



Department for Transport

Councillor Emily Smith
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From the Minister of State
Chris Heaton-Harris MP

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10 March 2021

Dear Councillor Smith,

Thank you for your letter of 1 March to Grant Shapps about East West Rail electrification. I am replying as the Minister responsible for rail.

The Government is committed to decarbonisation and EWR Co is preparing a range of options for consideration by Government, as part of our wider commitment to meet net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Although rail is a comparatively green mode of transport and can contribute to transport decarbonisation by moving goods and people from more polluting modes, it must still decarbonise significantly if we are to reach net zero by 2050.

Further electrification will play an important role in our plans to decarbonise the railway, alongside the deployment of hydrogen and battery trains on some parts of the network. The Network Rail-led Traction Decarbonisation Network Strategy (TDNS) recommends which technologies could be best suited to which parts of the network. TDNS will inform Government decisions about the scale and pace of rail decarbonisation between now and 2050, and the Department's forthcoming Transport Decarbonisation Plan.

It is possible diesel rolling stock will be used for the first East West Rail ("EWR") services in Connection Stages 1 and 2 of EWR – Oxford to Bedford. This would be an interim solution which will allow the earliest possible start of services between Oxford and Milton Keynes, whilst a decision on decarbonisation options for the full route are taken.

The case for the electrification of EWR is being considered. A review is being undertaken by East West Rail Company, which is looking at options including full electrification along the whole route as well as various options for partial electrification using battery/electric hybrid rolling stock, and other sustainable rolling stock options.

It is not yet clear if other technologies are likely to be sufficiently mature by the time a firm decision needs to be taken on EWR's long term fleet and so it is not yet known whether these technologies could be a replacement for conventional electrification.

Enhancement schemes that were deferred from the previous Control Period, including the electrification of the line between Didcot and Oxford, are subject to the governance and approval process for the new Control Period, and it remains as a potential scheme within the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline. Any future decision to proceed will be subject to a satisfactory business case offering value for money for the taxpayer.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Minister of State for Transport