

In this joint response from East Anglia, London & South East and Thames Valley regional branches we have taken the opportunity to respond to the proposals for the East West Railway between Oxford and Cambridge by addressing each route section as presented in the November 2024 consultation document, starting at Oxford, as well as our overall position on East West Rail and its objectives.

The aims of East West Rail as a project must align with the future ambitions for the rail network as a whole. The concept of a new main line linking East Anglia, central England and regions further west has existed since the 1990s, and Network Rail's East West Main Line Strategic Statement (published in 2022) reflects this ambition. EWR must not be treated as simply a commuter line between Oxford and Cambridge, but as a new link in the wider network, connecting the towns and cities along the route not only to each other but also to regions beyond. We recognise that these plans are not within the remit of the current project, but nevertheless they must be taken into consideration during development and delivery of EWR to ensure that future development of the route is possible.

We support a minimum service level of four trains per hour early until late, seven days a week. The associated infrastructure must therefore be able to support this, including station platforms of a standard length that can accommodate 12 passenger vehicles at 20m length each. Accessibility and level boarding must be built into both stations and any new train fleet as a basic requirement. The new railway will support communities for decades to come, and must therefore be at the heart of the communities it serves. This includes making access to stations as easy as possible, with active travel links to all nearby existing and planned settlements.

Oxford to Bletchley

At Oxford station we support the additional works proposed, including provision for services to be extended onto the Cowley branch in future.

We support the closure of Bicester London Road level crossing and diversion of road traffic onto to the new route as indicated. However, to make journeys for pedestrians and cyclists as easy as possible, we prefer the installation of a wide, accessibility-compliant, precast underpass rather than an unsightly and awkward-to-use pedestrian bridge.

As the line through Fenny Stratford is redoubled, provision should be made for a east-to-north junction between EWR and the West Coast Main Line in this area, to enable future services between Cambridge and Milton Keynes Central (and onwards to Northampton, Rugby, Birmingham etc) as outlined in Network Rail's East West Main Line Strategy. We also welcome the engagement with Milton Keynes City Council on providing an eastern entrance to Bletchley station, and see this as a priority to maximise both ease of access to the station and connectivity with local buses via the nearby bus station. A new entrance would also lessen the impact of closing Fenny Stratford station by providing simplified access to the high-level platforms at Bletchley.

Fenny Stratford to Kempston (Marston Vale)

This section is crucial to the long-term development of the entire line, and so must not hinder that development. Doing the 'hard' (or even controversial) work and getting it right now will enable EWR to be a success and avoid more expensive and disruptive works in the future. We therefore support the Consolidated Stations option in order to enable a minimum service of 4tph to be provided across the full extent of the line. The four consolidated stations must be developed as 'hubs' with active travel links to all surrounding settlements and future planned developments.

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While we recognise the issues around the closure of level crossings, the Marston Vale section must not become a bottleneck for initial and future services along the EWR route. We therefore support the removal of as many level crossings as possible, and to that effect agree with the proposals for all level crossings except the following:

- Bow Brickhill (V10 Brickhill Street) – Replace with new bridge
- Pony – Replace with underpass
- Millbrook (Station Lane) – Replace with underpass
- Green Lane – Replace with underpass
- Wootton Broadmead (Broadmead Road) – Replace with new road overbridge

Furthermore, traffic at Fenny Stratford (Simpson Road) level crossing should be encouraged, through waymarking, to use the Watling Street overbridge when possible.

Ridgmont station should be redeveloped on the current site, in order to enable closure of the adjacent level crossing and to retain links to existing employment sites. While we have no preference for the relocation of Stewartby station, there is significant development potential in the area. 1,000 new homes will be built on the Stewartby Brickworks site (which Option 1 is located within), while the proposed Universal Studios theme park would be located to the north of Option 2. EWRC must engage with the relevant local authorities and planners to determine the best location for the station to serve the future needs of the area.

Bedford area

We agree with the proposals to relocate Bedford St. Johns station to a new site adjacent to Bedford Hospital.

We also agree with the proposals to redevelop Bedford station, as well as the public realm improvements. To maximise the benefits of connectivity for EWR, the works should be used as an opportunity to provide an additional platform on the Up Fast line – as proposed by Network Rail – to allow long-distance trains on the Midland Main Line to call at Bedford. Even if this does not fall under the remit of EWRC, there should be coordination with Network Rail to enable this to be delivered.

Clapham Green to Colesden

We agree with the proposals for this section of the route.

Roxton to east of St Neots

We agree with the assessment that Option 1c would be the better route and station location at Tempsford. Provision should be made for a future island platform on the fast lines of the ECML, for improved interchange capability to / from more northerly destinations and to serve what may become a substantial new town in the area. We also recommend investigating the potential to retain the temporary logistics hub at Tempsford as a road-rail interchange, given its proximity to the A1 and A421, and as a link between EWR and the ECML.

We believe than an additional station must be provided on this section to the east of the Wintringham development, at St Neots. This is an important settlement with a growing population of almost 40,000 people, and close economic links with both Cambridge and Bedford. It is unrealistic to expect any substantial modal shift from road to rail along this corridor if residents are expected to either drive south to Tempsford station or wait for a connecting service at St. Neots ECML station, and not linking the town to the railway at such a short distance would be a failure of the project's connectivity aims.

Croxton to Toft

We support the proposals for this section of the route, including a new station at Cambourne. This station must be developed as a high-quality travel hub with bus and active travel links to all sections of the existing town, as well as the upcoming Bourn Airfield development. EWRC should also engage with the Greater Cambridge Partnership as to how the planned Cambridge to Cambourne Busway can be integrated to serve the new station.

Comberton to Shelford

We support the proposals for this section, including additional pedestrian bridges at Newton and Hauxton Road. We also recommend that provision for a future station in the Comberton area be investigated to serve the numerous villages in the area and reduce car traffic into Cambridge city centre.

Cambridge area

We strongly support the proposals for this section, but noting the current work between Shepreth Branch Junction and Cambridge South station would encourage the four-tracking of this section to be delivered sooner to reduce future disruption.

We note the proposal to lengthen platforms 7 and 8 at Cambridge; as these platforms can already accommodate 12-coach trains, more information is needed on the reasons for this and how the extended platforms will operate. The additional footbridge at the south end of the station is a welcome addition; however, its extension to staff facilities on the east side of the station must be enhanced to provide a proper pedestrian entrance, as has been suggested for many years. This would improve access to the station and help to relieve the overcrowded western entrance.

We strongly support addition of a 'Cambridge East' station on the Newmarket line, and prefer that it be located at the site of the planned turnback in Cherry Hinton near Yarrow / Gazelle Road. This would greatly increase access to the railway as well as local connectivity. We also support the provision of additional reception sidings for freight trains and empty stock movements to the east of Cambridge station; we believe previously used land is available close to the Cherry Hinton Lakes (former Norman Cement works chalk quarry) for at least some of the length needed.

We support the remodelling of Cambridge North station and welcome the suggestion that EWR services may call at the station in future; to this effect we emphasise that the works must rectify the poor platform / track arrangement of the current station. Developing 'cross-city' services for Cambridge, with trains calling at Cambridge South, Cambridge (central) and Cambridge North / East will create major benefits for the city by providing an alternative to its already congested road network (the latest INRIX Global Traffic Scorecard for 2024 ranked Cambridge 19th of 111 UK cities and 99th of 945 cities globally).

Additional comments we have in relation to route-wide matters

We stress that EWR must be *continuously* electrified along its entire length, between Oxford and Cambridge East; this would provide the most benefits for both passenger and freight traffic using the line.

As previously stated, the scope of East West Rail should not be limited to Oxford-Cambridge, and work should be done in parallel to extend operations south to Cowley and Didcot Parkway (to meet the Great Western Main Line) and east to Newmarket and Chippenham Junction – including reinstatement of double track – to meet the Mid-Anglia Line; particularly in the latter case where there is unmet latent demand along the Cambridge to Bury St. Edmunds corridor.