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Freepost
EAST WEST RAIL

Harston Parish Council

Response to the East West Rail 2021 Public Consultation Harlton to Hauxton Zone E

Dear Sir/Madam,

This response document is being prepared independently of the East West Rail official feedback form as the questions posed are too narrow to cover the issues expressed by the people of Harston. It will be emailed directly to EWR at consultation@eastwestrail.co.uk and a copy posted to Freepost EAST WEST RAIL

This response is concentrated on the impact upon Harston. Many of the issues raised are common for all of the villages impacted by the Zone E and F proposals to which each Parish will independently respond. The lack of reference in detail to the impact outside of Harston should not in any way be taken as indifference to our neighbouring villages with whom we are in full alliance

The comments and observations expressed here are the result of extensive outreach initiatives to the residents of Harston spearheaded by a collaboration between Harston Parish Council, Harston Residents Group and local independent residents to provide a comprehensive village inclusive response.

Multiple zoom presentations and feed back sessions, including sessions attended by the local MP and Councillors

A dual online /offline poll inviting the residents of every household in Harston in the age range of 14 and above to have their say.. There were 272 completed questionnaires representing 656 residents of the target age. That represents 43% of Harston's eligible population. Statistical results have been included in brackets alongside the categories detailed below

A dedicated email feedback account

Updated newsletters and blogs encouraging maximum participation

General reaction from Harston Residents:

- Shock and anger that the proposals to create effectively a 12 m high barrier around the southern and eastern perimeter of the village and severing of 2 key roads between Harston and Hauxton from Newton could be so insensitively and brutally presented with no real commitment and certainly no meaningful suggestions to mitigate the effects
- That the consultation was at too high a level with insufficient detail or evidence to facilitate detailed responses, a criticism similarly made of the 2019 consultation, see further below.

Original consultation 2019

There was widespread ignorance of the existence of a consultation in 2019. Whilst recognising a leaflet was posted to residents by EWR most had no memory of it. At the time there existed a widespread belief that optional routes would be either north following existing major transport routes or through Bassingbourn further to the south of the county. Zone E was summarized as a more expensive option. There were no exhibitions in Harston but there were in the villages of Orwell and Bassingbourn reinforcing the widespread view at that time.

The zone options were too wide to invite meaningful responses so residents could not relate them to their personal circumstances.

The recurrent claim by EWR that 3500 responders of the 2019 consultation from a total of 7000 voted for Zone E is met with incredulity by the residents of Harston who believe the consultation to be flawed at best and basically a failure in its core objective of reaching out to our community for comment and 7000 is a very small percentage of the population in the gross consultation area.

[68% of poll responses were unaware of the 2019 consultation]

The Northern route options.

Harston Parish Council has consistently supported a full consultation on the benefits of a northern compared to the EWR preferred southern option. EWR's reasoning behind its preference to rule out a northern option detailed in the Consultation Technical Report Appendix F (or any other option to avoid going as close to Harston) is not equitable. We cannot understand why both of the considered options are not presented comprehensively side by side to facilitate a balanced consultation. We call for a full public consultation on a northern route on an equal basis as that presented for the South inviting comment and recommendations from residents along both routes. This will facilitate greater transparency behind the eventual final decision.

[Poll 270 responses – 4.71 out of a maximum score of 5 support a full consultation on an alternative northern route]

The Closure of Station Road, Harston and proposed two new road alternatives

The proposal to sever the link between the villages of Harston and Newton is totally unacceptable for our Primary School and to the Village.

- Children travel daily from Newton to Harston to attend the Newton and Harston Primary School whose entrance is situated at the Harston end of Station Road. This will effectively cut the catchment area of the school in half threatening the very viability of the school. Parents will reconsider attendance at alternative schools accessible from Newton. [Ref objections lodged by the Board of Governors]

- If such action resulted in the closure of Harston School more than 150 children would have to seek schools in alternative villages – all of which would necessitate car journeys with no public transport alternative with considerable anxiety and upheaval to the lives of all families involved.
- The suggested benefit of making Station Road a safe pedestrian and cycle way route resulting from its closure are impractical. The road rises over a steep hill – difficult for young children to use twice daily and would further require a 12-meter plus high bridge over the railway. Not a viable option during short dark winter days.

Proposals for two separate roads to London Road and the A10 south of Harston to compensate for the closure of Station Road will have negative impacts in all cases.

- Longer journeys
- More pollution
- Adding further traffic into the already heavy traffic flows along the A10 to compensate for the lack of a direct Station Road access between the two villages.

The impact of Embankments, Viaducts and Bridges

The vast majority of the of the 6.3Km route from the Eversdens to the Kings Cross Line east of Station Road Harston is proposed to be built on embankments of approximately 12 meters in height, viaducts where there are rivers or flood plains and bridges. The visual effect is transformational and will destroy the very essence of the green belt perimeter along which our southern villages are situated. Harston will in effect be walled in across its southern and eastern borders.

Harston Grade 1 farmland will be destroyed with several small parcels of land created and rendered unworkable. A working farm and 2 dwellings at new Farm on the A10 will be demolished.

It would appear that this massively destructive option is cheaper than the alternative routes. At no point in the proposal is the economic impact on local properties, the loss of environmental habitats, the availability of recreational countryside, most valued by residents, set against this option which in the 2019 consultation was presented as the more expensive option.

As a minimum we would expect every effort be made to keep the line at ground or below ground level along its route so as time goes forward the impact of the inevitable disruptive construction program recedes into the landscape.

There has been no mention or offer of technical help into the environmental impact on the school or residents. We envisage that this could affect noise, electromagnetic fields, smell and air quality generally especially as the embankments and viaducts will create a parabola situated between the two hills. (Please note that the above is not to be confused by air pollution created by the trains)

[Poll 272 responses – 4.71 from a maximum score of 5 are concerned about the visual impact of embankments up to 12 metres high]

Offline Grade Separated Junction East of Station Road.

The proposals for all residents in the vicinity of the preferred proposal to construct a grade separated junction to elevate the new EWR over the Kings Cross line is hard to accept. In EWR own words it will create

a “visual hotspot” It would remodel the whole south-eastern corner of Harston into an eyesore near which nobody will want to live.

This option requires the closure of Station Road the impact of which has already been summarised.

This whole proposition is unacceptable and needs new solutions. We cannot accept the closure of Station Road and the blight of the proposed construction is of a level that cannot be tolerated. EWR must come forward with new recommendations, which may well include tunnelling and or cuttings or possibly relocating the junction.

[Poll 272 responses - 4.48 from a maximum score of 5 claimed they will be adversely impacted by a grade separated loop over the Kings Cross line]

Effect on property valuations - Blight

The announcement we are responding to now will be impacting demand for housing in Harston and our neighbouring villages. Those houses within at least 500 meters will presumably experience the most harmful effects.

Whilst acknowledging a parallel consultation on a compensation scheme for those who “need” to sell the effect of this project will have a long impact tail – during consultation, planning, awaiting authorization to build, construction and eventual operation – a minimum 10 year effect before the long term impact on prices settles in. The HS2 project has demonstrated the “keep away” blight effect on whole towns and with the extreme elevated above ground proposals we expect Harston to experience severe effects on demand and subsequent pricing. We expect EWR to address this first by minimizing elevated track proposals around Harston, which we acknowledge will be considerably more expensive to construct, and respectfully offering a compensation scheme that recognises the extreme harm to our residents and community.

[Poll 272 responses 4,25 out of a maximum score of 5 believe their property values will be negatively impacted]

The impact on local wildlife and environment

The overall EWR proposals claim to be pursuing a sustainable and environmentally responsible policy to building the railway. We however believe Harston will be a net loser in this regards. The well renowned soft landscape that surrounds our southern fringe and used by many local people will be severely impacted visually and functionally – cutting across rivers, waterways and wooded areas which is rich in biodiversity creating a massive walled effect around the entire southern and south-eastern east fringe of the village less than 300Metres from the nearest housing in several areas.

There will be extensive damage to trees, plant species and protected animal species. Just one example - Birds, geese and swans using the river line for low level flying up and down the river Cam and Rhee.

[272 responses – 4.78 from a maximum score of 5 believe there will be a negative impact on nature and local wildlife]

Air pollution and possibility of diesel train use

Harston already experiences high levels of pollution from the considerable volume of traffic along the A10 further aggravated by numerous hold ups for traffic lights, turnings etc. We are very concerned that the

building of an embankment wall around our southern perimeter will have the effect of containing pollution within the village and act as a barrier to normal dispersion of polluting gases and contaminants. This concern requires detailed and independent scientific modelling to ensure the impact does not contravene the maximum limits on particulate emissions laid down by the WHO and supported in UK law.

The suggestion of diesel train use, whilst acknowledging it is not a specific proposal in this consultation, goes against all decarbonisation aims of the government both national and local. We reject the suggestion entirely.

[272 responses – 4.73 out of a maximum score of 5 believe air pollution will increase if the southern alignment is approved]

Preparing for Freight Train Traffic on a line predicated on a railway built for passenger use.

The current justification of this proposal is based we understand – albeit a comprehensive business case has not been published – on the volume of passenger use. Passenger number projections will need refreshing anyway for the Covid change of commuter behaviour effects. We believe the case for passenger numbers is likely to be thin and will be affected by the Covid refresh.

There are no freight use projections being built into the business case to justify its viability simply a statement to say the line will be freight use compatible.

EWK need to come off the fence and make this position crystal clear. On the one hand we have a very expensive infrastructure project with very little detailed justification designed to serve a need that is far from proven. On the other we have a freight line capability with a capacity, we understand, of 50 trains per day travelling through the centre of Cambridge and across a large curve around the southern fringe of Cambridge to join to Cambourne but no plan to develop.

If hypothetically this large number of freight trains were to travel around Harston as suggested the noise and pollution from these long slow noisy engines will create an acoustical nightmare for residents living nearby. In the summer months when residents need to keep their windows open overnight there is no way the construction proposed can shield them from the resultant noise and indeed vibration.

Common sense points to any freight being directed north from east to west above Cambridge.

[We do not envisage that any residents will use the railway line between Cambourne and Cambridge]

[Poll 272 responses – 4.55 from a maximum score of 5 are concerned about noise disturbance from the potential use of diesel passenger and freight trains during the day]

[Poll 272 responses – 4.8 from a maximum score of 5 are concerned about noise disturbance from the potential use of diesel passenger and freight trains during the night]

Mitigation

We wish to make clear all references to the need for or suggestion of mitigation does not detract from the overwhelmingly supported preference from Harston Residents for a northern approach into Cambridge.

The proposals for the southern approach as presented in this consultation are virtually devoid of mitigation recommendations but it is clear to us that the destructive nature of the proposals as they stand on the countryside will require considerable expenditure to alleviate the unacceptable impact on the surrounding countryside and local residents.

There are several references to the lower construction costs of building the southern option. We believe that claim can only be made because the very high costs that will be demanded if planning goes ahead have not been factored in.

[Poll 272 responses – 4.52 from a maximum score of 5 believe ground level building of the line by tunnelling through Chapel Hill should be prioritized even if more expensive]

4.44 from 5 believe routing the line further south towards Foxton should be considered

4.75 from 5 would like to see the line screened by wooded areas

4.88 from 5 expect to see electric trains only on the line

Harston Station [An application has been made to the Beeching Reversal Ideas Fund to help to finance a feasibility study

In 2020 Harston Parish Council with the support of Anthony Browne MP submitted a grant application to conduct a feasibility study to the Department for Transport to re-open the old station in Harston closed during the Beeching cuts. The position of the old station is precisely where the EWR proposal crosses Station Road in Harston.

Harston residents strongly supported this potential reopening bid and any future plans need to accommodate this continued wish – which represented an important contribution to encourage residents out of their cars and onto public transport.

Conclusion

Taking traffic off our roads and onto public transport is widely supported across our community. Unfortunately this proposal has nothing to offer the local people to further that ambition and is seen as a proposal that is prepared to sacrifice this beautiful Cambs Village for a greater vision based on a dubious demand for long distance travel.

Regrettably that argument is not convincingly made and comprises several unsubstantiated sound bites on housing, jobs etc

There is no case being made for freight – so we can dispel that- just reference to the fact it will be freight ready.

The passenger projections are not spelt out

The demand for Oxford to Cambridge passenger traffic is not evidenced at any point. In your own documents you identify demand for local travel but in your plans you do not plan for any local stops; we believe that this is a massive disconnect between the two objectives.

It is assumed it will help to catalyze the Oxford to Cambridge boom - which it may well assist in doing but is made in total isolation to the local transport development plans current or future and for which there is no great infrastructure or joined up plan to develop; it is difficult to comment on the proposed railway before

the local plan has been finalised. Indeed we need to be careful that the we don't destroy the very nature of the small rural communities with their mixed economies that together provide the key workforce for Cambridge and its economic growth.

We have tried hard to search for a positive from the people of Harston but failed to find one that could say – this would be a benefit for me.

Dominic Bellamy

Chairman & Councillor

For Harston Parish Council