



Department
for Transport

Crispin Truman
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RECEIVED
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Baroness Vere of Norbiton
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Dear Crispin,

Thank you for your letter of 19 February, jointly signed by the Chief Executives of The Wildlife Trusts, Berks Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust and the Beds, Cambs & Northants Wildlife Trust, addressed to the Secretary of State, about the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and East West Rail (EWR). I am replying as the minister responsible for this issue.

As you will be aware, in 2014, the Government commissioned a strategic study into the potential for a high-quality route linking the key economic centres of Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford. This recognised that the existing road route suffers from congestion and poor journey time reliability, particularly during peak travel periods, creating a barrier to movement.

Over the last year, Highways England has been developing its understanding of potential options for the expressway project. Its work is informing the Department's thinking about the benefits and costs of the expressway, and we will provide an update on whether the project should continue in due course.

A number of re-opened railway lines and stations around England, Wales and Scotland have enjoyed a great deal of success with more and more passengers using them. This Government wants to take this further and therefore has committed £500 million to start re-opening rail lines and stations closed during the Beeching cuts. This fund will be split in three ways to ensure we can support different projects at different phases of development. Details on how to take forward proposals are set out on our website at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/restoring-your-railway-fund

I welcome your support for EWR. I can confirm that the case for the electrification of EWR is currently being reconsidered, with a review being undertaken by the East West Rail Company of three possible options: full EWR route electrification, Central Section (Bedford to Cambridge) electrification, and a Central Section electric/hybrid rolling stock solution. Electrification had previously been descoped for the Western Section Phase 2 (Bicester to Bedford) to reduce capital costs. Passive provision is being provided in the construction of this section so that electrification may be implemented in the future subject to value for money and affordability.

Creating any new transport infrastructure carries environmental challenges, and we seek to find solutions that have the least effect (and where possible avoid, mitigate and minimise impacts) on the natural environment. This process involves working with Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, as well as local environmental groups.

Thank you for taking the time to write in with your concerns.

Yours,
Charlotte

BARONESS VERE OF NORBITON