

# East West Rail: a legacy for the region



Collated by England's Economic Heartland with input from the East West Railway Company

**// A better transport system across the region: connecting people to job opportunities, skills and education, leisure, green spaces and sustainable communities, while regenerating existing places, reducing our impact on the environment, delivering biodiversity net gain and unlocking local prosperity and UK economic growth. //**

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## A better transport system across the region...

East West Rail will transform journey times between the towns and cities in the region, meaning it will often be faster to use the train than jump in your car.

But it's not just about getting to the places directly on the line. By connecting with the UK's most important rail lines, East West Rail will completely open up the UK for those living in the region. By connecting at an East West Rail station (rather than travelling into London), journeys to the likes of Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Bristol and Norwich will now be far easier by rail. Airports will also be within easier reach – including Luton, Stansted, Birmingham, Gatwick and East Midlands. And it will be a catalyst for wider transport improvements, including bus services and active travel.

In many ways, this is a case of the region going back to the future. The 'Varsity line', opened in 1846, had connected the region between Oxford and Cambridge, until its closure in 1968.

For the last 55 or so years, travelling by rail across the region has often required a change in London – making such journeys long, complicated and unrealistic. Yet, travelling by car is often also slow despite the relatively short distances involved.

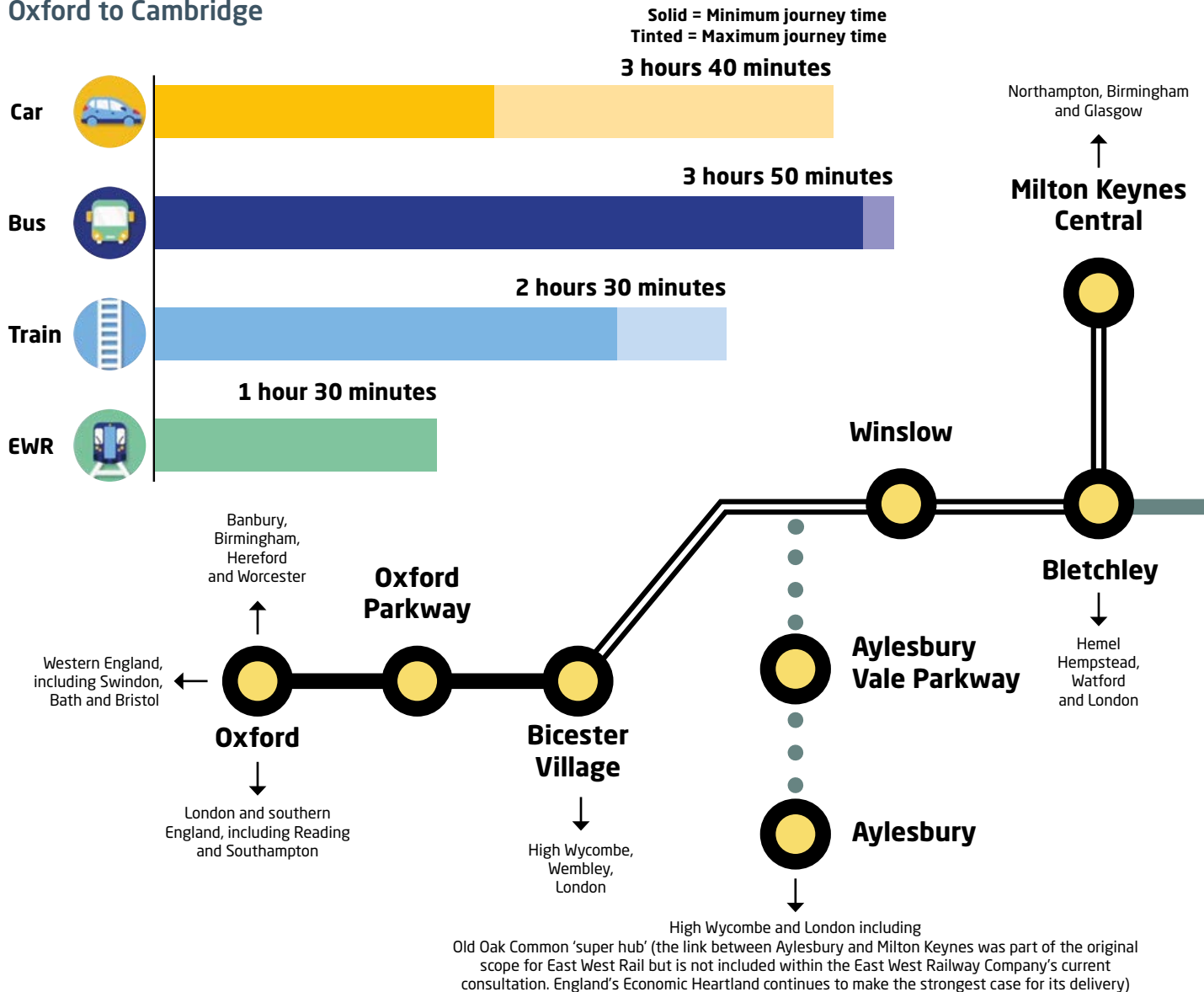
This means that, at peak times, a journey between Oxford and Bletchley, which in 1853 took 75 minutes by train, can in 2024 take more than 140 minutes, and even 90 minutes by car. East West Rail will reduce this journey to 40 minutes.

The end-to-end journey time between Oxford and Cambridge will be just 90 minutes, served by up to four trains an hour.









## Oxford to Cambridge



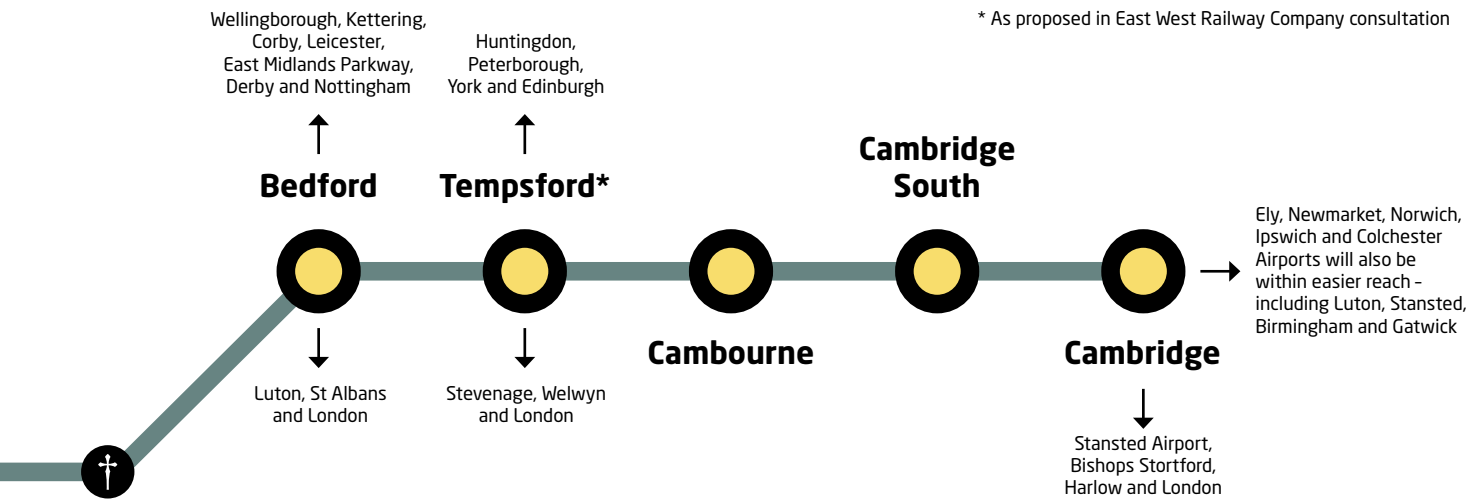
**"My family lives in Oxford so I do go home quite a lot. [East West Rail would] be great because I normally get the coach [from Cambridge] which is longer or go across London and back up to Oxford, so it would be great to have something more direct."**



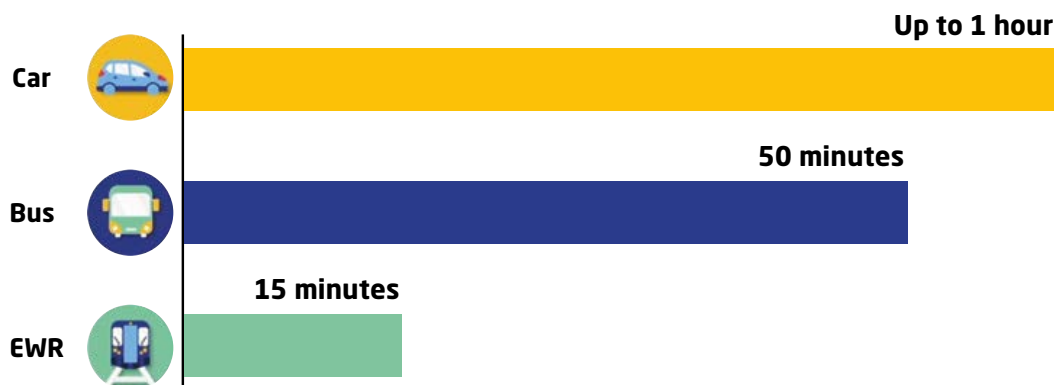
## Key

-  Line completed
-  Due to open in 2025
-  Route under consultation, with Bletchley-Bedford due to open by 2030, and Bedford-Cambridge in mid-2030s.
-  Station configuration between Bletchley and Bedford to be confirmed by East West Railway Company

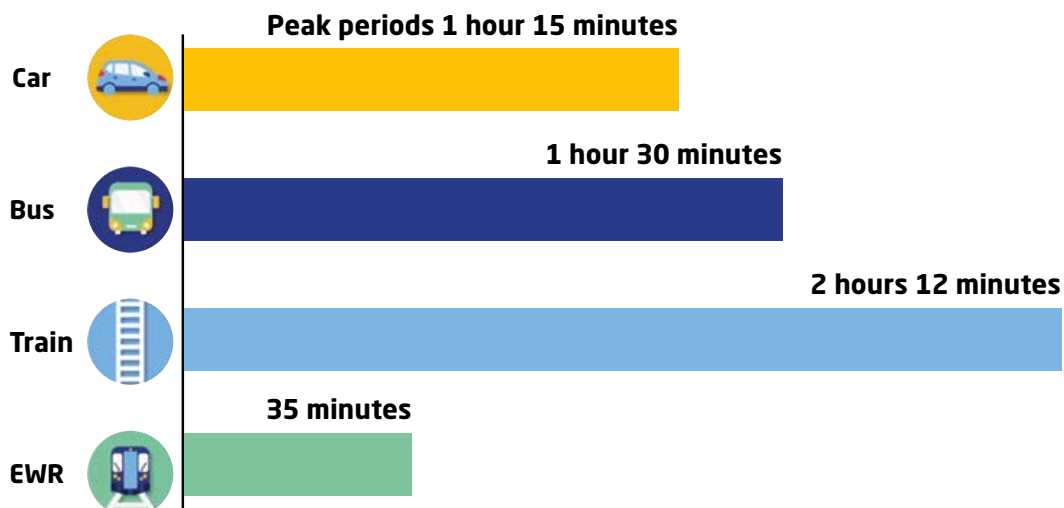
\* As proposed in East West Railway Company consultation



## Cambourne to Cambridge



## Bedford to Cambridge



## ...connecting people to job opportunities...

East West Rail significantly expands the region's jobs market. Opportunities in places previously considered out of reach will very much now be in reach.

Faster, more productive and more affordable ways to travel will not only connect people to more jobs, but also to the widest possible choice of paths for their careers to take.

The region is home to some of the world's very best and most exciting industries and businesses at the cutting edge of technological and scientific development, including life sciences, advanced engineering, data and AI, and the creative sector. Now, those roles will be accessible to more people, especially those who cannot afford to live where the jobs may be located.


And again, it's not just those places on the line – centres of employment such as Northampton, Watford, Stevenage and Peterborough will also be within a single connection, as will the film studios such as Pinewood and Elstree in south Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire.

There are 2.6 million jobs in the England's Economic Heartland region, including 25% of all England's life science roles, 12% advanced physics and engineering, and 10% digital and creative.

Those job numbers are only likely to further expand with businesses and investors supported and encouraged by East West Rail. There is a thriving start-up scene and many of the companies that start here grow fast and become thriving businesses. Whether it's the likes of Oxford Nanopore or AbCam in Cambridge, Oxford and Cambridge produce the same number of 'Unicorns' as Berlin and Paris.

Milton Keynes, at the heart of the region, is a testbed for AI innovation, with over 1,000 people with direct AI or machine learning skills and is home to over 6,000 software engineers and 4,000 data engineers, while Cambridge's rate of patent applications – a key indicator of innovation – is the highest in the UK, at over 12 times the national average.

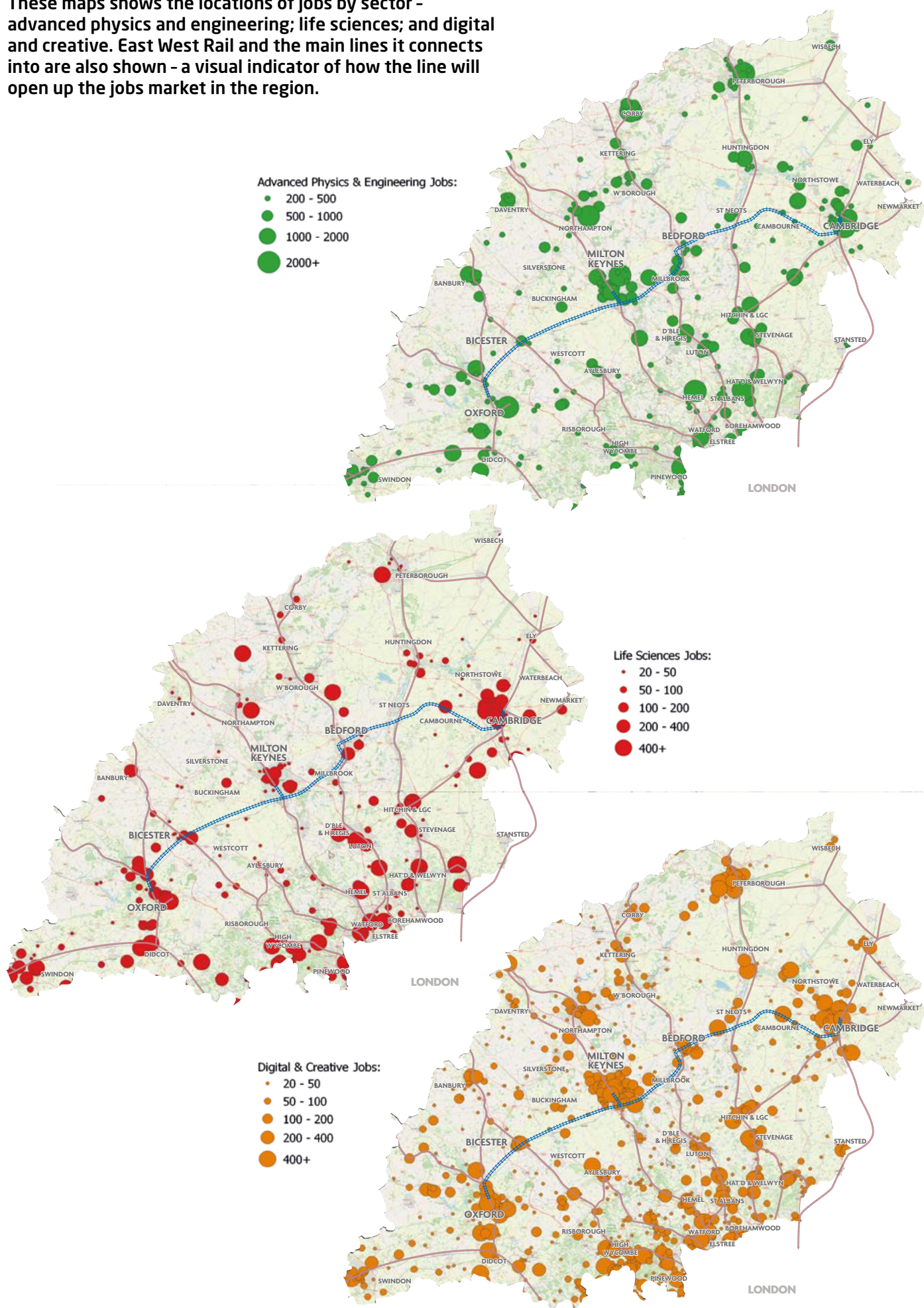
Moreover, with East West Rail, those businesses are more likely to locate throughout the region. With space in Oxford and Cambridge running out, the rail line will make it possible for businesses to grow by taking accessible and affordable space elsewhere along the railway line, much like Cambridge Medical Supplies has done by expanding into Ely. This will keep business growth in the region and spread the prosperity all the way along the East West Rail line.



**"I work daily in Milton Keynes so I think a faster service [from Bedford]... would be more direct and more convenient for passengers."**



These maps shows the locations of jobs by sector - advanced physics and engineering; life sciences; and digital and creative. East West Rail and the main lines it connects into are also shown - a visual indicator of how the line will open up the jobs market in the region.



### ...skills and education...

East West Rail is opening access to the widest choices of vocational training, apprenticeships and academic courses.

This is particularly important to young people, students and low-income households for whom access to skills and education is so important, and who are less likely to own a car and so rely on public transport.

East West Rail provides access to the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University, the Open University, University of Bedfordshire, Anglia Ruskin University and University of Cambridge, while the likes of Cranfield and Buckingham universities only require a short connection by bus. Other institutions, such as University of Northampton and University of Bedfordshire Luton campus are also within reach via a single connection.

Colleges and business schools will also be far more accessible, from the Said Business School in Oxford to the Judge Business School in Cambridge, and Milton Keynes College to Bedford College.


### ...leisure...

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 shopping centre or indoor skydiving and skiing in Milton Keynes, through to the historic cities of Oxford and Cambridge.

Travelling to these places by car, however, can be stressful, time consuming and expensive, – and, of course, may not always allow people to experience nightlife to the full.

By rail, journeys to these destinations are simple. As East West Rail connects more people to these attractions, simpler travel will boost the region's leisure, hospitality and nightlife industries — meaning even more places to go and more things to do.

Within a single interchange are attractions such as the Harry Potter Studio Tour in Watford (change at Bletchley – or alight there first to visit the famous home of the Codebreakers), while Blenheim Palace is a bus journey from Oxford Parkway Station. Communities in Winslow, Tempsford and and Cambourne will also be able to access fast trains into London for the first time.

A photograph of two young women standing on a city street. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a brown jacket. The woman on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a dark blue jacket. They are both looking towards the camera. In the background, there are buildings and other people walking on the street.

**"For students I think it will mean quite a lot to have a rail service, being able to get the train from [Bedford to] MK or Cambridge, it's a lot easier than driving lessons and cheaper than the cost of fuel at the moment."**



### ...green spaces...

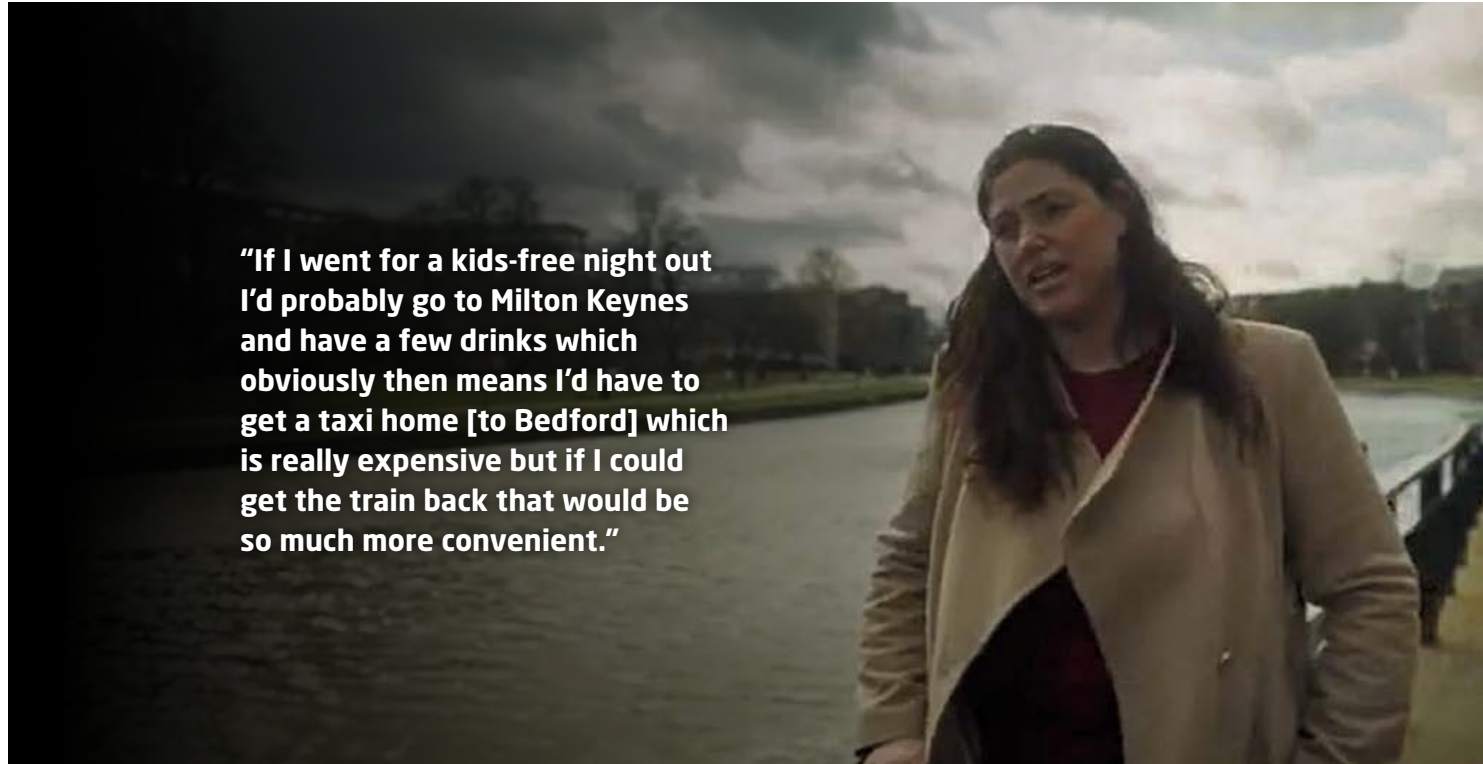
The East West Rail scheme will provide extensive opportunities for accessing existing green spaces as well as creating new spaces for local communities. This is a key consideration as part of the scheme's design, and East West Railway Company says it will work with local communities and partners to meet 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.

### ...and sustainable communities...

East West Rail has the potential to support sustainable communities, putting public transport at the heart of development and travel choices in the region. The proposed East West Rail route strongly aligns with allocated sites in local plans across the region, where house prices have become unaffordable for most of the population.

In Oxford and Cambridge, average house prices are 12 times more than average yearly earnings — compared to around eight times more nationally. This prevents many people from living in these areas and within a short commute of the available job opportunities. Many young people cannot see the region as their permanent and long term home, as they cannot afford to get on the housing ladder.

East West Rail will act as part of the solution to the region's housing problem by providing new connections from residential communities to the education and employment opportunities in the region's economic centres — and will unlock access to new affordable and sustainable homes, where increasing demand for the current supply is driving prices upwards.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored coat over a dark top, stands outdoors near a body of water. She has a thoughtful expression, looking slightly to the side. The background shows a river and some distant buildings under a cloudy sky.

**"If I went for a kids-free night out I'd probably go to Milton Keynes and have a few drinks which obviously then means I'd have to get a taxi home [to Bedford] which is really expensive but if I could get the train back that would be so much more convenient."**

### ...while regenerating existing places...

Increased connectivity will drive urban renewal and town centre regeneration throughout the region by attracting new investment and new housing in other town centres along the route.

East West Rail will create opportunities to reframe local stations as the gateway to their towns and stimulate regeneration. In Bletchley, this has already accelerated plans to develop the iconic Brunel shopping centre. A brand-new station in Bedford will improve access to the local hospital.

Oxford, Milton Keynes and Bedford all contain neighbourhoods which are among the top 10% most deprived in the country.


### ...reducing our impact on the environment...

Emissions from surface transport per capita in the England's Economic Heartland region are currently 30% higher than the UK average. Often people drive because they simply have no other choice – but East West Rail will change this directly, and will also act as a catalyst for wider improvements to sustainable transport.

Rail travel can reduce emissions by up to 66% compared to travel by car. By giving people a choice in how they travel, and enabling them to cut their everyday emissions, the positive environmental effects of East West Rail will accelerate progress to net zero.

Locally, the positive effects will be more immediately felt. Getting people off the road and onto rail will reduce congestion and improve air quality, so walking through, and existing in, our urban areas will be more pleasant.

Following years of campaigning by local leaders, East West Railway Company announced this autumn that the trains would be powered through 'discontinuous electrification' rather than dirtier diesel.



**"We've noticed a difference with the cost of living crisis, it really has reduced people's spending but I think an increase in transport would definitely increase more people into the area."**

### ...delivering biodiversity net gain...

By encouraging a modal shift from cars and lorries, East West Rail will reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, promote environmental sustainability and support the UK's energy transition. East West Rail aims to be a net zero passenger railway and is exploring new technologies to power its trains that reduce carbon emissions and support the Government's ambitious climate agenda.

East West Railway Company says it is committed to finding ways to protect species development, so biodiversity is left in a better state than we found it. This includes through pledging a target of 10% biodiversity net gain for the route. The scheme's nine environmental principles are aligned to the regional principles, developed by the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership, and are being embraced by partners and the supply chain.

Creating sanctuaries for rare and protected species is a key commitment. East West Rail's first section between Oxford and Milton Keynes has already successfully established 20 Ecological Compensation Sites (ECS), designed to enhance connections between habitats and safeguard species across the route. These sites include 45 ponds, badger setts, over 70 bat boxes and more than 150,000 plants and trees have been planted. The sites have transformed previously low-diversity land into wildlife havens. Surveys conducted on the ECS to date demonstrate tangible successes and this is just the start.

### ...improving quality of life...

East West Rail will mean local people can spend less time stuck in traffic and more time focusing on what matters to them. Fast, stress-free, travel with lower carbon emissions mean happier residents and healthier communities. More efficient commuting routes open up affordable housing options in less well-served areas, supporting growth and investment. This will not only enhance the quality of life for residents and create access to jobs, it will also reduce costs for business, improve their productivity and drive growth.

### ...and unlocking local prosperity and UK economic growth.

With its knowledge-intensive sectors and world leading businesses, the Heartland region is uniquely placed to deliver economic advances quickly.

The connectivity East West Rail provides will enable Oxford, Bicester, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge to reach their full potential. The railway will ensure inclusive sustainable growth for everyone, including those areas that have fallen behind, while also unlocking economic growth for the whole of the UK. Better transport connectivity will make the region more attractive for international companies.

As they expand, so too will their investment in supply chains across the UK, just as AstraZeneca has shown with its further commitment to £650 million investment in the UK, which includes significant funding for not only this region but for England as a whole.

**"If I'd got the train from Oxford to Cambridge today I could have worked on my laptop, it would have been more comfortable, more direct, and it also has a better impact for the environment."**





