



Beth West  
Chief Executive Officer  
East West Rail Company  
One Grafton Mews  
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Milton Keynes  
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27 April 2022

Dear Beth,

I am writing to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Chief Executive Officer of the East West Rail Company. I read of your previous experience in the sector with interest and would like to wish you all the best in your role.

My constituents in North Oxfordshire welcome the prospect of improved interconnectivity which East West Rail (EWR) will bring. The opening of the Chiltern line from Oxford to London via Bicester Village station shortly after I was first elected in 2015 has already proven a popular link and enhanced economic growth in the area. The reconnected line between Bicester and Bletchley, ultimately running to Cambridge, is greatly anticipated.

While the long-term benefits of the project are widely supported, there remain areas of local concern which need to be addressed in the immediate term. I hope that you will have already been briefed on the current situation with the London Road crossing in Bicester. Following the opening of the Oxford to London line, barrier down time has become a cause of concern for residents. Over the past few years, we have seen this down time increase gradually. EWR's own calculations suggest that the barrier could be down for as much as 50 minutes per hour when the line is fully operational. This is clearly unacceptable.

EWR's second public consultation, which ran last summer, proposed six possible solutions for the crossing. It has always been clear to me that a more radical solution than signalling improvements alone would be required, and I welcomed EWR's acknowledgement that this is the case. While the consultation was a step in the right direction, I was concerned that the six proposals lacked detail. No detailed indication of viability or cost was provided, for example.

The benefits and disadvantages of a bridge, tunnel or alternative route have been discussed for a number of years. It has also been argued that the solution may lie in a hybrid approach which combines a number of ideas. What is clear, however, is that simply closing the crossing to vehicles in its entirety without providing adequate access to the station and town centre for residents in the south of Bicester is unacceptable. I firmly believe that a solution must be found which retains accessibility from the south of the town.

I was pleased to speak to your predecessor shortly before Christmas about the situation at London Road. He informed me that EWR had received an overwhelming number of responses from constituents about the crossing, with local opinion split over the best solution. He also advised that EWR would work up the most viable designs into greater detail ahead of a further consultation this summer. Given the time elapsed since we spoke, I would be grateful for an update on the progress which has been made on this. It is vital that EWR are transparent with my constituents regarding what is actively being worked on for this crossing.

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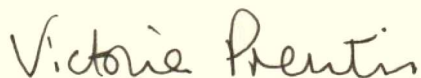
Aside from the London Road crossing, I am aware that EWR are making good progress on the first connection phase of the project. I understand that tracklaying is now underway between Bicester and Bletchley. While I welcome this progress, it is clear that construction activity is causing significant disruption to my constituents in Bicester, Launton and the surrounding area.

A number of constituents have contacted me to raise concerns about disruption to the Bicester – Launton Road and Charbridge Lane in particular. In recent months, there have been numerous roadworks, lane closures and whole closures in this area as construction has progressed. I am aware that the Bicester Road bridge has been closed once again for an advertised period of two months. Many constituents have expressed their understandable concerns that this bridge is closed again, despite previously being closed from February to April of last year.

While I appreciate that some disruption is inevitable for a project of this scale, I am sure you can appreciate my constituents' frustration that such a key route into Bicester has been closed for a second significant period. Many constituents have highlighted the impact that this will have on regular journeys to and from shops, GP surgeries and also schools during the forthcoming exam period. I would therefore be grateful for your assurance that such disruption will be minimised as construction continues.

I hope that this provides a brief overview of the issues currently facing my constituents in relation to East West Rail. I was pleased to speak to your predecessor on a number of occasions about the project and very much hope that you and I can have a similarly strong working relationship moving forward. I look forward to welcoming you to Bicester as soon as diary considerations allow. In the meantime, I would welcome an update on the latest developments regarding the London Road crossing and also your comments on the disruption being caused by construction in my constituency.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Prentis". The script is cursive and fluid.

**Victoria Prentis MP**