on geography, operation and construction programme and methods. The Project will install new double or single track or improve to the existing track bringing it in line with modern standards. The Project will also repair and replace bridges as required. The Project includes closure and replacement of many foot and road level crossings to improve safety.
New modern signalling and communication systems will be installed throughout the Project to enable the railway to operate frequent train services travelling at speeds of 30 to 100 mph. In addition to the works to the track and structures, the Project includes a new station at Winslow and works to existing stations at Bletchley, Woburn Sands, Ridgmont and Aylesbury Vale Parkway. To avoid, reduce or compensate for adverse environmental impacts, environmental features have been incorporated into the Project design. These include areas for ecological compensation, flood storage and landscape works, along with noise barriers.

## Learning Outcomes

### Lessons learnt

The following key lessons were learnt for streamlining EIA delivery and producing a proportionate Environmental Statement:

- **Proportionate EIA**: Informed by the scoping report and following the production of a draft environmental statement, the structure and format of the ES were altered to be proportionate to the scale and significance of potential effects in each route section. The revised ES was structured to have an overall project wide assessment and also a chapter for each of the route sections. The project route sections have very different construction activities and scales of work to be undertaken therefore the impact of construction or operation in each of these areas will be different. This reporting structure allowed for a more focused assessment and reduced repetition that would have arisen if the report had been structured by local authority area or all receptors were reported to a similar level of detail for each route section.

- **Accelerated assurance**: A rolling review process was established with concurrent project team and legal review periods. A robust programme ensured reviews were undertaken in a timely manner and provided consolidated comments for final edits by each technical lead. This reduced the overall review period.

### Lessons learnt continued

- **Identification of milestones**: To ensure timely delivery the project programme identified clear dates by which assumptions for use in the EIA technical assessments, baseline data, and design and construction information had to be provided to the relevant environmental team.

- **Advanced ecological compensation**: To maximise the benefits of the environmental design and allow sites to establish before the start of construction, some of the sites proposed for ecological compensation were implemented ahead of the Order being granted. Work included excavation of ponds, required as receptor sites for great crested newts that needed to be moved to facilitate construction. Implementation of compensation ahead of the Order allowed the project to maintain the construction programme as planned.

- **Public consultation and landowner engagement**: Three rounds of consultation were undertaken with landowners, statutory bodies and local communities through the design of the project and the EIA process. Feedback from stakeholders and the public was carefully evaluated and the design of the Project influenced by the comments received. Early and ongoing engagement and communication with landowners allowed the team to progress the advanced ecological compensation works and minimised objections by allowing the team to take on board comments and feedback into the design.

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