

ENGLAND'S
ECONOMIC
HEARTLAND



MAXIMISING EAST WEST RAIL

INTRODUCTION

East West Rail has the potential to be transformational for our region.

The opportunity it presents is about so much more than new train services on 80-odd miles of track. East West Rail can transcend expectations of what infrastructure can unlock for our economy, environment and society: but only if we – collectively – enable this to happen.

With the government, local and regional partners, the private sector and our academic institutions we must continue to ensure that the needs of our communities and businesses are met and maximised alongside delivery of East West Rail.

With the right collaboration, coordination and investment, East West Rail will be a catalyst for supercharging inward investment, business expansion, skills and jobs, sustainable housing, digital connectivity, tourism and wider transport improvements. Most of all, by putting enhancement of the region's natural and built environment at the centre of what we do, we can ensure the region is a great place to live and work.

East West Rail 'legacy' funding

England's Economic Heartland has been working with government, local partners, East West Railway Company, the Pan Regional Partnership, Science Supercluster Board and Oxford to Cambridge Universities Group to explore how East West Rail can supercharge the ambitions of the region.

This has heralded a new partnership model for delivery across sectors, focusing on specific, high impact initiatives.

This document sets out an initial programme of work, the framework for a bold future that puts our region's communities, lifestyle, environment and economic strengths at the forefront of what we do.

The programme has initial support from HM Treasury, with some funding already available through the East West Rail 'legacy' fund, though with scope for further investment to multiply its impact (we have indicated in the brochure where 'legacy funding' has been used for the initial parts of the projects).



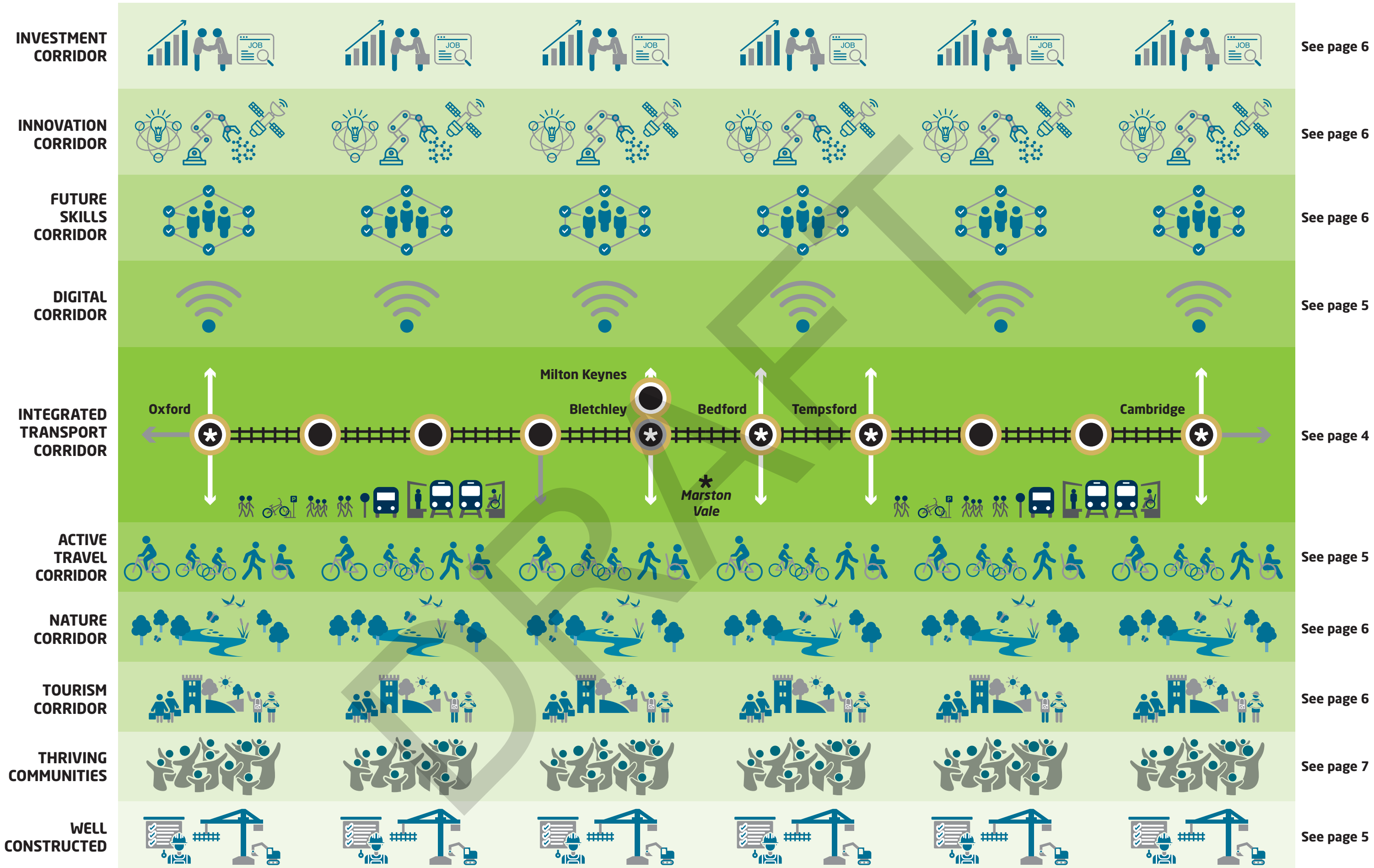
An integrated 'corridor of corridors'

East West Rail's greatest potential is how it can connect and catalyse the region's biggest strengths. EEH will work with partners to ensure East West Rail is catalyst for a far wider integrated, connected transport corridor.

At the same time, there are opportunities to use delivery of East West Rail to supercharge a regional investment corridor, innovation corridor, skills corridor, nature corridor, digital corridor, and so on. **See diagram opposite.**

Creating a fully integrated corridor of corridors: much more than the sum of their individual parts. Realising the ambitions for the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor for the benefit of our communities, businesses and the wider UK economy.





Key:

East West Rail core route

Connecting radial main lines

East West Main Line, including links to Aylesbury, Ipswich, Norwich and Bristol, and the Bletchley North East chord. See pages 8-9

Supporting place-based sustainable growth and regeneration through Local Opportunity Plans and growth commissions. Page 7



CONNECTED CORRIDOR

Integrated transport corridor

Providing integrated, high quality public transport and active travel connections to and from stations, will enable an expanded catchment of people and businesses able to benefit from East West Rail. A total of 374,000 homes will be within 10 minutes of an East West Rail station and an additional 305,000 homes are within 20 minutes of these stations.¹

Making it happen:

The East West Railway Company has produced a 'door-to-door strategy', which has been approved by the Department for Transport. The proposals will provide for facilities and services at stations and measures along the railway to enable active travel and seamless transfer to East West Rail services.

Local and combined authorities, supported by EEH, have an essential role in improving the routes to and from stations which fall outside of the 'red line boundary' of the Development Consent Order and within the communities across the East West Rail route.

'Door to Door Plus*', led by EEH, is building on the East West Railway Company's Door to Door Strategy. It will set out how East West Rail will be a catalyst for an integrated transport system for the whole region, not just the 'last mile' connectivity around station locations. This will include maximising the use of interventions, such as new cycling infrastructure and public transport routes, including EEH's proposed 'Heartbeat' regional bus network. It will also explore how improved journey planning and innovations can bring about changes in travel behaviour, and draw upon examples of international best practice.

The project will set out an action plan for the most cost effective way of achieving genuine transport integration in this key economic corridor for the UK. However, dedicated door-to-door funding must be made available for local and combined authorities to plan and deliver these improvements.

Source: Public First report for Science Supercluster Board (2025)

EEH's Strategic Transport Leadership Board has agreed a set of principles to inform work on door-to-door connectivity:

- **Ambitious** – to maximise the potential of the middle mile solution
- **Innovation led** – so that provision for first mile last mile is future-proofed and enabled through forward thinking design and planning
- **Customer led** – to meet the needs of communities
- **Integrated** – to provide seamless end-to-end journeys
- **Safe, easy, secure and accessible** – so as many people as possible can access the first mile last mile options. This includes the timetable patterns of public transport
- **Reflect local and customer needs and opportunities** – recognising local needs should be met as well as being part of a recognisable network
- **Good practice** – draws on good practice of known successful examples of first mile last mile solutions
- **Strategic network** – should be part of a wider network (such as EEH's proposed Heartbeat bus network) as well as providing local solutions

¹ Enabled through DfT initial 'legacy' funding as part of 'integration' workstream





Digital corridor

High quality digital connectivity should be assumed for this internationally competitive, technology-driven corridor. However, digital deserts exist throughout the region, stifling productivity, innovation and inward investment. EEH previously secured funding to enable fibre to be affordably installed along the Bicester-Bletchley section of East West Rail during its construction. Following this, the England's Connected Heartland consortium won funding to trial 5G connectivity along this section of the route, significantly enhancing onboard and lineside digital connectivity: benefiting not just passengers but communities and businesses along East West Rail. Given the relatively small costs involved, and to ensure a consistent and productive passenger experience, digital infrastructure should also be installed during the construction of the next phases of East West Rail.

Making it happen:

EEH and East West Main Line Partnership continues to work with England's Connected Heartland to make the strongest case for East West Rail digital infrastructure.



Active travel corridor

There is an opportunity for a landmark active travel corridor between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, following a significant proportion of the East West Rail route. The 'Varsity Way' will be a catalyst for active travel improvements elsewhere in the region, providing access to green spaces (including in areas likely to undergo significant housing growth) and becoming an iconic tourist destination in its own right.

Making it happen:

The Varsity Way is largely based on an existing National Cycle Network routes, parts of which require upgrading. EEH is working with Sustrans on progressing proposals for the Varsity Way. For more information see EEH's report '[Introducing the Varsity Way](#)' on the EEH website.



Considerately constructed corridor

The phased approach to delivering East West Rail provides an unmissable opportunity to learn lessons from previous stages. By doing so, the impact of East West Rail's construction on communities, businesses and the environment can be minimised.

Making it happen:

EEH and East West Main Line Partnership will engage with a variety of people involved in supporting the planning and delivery of the first phase of East West Rail. Their feedback will inform advice for both local authorities and East West Railway Company to inform their approach to future stages of East West Rail.



Winslow Station under construction in January 2023



SUPERCARGING STRENGTHS



Innovation corridor

By connecting the region's world class concentrations of knowledge-intensive business clusters, science parks and universities, East West Rail can fuel innovation, attract inward investment, and boost economic growth.

Making it happen:

A global cluster gap analysis^o, led by the Supercluster Board, will examine how the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor functions as a cohesive innovation ecosystem and what it requires to reach its full potential. It will map existing science parks, research hubs, and business clusters, identifying their strengths, interdependencies, and infrastructure needs. The study will pinpoint gaps that must be addressed to compete globally. This report will provide a roadmap for targeted investment, infrastructure planning, and policy development. The findings will ensure the region fully capitalises on East West Rail and its world-class science and innovation sector, positioning it as a leading global supercluster.



Investment corridor

East West Rail is strengthening the region's ability to compete with other global investment destinations such as Boston, Paris and Seoul.

Making it happen:

A regional promotional strategy^o, led by the Supercluster and including engagement with growth and business boards, will focus on attracting businesses and investment to the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. The programme is being developed to target key investors and businesses. The Growth Corridor proposition, will be built around a timeline of key global events, trade missions and a communications strategy that will position the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor as a competitive global science and technology supercluster.



Future skills corridor

The uplift in economic activity for the region necessitates a renewed approach to developing the skills and talent required for the future.

Making it happen:

Working with the Oxford to Cambridge Universities Group, local partners, business leaders, educators, investors, and policymakers will tackle the skills gap that limits economic growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. Building on previous initiatives,

this work[†] will develop a coordinated strategy to ensure the region has the talent pipeline needed to support its world-class industries. With the new government's industrial strategy, local growth plans and a national and a national skills body taking shape, this is a timely opportunity to align regional skills development with long-term national priorities, strengthening the region's position as a global leader in science, technology, and innovation.



Tourism corridor

The places served by East West Rail offer some of Britain's best culture, museums, shopping and family days out, from the modern attractions of Bicester Village or indoor skiing in Milton Keynes, through to the historic cities of Oxford and Cambridge, and the beautiful environs of the Marston Vale. An integrated public transport network with East West Rail as its spine will transform the potential of the region's visitor economy and access to the natural environment. The proposed Universal Studios and Puy du Fou parks in Bedford and Bicester will further add to the corridor's rich tourism offer.

Making it happen:

EEH will lead work[†] in collaboration with local and combined authorities, to identify how the region can best grasp opportunities to boost the visitor economy and sustainable access to attractions in the region. This will include a strategy based on a clear understanding of the region's visitor assets (including heritage and blue and green nature sites), alongside the production of marketing material and resources.



Nature corridor

Local leaders across the region are clear: preserving and enhancing our natural environment is crucial. In 2024, the Pan Regional Partnership published its environmental principles which provides a framework for achieving this. The East West Railway Company has committed to constructing the railway to support biodiversity net gain, further enhancing the natural environment for which the region is renowned. The East West Rail scheme will also provide extensive opportunities for accessing existing green



spaces as well as creating new spaces for local communities. This is a key consideration as part of the scheme's design, and East West Railway Company says it will work with local communities and partners to meet their needs and to establish ambitious targets for improving the region's quality of life through improving access to nature-rich green space in rural and urban areas, where appropriate, while maintaining a sense of wilderness and protecting species. A key enabling factor will be how the scheme links up the extensive network of rights of way across the region. The route will provide significant opportunities for meeting health and wellbeing ambitions, including the provision of access to areas for green social prescribing, and enabling greater access to leisure based enjoyment of nature, from pocket parks to biodiversity on our streets initiatives.

Making it happen:

EEH – in collaboration with regional partners and building on the work carried out by the Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership – will lead a project[†] to enhance the quality of data held about the corridor's natural environment. Satellite and development plan data within 5km of the EWR line will be used to identify opportunities for supporting local nature recovery strategies; expanding green spaces and access; achieving biodiversity net gain; and establishing habitat corridors.



Supporting sustainable growth and regeneration

East West Rail unlocks specific place-based opportunities to support sustainable growth and regeneration at a number of locations along its route.

Making it happen:

Working with local authorities alongside regional and national partners, East West Railway Company is undertaking work to understand opportunities at five locations – Bletchley, Marston Vale Line, Bedford, Tempsford and Cambourne. The Local Opportunity Plans will set out an initial 'vision' for each which accounts for the current context and environment and builds upon work already

produced locally. Opportunities in Oxford and Cambridge are being explored by the Growth Commission for Oxford and Cambridge Growth Company respectively.



Thriving communities

East West Rail's benefits for the major economic and population centres on its route are well known. What is perhaps less well known is how it will impact smaller market towns near to, but not directly on, the line.

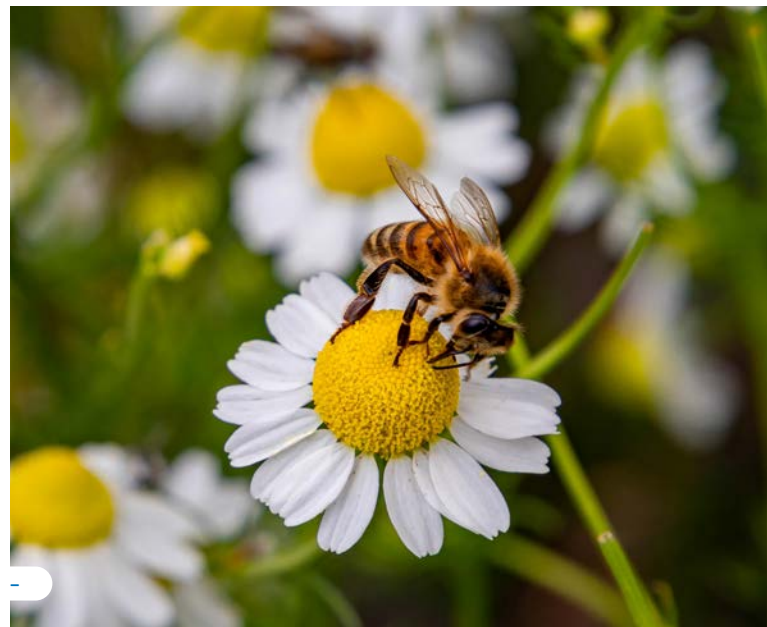
Making it happen:

Oxford Brookes and Anglia Ruskin universities will undertake a joint research study[†] on four case study towns in the region. This will assess how stakeholders and residents perceive the regeneration and development potential of East West Rail for their locality. The research will include an overview of the characteristics of each town, including its economy, skills, cultural assets and built and natural environment.

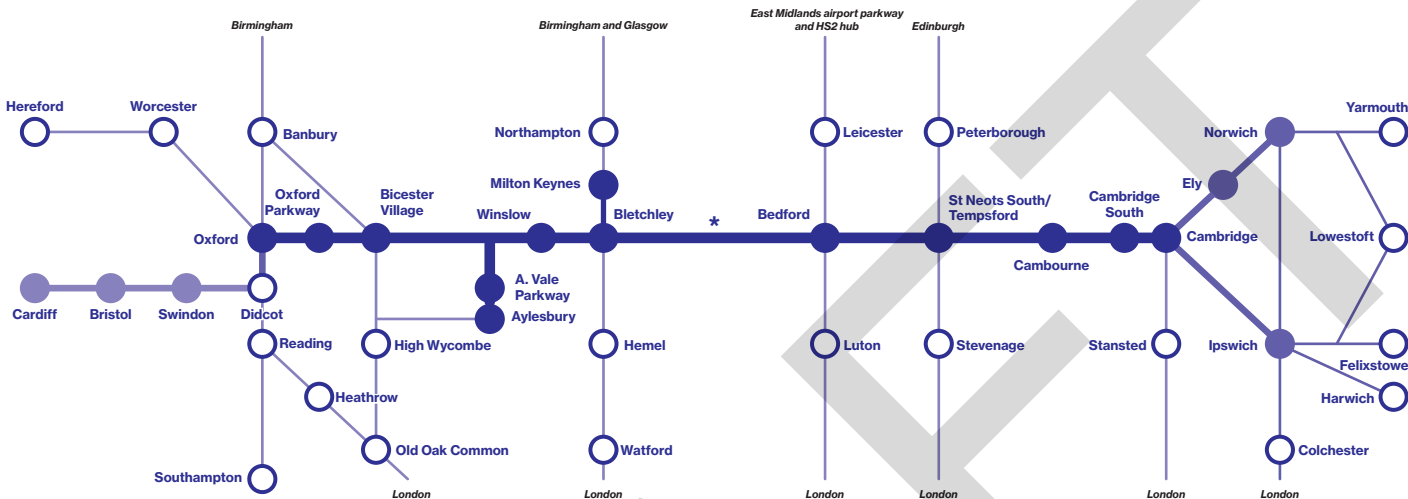
◊: Enabled through DfT initial 'legacy' funding as part of 'business investment and knowledge' workstream

‡: Enabled through DfT initial 'legacy' funding as part of 'skills and learning' workstream

†: Enabled through DfT initial 'legacy' funding as part of 'quality of life, place, heritage and culture' workstream



EAST WEST MAIN LINE



Key:

- East West Rail core scheme between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge
- Proposed East Main Line extension to Ipswich and Norwich (the ‘Eastern Section’)
- Proposed East West Main Line extension to Swindon, Bristol and potentially Cardiff

[*] The configuration of stations between Bletchley and Bedford is to be confirmed by East West Railway Company following a public consultation.

East West Rail intersects with all the UK’s major main lines. This unique connectivity into the rest of the rail network means East West Rail has the potential to change the way people travel across the wider region and country (often negating the need to travel through London). By doing so, East West Rail can facilitate economic growth beyond its core route, while supporting the creation of a coast-to-coast ‘East West Main Line’ from Norwich and Ipswich through to Bristol and South Wales.

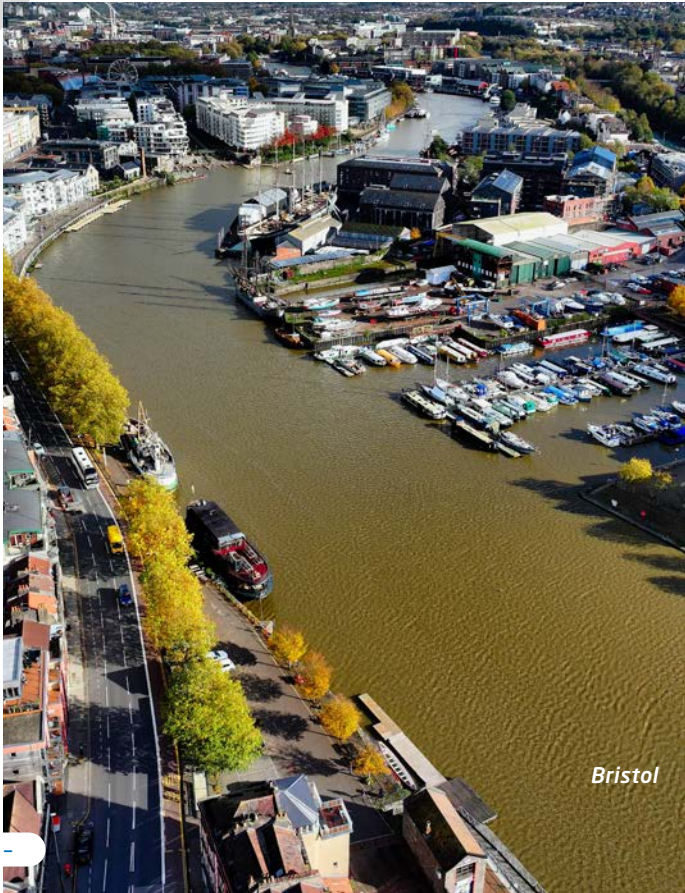
Making it happen:

It is vital that East West Rail stations which intersect with other lines are built or enhanced to become quality interchange hubs, providing seamless onward connections to regional economic centres such as Luton and its airport, Northampton, Peterborough, West Midlands and Stevenage.

EEH and East West Main Line Partnership’s work has identified specific opportunities to improve rail links into East West Rail and support the iterative creation of what will eventually become an East West Main Line with frequent, direct services.

EEH is producing a technical study examining how opportunities associated with delivery of EWR and HS2 can be maximised. It will consider what else is needed above that of the core scheme to achieve the region’s objectives for rail.

In addition to the four major priorities for the main line set out below, we also support work considering how services can be extended to south Oxford via the Cowley Branch Line.



Northampton-Milton Keynes-Aylesbury-High Wycombe-Old Oak Common rail corridor

By harnessing delivery of East West Rail between Oxford and Milton Keynes, a significant opportunity should be unlocked to deliver a new rail corridor between Northampton, Milton Keynes, Aylesbury, High Wycombe and Old Oak Common that better connects important economic centres and maximises the investment in the Elizabeth Line to (an expanded) Heathrow Airport, Slough and Reading. Realising the corridor includes delivery of the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link, which is an integral part of the original plans for East West Rail. For more information see [‘Global Britain Rail’](#).

Bletchley North-East chord

Currently, direct East West Rail services east of Milton Keynes to Bedford and Cambridge are not possible. This risks the city centre of one of the UK’s most dynamic and fastest growing new cities not being fully integrated within the East West Rail route. To facilitate a through route for East West Rail to Milton Keynes Central, and alleviate rail capacity constraints between Bletchley and Milton Keynes, a north-east chord is required, with supporting capacity enhancements at Milton Keynes Central Station.



Oxford-Swindon-Bath-Bristol services

A ‘quick win’ opportunity has arisen to introduce hourly rail services which will link Oxford to Swindon, Bath and Bristol: a major step towards eventually realising direct coast-to-coast connectivity. The new service, which could be introduced within the next 12 months and requires less than £10 million in funding, would deliver journeys between Bristol and Oxford in under an hour and a quarter, and between Swindon and Oxford in just over half an hour. Onward connectivity from Swindon, Bath and Bristol to Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge would be possible via a simple interchange at Oxford. For more information see [‘The case for reinstating Oxford-Swindon-Bath-Bristol rail services’ booklet](#).

‘Eastern Section’

The ambition for East West Rail services to extend to the east of Cambridge to Ipswich and Norwich, as part of an ‘eastern section’ is long-standing. Slow and infrequent, or indirect rail services from Cambridge to Norwich, Ipswich and Colchester currently limit East West Rail’s transformative potential to link with major economic hubs in the East of England. It is worth noting that upgrading **Ely and Haughley junctions** (which will transform the UK rail freight network) are also key to realising improved connectivity between Cambridge, Norwich and Ipswich.

EEH is working with the East West Main Line Partnership and Transport East to make the case for the eastern section.

Get in touch

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