

Strategic Transport Leadership Board

11 July 2025

Agenda Item 4 Rail Capacity Opportunities

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the Board:

- a) To receive an update from Arup on progress of the work to date the progress and emerging outcomes of EEH commissioned work to consider both new unlocking regional rail capacity and the new stations tool kit, both of which are aimed at further progressing EEH's known rail priorities.**

1. Purpose of report

This paper gives an update to the Board on the work being undertaken by EEH to improve understanding of opportunities around new stations and identify new connection opportunities resulting from released capacity created by the delivery of East West Rail and potentially HS2 for the main lines across the region.

2. Key points to note

- 2.1. New stations and the unlocking of identification of released capacity as a result of East West Rail and potentially HS2 provide an important opportunity for this region to progress an integrated, connected transport system.
- 2.2. EEH has commissioned rail experts, Arup, to analyse these opportunities, and they will provide an update to Board on progress.
- 2.3. The new stations toolkit will help make it easier for authorities to make the case for new stations; while also providing analysis of the potential deliverability of stations.
- 2.4. The Released Capacity Study focuses on identifying the potential released capacity that EWR and potentially HS2 provide and to maximise the benefits of these two major rail projects for the region's main lines including: the East West Main Line, West Coast Mail Line, Midland Mail Line, and East Coast Mail Line.
- 2.5. The opportunities associated with the East West Main Line are well known and include major priorities such as the Northampton-Old Oak Common-Heathrow corridor (including Aylesbury-Milton Keynes). The study will provide further information and expert advice which will help progress the East West Main Line.

3. Context

- 3.1. Improving rail connectivity as part of the development of an integrated transport network continues to be a priority for EEH. The region is served by six main lines as well as the future East West Rail line. HS2 also cuts through the region, as outlined in Figure 1 below. Although HS2 does not directly serve the region it is important that it is assessed to determine if there are any potential benefits and capture these for the region.
- 3.2. A key on-going focus is development and delivery of East West Rail to support improved connectivity and economic development across EEH that will also provide east-west connectivity between the existing main lines.
- 3.3. Planning for improving rail services on the existing main lines is also important to ensure better strategic connections are enabled, both between important locations within EEH, but also to major locations outside of the EEH area.
- 3.4. In July 2023, this Board considered and endorsed a report that set out strategic objectives for rail for each of the main lines within our region, which then formed the basis for the EEH Main Line Rail Priorities work that was completed and endorsed by the EEH Board in September 2024.
- 3.5. The EEH Main Line Priorities Study included a baseline assessment of the rail network across EEH, including understanding the current train services and how this may be impacted by planned rail investment such as East West Rail. It identified the importance of developing key rail hubs across the EEH region, including improving interchange and door-to-door connectivity. It also analysed the rail network from the perspective of decarbonisation and network constraints and identified options to address issues identified.
- 3.6. The outcomes of this work has been used to inform more detailed discussions and work with rail industry partners and others, including neighbouring STBs.
- 3.7. This Board agreed that the Main Line Priorities Study should be followed by more detailed work on the potential for new stations in the region; and how services can develop in the context of the delivery of East West Rail and potential released capacity opportunities as a result of HS2.
- 3.8. Today's meeting will hear from our consultants Arup, who will provide an update on this work, ahead of the study coming back to Board in December following extensive engagement with officers and members.

The EEH Area Mainlines

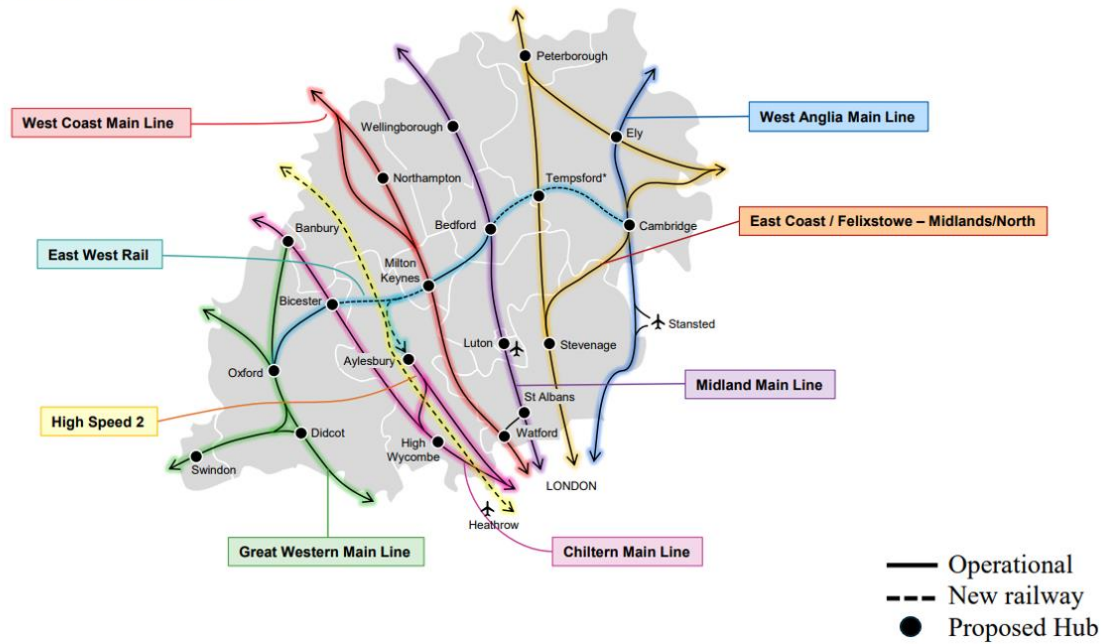
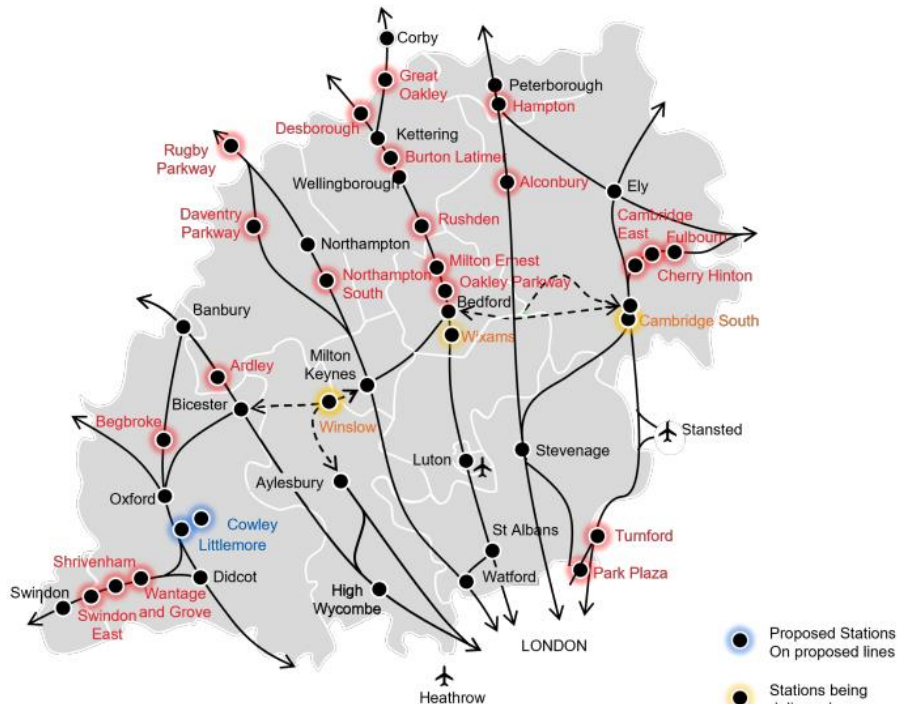


Figure 1. EEH Mainlines HS2 and EWR

4. New Stations Tool Kit

- 4.1. The EEH Main Line Priorities study identified a number of potential new stations across the region either through local plans or local authority priorities (see figure 2 below). However, there seemed to be no clear path on how or if these stations could be delivered. Therefore, it was agreed to develop a stations tool kit, to support our local authorities to progress stations in their area.
- 4.2. There are common challenges with delivery of new stations such as: how to develop the funding package; how to determine and agree a level of service, especially for stations on inter-city mainlines where there are already capacity constraints on the line; how to deal with uncertainties, such as changing travel patterns, links to and dependency on development; and the complexities of the planning process, such as Transport and Works Act Orders and Development Consent Order. The tool kit is aimed at trying to provide a way through this.
- 4.3. Therefore, the tool kit looks at how to make the case for new stations; the requirements to deliver a new station, it provides a high-level overview of funding, analysis of the proposed stations across the EEH region, and also provides relevant case studies of best practice.
- 4.4. The work will also provide some high-level analysis of these stations to support LTAs, looking at catchment analysis and service assumptions with a high-level overview of their deliverability to contribute towards an LTA's development of their strategic narrative and provide a guide on making the case for new stations in support of economic and housing growth, as determined by the established democratic planning process.

Figure 2. Identification of the long list of potential new stations in EEH region



5. The Released Capacity Study

- 5.1. The Released Capacity Study focuses on identifying the potential released capacity that EWR and potentially HS2 provide and to maximise the benefits of these two major rail projects for the region's main lines including: the East West Main Line, West Coast Mail Line, Midland Mail Line, and East Coast Mail Line for communities, businesses and freight operations across EEH.
- 5.2. The opportunities for the East West Main Line are well established, having been set out in EEH's 2021 Transport Strategy and subsequent studies and investment brochures. They include the Northampton-Old Oak Common-Heathrow corridor (and within this, the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link), one of EEH's most significant strategic priorities, together with the Bletchley Chord, eastern section to Ipswich and Norwich (for which Ely/Haughley junctions are key enablers) and connectivity west of Oxford to Swindon and Bristol.
- 5.3. The case for the [Northampton-Old Oak Common-Heathrow](#) (Aylesbury-Milton Keynes) corridor; and [Bristol-Swindon-Oxford](#); have been set out in advocacy brochures produced by EEH, which are available as annexes. The strategic case for the Eastern Section is currently being produced by Transport East and the East West Main Line Partnership (for which EEH provides secretariat). (EEH has also produced an advocacy brochure for Ely Junction, '[Keeping Trade on Track](#)').
- 5.4. The Released Capacity Study will provide valuable additional information and expert advice which will support further progression of the priorities for the East West Main Line.
- 5.5. Importantly, the Released Capacity Study will also assess other potential opportunities unlocked by EWR and HS2 for the West Coast, Midland, East Coast and Cross Country routes.
- 5.6. The study will include analysis of existing data on current journey patterns to identify existing journey patterns, and determine the strategic infrastructure requirements for the region to support goals for sustainable growth and enhanced regional accessibility focusing on key hubs across the region.

- 5.7. These options are being assessed against journey time benefits and the population that they would benefit. Further assessments will be undertaken to provide an understanding of potential deliverability.
- 5.8. This work will allow EEH to have strong evidence base for progressing priorities with the rail industry and future Great British Railways, including for example, around infrastructure and timetabling.

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