

SixShiresRail

Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland

Newsletter for Railfuture East Midlands
& Lincolnshire branches

railfuture

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*Campaigning for Rail in Derbyshire, Leicestershire,
Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland*

Peterborough Mini-conference

The Railfuture mini-conference organised by East Anglia, Lincolnshire, and East Midlands branches on 15 May at Peterborough Museum, gave an opportunity for me to attend a Railfuture event easily accessible from Grantham.

On this occasion it was convenient to use LNER services rather than the alternative East Midlands Railway (EMR) Liverpool – Norwich service. In both directions, my trains were on-time.

The event was chaired by Jerry Alderson, Railfuture Director and event organiser. As delegates arrived, photographs of construction of the new Cambridge South station were shown. East Anglia branch Chairman, Ian Couzens welcomed members and explained some of the features of Cambridge South which is set to be a busy location serving a 200,000 population with a minimum hourly service to various routes.

Redevelopment of Peterborough Station

The venue, being only a short walk from the railway station, linked well with the first speaker, Lewis Banks of Peterborough City Council giving details of proposals to redevelop the Peterborough station quarter, aiming to improve the journey experience at the station. The enhancement will see the current station entrance moved to the south, providing more space around a repositioned 'gateline', with a new spacious station square freeing land and property, such as the old Station Hotel, for redevelopment. For many years Bourges Boulevard has been a barrier between the station and Queensgate Shopping centre and on to the Cowgate shopping area. The plans include improved pedestrian access across

Bourges Boulevard and the realignment of the gradient of the current, somewhat unpleasant subway walking route to become a level walkway with pedestrian friendly crossings on the boulevard.

An exciting part of the redevelopment is to construct an entrance on the West side of the station to accommodate some 30% of users from this part of the city. Although available space is limited due to land being used by Network Rail, there will be a restricted bus stop and taxi drop-off point.

Funding of more than £49million is allocated and work is expected to begin in Autumn 2025 to completion 2027.

Great Central Railway Unification Update

Looking to railway heritage, Tom Ingall of the Great Central Railway gave an update of the Reunification project to link the southern part of the preserved railway to the northern section towards Nottingham. Detailing the need to construct an innovative viaduct over industrial land that has changed over the years since the reunification project was first conceived. Raising funds for this increasingly expensive project is a major factor.

ECML Open Access

Martijn Gilbert, Managing Director of First Rail, gave an interesting introduction to two open access operators' services on the East Coast Main Line. We were reminded that Hull Trains is in its 25th year. Employs 125 colleagues, introduced five bi-modal Class 8xx trains in 2019, operating ninety-seven services a week with plans to have some ten-car trains in the future.

The Lumo service Kings Cross, Stevenage, Newcastle' Morpeth and Edinburgh offers a different type of service. Consisting five 100% electric ►

◀ trains with one class providing seventy services a week with average fare of £40.

Although there is an internal alliance between Hull Trains and Lumo, the two companies have a different passenger focus and culture. Interestingly, we learnt that Lumo pays a higher track access charge than LNER.

Ticket Sales

Our fourth speaker was Anthony Smith, Chair of Independent Rail Retailers (IRR). My immediate thought on seeing the conference agenda was a connection with station cafes and other retail outlets! But IRR represents ten retailers of train tickets and other services to the public, including names, except for 'Train Line', I have never heard of such as 'Atomised', 'Evolve', 'Fast Rail Tickets' and 'My Train Ticket'. Members of IRR provide booking services for the train operators and in the case of TrainLine which charges passengers 4.5% commission on ticket sales, other train companies absorb the commission charge.

It was explained that calls for a simplified fare structure could result in

higher fares and with the introduction of Great British Railways, there is debate over charging commission on ticket sales as there will be only one train operator and to have a blanket commission charge on all ticket sales would be politically unacceptable. IRR look to facilitating ticket sales through innovation and value for money.

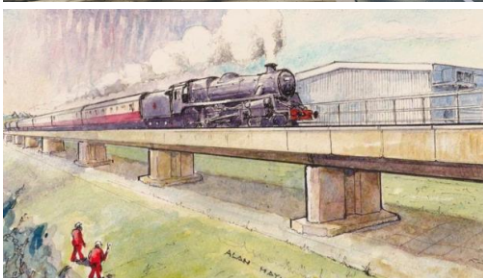
An element of Rail 200

Lincolnshire branch chair, David Harby introduced an element of the Rail 200 Celebrations by introducing Barry Coward Former British Transport Films archivist (1986-1996) who gave an entertaining video presentation of BTF films. Including extracts from Re-railing a locomotive using hydraulic jacks; The day in the life of a litter bin; The new Midland and Birmingham Pullman services;

Work of rail and bus staff in South Wales

Phil Thomas, chair of East Midlands branch, thanked the guest speakers for an informative afternoon.

Phil Mason, Nick Dibbens



Eclectic subjects at the Peterborough Mini Conference:

Artist's impression of the proposed pedestrian link to Peterborough station (photo: Peterborough City Council),

ECML Open Access: Hull Trains and Lumo Train at Kings Cross. (Internet photo)

Artist's impression of GCR 'reunification bridge'.

Lincolnshire Branch Campaigning Priorities

At the Lincolnshire branch AGM we had a detailed discussion to consider what the branch campaigning priorities should be. This followed a discussion on the proposed December 2025 timetable changes so these could be taken into account.

The first point made was that whilst the gaps in the Joint Line timetable are filled and we have better timed services to Doncaster there are still significant gaps. We are told that the Lincoln to Doncaster services will connect each way with Edinburgh trains but with only 5 trains each way per day the service is still very sparse. Our target is for these to be increased to every 2 hours ASAP with the ultimate aim of an hourly service. There is also no Sunday service whatsoever on the Joint Line which is totally unacceptable for leisure journeys, when we are being told that Sunday is now one of the busiest days of the week.

Better connections at Lincoln between services from Cleethorpes and the LNER service to London is welcome, but there is still only a train every other hour. Overcrowding on this route is unacceptable, especially on Saturdays, so we agreed that increasing this to hourly should be a branch priority as should the introduction of the proposed morning

and evening direct LNER London – Cleethorpes service.

Also in the north of the area, we wish to see the reintroduction of the hourly Doncaster to Scunthorpe service and an ultimate aim of hourly services on the Barton branch, though this may need reinstatement of some double track between Grimsby and Cleethorpes. We also consider that loadings to/from Sheffield indicate that there is a case for reinstatement of the Sheffield to Gainsborough Central stopping service.

Infrastructure issues were also considered. As far as electrification is concerned there must be a case for electrification of the Joint Line for freight services. In the medium term we are looking for electrification from Nottingham to Lincoln and filling of the gap between Nottingham and Grantham when Midland Main Line (MML) electrification to Nottingham is complete.

Some increase of speed limits between Cleethorpes and Doncaster would be welcome though bearing in mind the underlying peat soil in some places a minimum of 75mph is probably the best we could hope for. Reinstatement of some double track between Sleaford and Skegness along with resignalling would

be welcome to provide capacity for additional services to Skegness, but we appreciate that this must be a long term aim where there probably won't be a business case without demand for freight paths to either the proposed Wash Barrage or nuclear waste site near Theddlethorpe.

David Harby



East Midlands Railway Class 170 at Gainsborough Lea Road, June 2024 (YouTube photograph)

Planned major changes to EMR Regional timetable

From December 2025 East Midlands Railway (EMR) expect to be able to operate 2 trains per hour in each direction over the East Coast Main Line (ECML) flat crossing at Newark. As a result of this they are taking the opportunity to make some major changes to their regional services.

The most significant is that the Newark Castle to Crewe stopping service becomes Lincoln to Crewe with Burton Joyce now getting a train every hour on weekdays and Saturdays. Leicester to Lincoln semi fast will instead be a Matlock to Lincoln service which extends through to Cleethorpes every two hours instead of Grimsby. New Cleve and Grimsby Docks calls are transferred to the Matlock service which enables a longer, and more robust, turnaround time at Cleethorpes for the Barton branch service. Nottingham to Leicester locals become a self contained service.

The Doncaster to Peterborough Joint Line service is split into Doncaster to Lincoln and Lincoln to Peterborough. There will be one extra service from Lincoln to Peterborough on weekdays

and 4 extra on Saturdays thus removing the long gaps in the current timetable. No extra trains to Doncaster, but the five services will be better spaced with an earlier morning arrival at Doncaster for work commuting.

These changes enable other improvements such as better connections at Sleaford, Derby and Crewe; more trains for Ratcliffe, Spondon and Attenborough; from Cleethorpes a decent connection at Lincoln into LNER London services; later evening services from Nottingham to Grantham, Mansfield and Matlock.

As this timetable was being planned Railfuture branch officers had opportunities to highlight our thoughts on deficiencies in the current timetable and we are pleased to say that whilst not all have been resolved, such as the meagre five return services per day between Lincoln and Doncaster, the new timetable is overall a big improvement on what we have now.

The next issue will, hopefully, include an article explaining how the timetable was constructed.

David Harby

SixShiresRail not only goes to members of East Midlands and Lincolnshire Branches of Railfuture; it is also sent to policy makers and relevant rail industry people in the combined region. Providing a good opportunity to promote members' views and opinions on rail topics, either by way of articles for publication or as letters to the Editor.

If you wish to share something on local rail with a wider audience, please support SixShiresRail and contact Editor Phil Mason, phil.mason@railfuture.org.uk

Campaigning for rail in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland.

Regional Refresh undertaken at Melton Mowbray

Work on improvements to regional stations across East Midlands Railway (EMR) continues to be funded and delivered to improve the customer experience.

The latest station to receive an investment of £78,000 is Melton Mowbray.

This popular Leicestershire market town attracts many visitors and rail charters a year coming to experience not just history and architecture, but also its status as “Britain’s rural capital of food” because of its popularity with hosting food festivals throughout the year.

Workers refurbished the footbridge deck and steps, installed new lights, and repainted the entire station in former Midland Railway colours, thus improving it and giving it the historical character of a pre-1923 railway station.

Later this year, workers will improve the appearance of lineside locations near the station.

Of the regional stations across the East

Midlands Railway network, Melton Mowbray is the 33rd station to see repairs and a station repaint.

Other stations that have already received such treatment include seven stations along the Derwent Valley Line, ten stations on the Robin Hood Line and fifteen on the Poacher Line, combined they have seen doors, windows and fences replaced around the stations while some have seen new lighting installed on the platforms.

“We regularly improve our regional stations, ensuring they remain safe, comfortable and visually appealing for our customers.

These refurbishments are part of our broader commitment to enhancing the customer experience and preserving the character of our historic railway network.”

Philippa Cresswell, Customer Service Director at East Midlands Railway.

(Source from post on X)



A nice paint job, but paint doesn't help passengers with mobility problems. Melton Mowbray station urgently needs disabled access with investment in a new bridge and lifts. Not forgetting Oakham and Stamford!



Photographs: East Midlands Railway

CrossCountry Fleet and Timetable Update

At the open part of the East Midlands Branch AGM at Nottingham Central Library on Saturday 21 June we were very pleased to welcome Adrian Hugill and David Jones from CrossCountry Trains as our speakers.

Adrian Hugill, Engineering Director, was first, with an illustrated presentation on CrossCountry's fleet refurbishment programme. CrossCountry (XC) has an entirely diesel fleet, consisting of Class 220 and 221 Voyager units for its North East – South West Intercity services, supplemented by Class 170 Turbostars on its Regional routes linking Cardiff and Birmingham with the East Midlands and East Anglia. These units are now middle-aged and, like the rest of us, are looking a little tired. It's time for a refresh.

The Voyager fleet, of 58 x 4- or 5-car units, has recently been added to with 12 x 5-car Class 221s transferred from Avanti West Coast. These bring welcome extra capacity on a group of services that are notorious for overcrowding. As well as modernising all the vehicles, the refurb will make them all interoperable. They will have new seats, tables, carpets, LED lighting, passenger information screens, and at-seat 3-pin and USB plug sockets. There will also be interior CCTV and automatic passenger-counting equipment. There will also be, of course, a complete interior repaint and new exterior livery. Pleasingly for the East Midlands, this work is to be done at Derby Litchurch Lane works, starting in October.

The Turbostars are receiving similar treatment, though at Arriva Traincare at Crewe. Unlike the Voyagers, they will lose their First Class seats, releasing space for more Standard Class capacity. The new seats, which use the same shells as those specified by East Midlands

Railway (EMR) for their own Class 170 refurbishment, allow greater space for under-seat luggage stowage. Some re-design of interior layouts is taking place; for example, to provide greater separation of bicycle and wheelchair accommodation. It was pleasing to hear that XC has worked quite closely with EMR in this project, as both companies are refurbishing Turbostars. The first two units are now 'out there'.

The new seats and tables reduce the mass of each vehicle by about 350kg. This plus LED lighting will enable some saving in fuel usage and emissions.

David Jones, who is well known to the Branch as Stakeholder Manager for East Midlands & Anglia, then gave an update on recent and planned timetable changes. From May 2025, XC has increased capacity on the Voyager routes with some additional trains (such as Reading – Birmingham – Newcastle), more double-unit workings, and some faster journeys to the North East via Doncaster. There is also improved connectivity between Derby, Oxford and the Thames Valley. Additional calls at Chesterfield, plus closer collaboration on bus links from there into the Peak District, are further improvements from May.

On the Regional (Turbostar) routes, changes in stopping patterns at the smaller stations such as Willington and Wilnecote will provide better differentiation between local stopping services and the longer-distance semi-fast services between Derby and Birmingham. The Birmingham – Stansted Airport service has had some restoration of services withdrawn during the Covid pandemic, along with service extensions between Cambridge and Stansted. Revision of unit diagrams has allowed strengthening of some busy ►

services with extra vehicles. However, there have also been some temporary reductions across XC to ensure the timetable can be more 'robustly resourced' in terms of traincrew.

The December 2025 timetable is yet to be finalised, awaiting sign-off of the East Coast Main Line timetable recast. Intentions include restoring the May 2025 temporary reductions mentioned above, and more double-Voyager workings.

Overall, this was an upbeat and positive presentation of significant timetable and service quality improvements directly

benefiting the East Midlands. We are very grateful to Adrian and David for taking the time to come and share all this with us and to answer a range of questions from the audience.

As I arrived at Nottingham station for my train home, refurbished Turbostar 170101 was just departing from Platform 3 on an empty stock shunting move across to Platform 7 to form the 16:41 to Birmingham New Street. It looked very smart in its new livery, as I hope my hastily taken photograph shows.

Steve Jones



Experience the future of rail ticketing

Do you regularly travel by train between Derby, Nottingham and Leicester?

Later this year, East Midlands Railway (EMR) will be trialing a new Pay As You Go App that will allow passengers to start their journey with the tap of a button.

GPS tracking is used to follow your location and time to determine the service you travelled on and ensure you are charged for the right ticket for that journey at the end of the day.

EMR is looking for volunteers to be among the first to trial this new PAYG

app. If you'd like to enjoy simpler, more convenient journeys and be a pioneer in shaping the future of rail travel, register your interest at the link below.

https://www.eastmidlandsrailway.co.uk/form/pay-you-go-trial?utm_source=redeye&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2025%2004%20PAYG%20Trial&utm_term=202504

Long Service Award for FoBL Stalwart

It is always a pleasure to report on an award to someone who has dedicated many years of their life to campaigning for improved public transport so we are delighted to report that Barton upon Humber Town Council have given their Town Award certificate for 2025 to Anthony Berridge.

The citation reads “For being a tireless, enthusiastic and dedicated campaigner for the retention and promotion of Friends of the Barton Line and for being instrumental in the

formation of the Barton Cleethorpes Community Rail Partnership, one of the first Community Rail Partnerships to be formed, paving the way for all the excellent work that the partnership does in the community”.

Anthony came to live in Barton in 1995 and was already planning the formation of what eventually became the Friends of the Barton Line (FoBL) in early 1996, having engaged in a supportive conversation with fellow Railfuture member John French. Anthony has been secretary of FoBL for many years but this is not his only railway claim to fame as he is also the author of *The Railway Comes to Barton-on-Humber: 1844-1914* as part seven of the Later History of Barton-on-Humber series.

David Harby



Collaboration Award

At the Rail Industry Planning awards on 25 March, East Midlands Railway won “Collaboration of the Year” for the Midland Main Line Sunday Speed Up in partnership with Network Rail.

The Planning Awards are supported by Modern Railways magazine, consultants Winder Phillips Associates, Timetable, and the Chartered Institute of Railway Operators.



Friends of the Barton Line

In addition to commemorating Railway 200 in 2025, the Barton Line celebrated the 175th anniversary of Barrow Haven station on 8 April and on 1 July the 150th anniversary of New Clee. The garden at Habrough station is to be improved and named for the Railway 200 year, with a launch event when completed, hopefully in September. The Group appreciates all the work done by volunteers and a Thank You event is planned.

Services on the Barton Line are generally improved by proposed changes in the December 2025 timetable. The first Nottingham – Cleethorpes service is proposed to be replaced by a 2-hourly Cleethorpes – Matlock service, giving a direct service to Derby and calling at New Clee and Grimsby Docks. Connections at Lincoln for Newark North Gate, Grantham, Peterborough and Kings Cross are proposed to be significantly improved with the majority of services having a connection time of 10 minutes in both directions.

Barton Line trains are proposed to be retimed to give improved connections at

Habrough for TransPennine Express (TPE) services. Grimsby Docks and New Clee are proposed to be removed from most Barton Line trains, to be replaced by calls on the Cleethorpes – Matlock service. This is to enable Barton Line trains to have increased turnaround times, improving reliability and delay recovery. The first service from Barton will continue to serve Grimsby Docks and New Clee.

The last service from Cleethorpes to Barton is proposed to leave Cleethorpes slightly earlier at 20:56 and to return from Barton to Cleethorpes earlier. This is to avoid timetable clashes with the last Matlock – Cleethorpes service which is having to run later to maintain a connection from London at Lincoln. East Midlands Railway (EMR) had asked for the LNER Kings Cross – Lincoln service to arrive at Lincoln earlier by not calling at Grantham, as there are other services from Kings Cross which call at Grantham around the same time, but this was denied.

Anthony Berridge

EDITOR'S MAIL

Passenger usage at selected stations

I can understand why the latest issue only published the number of passengers for selected stations in the area, on grounds of space as much as anything. But why didn't you list the figure for Grimsby Town, given that the town is the largest in North East Lincolnshire? I would also have liked to have seen the stats for Market Rasen, given that it is being used as an excuse as to the delay to introducing direct trains between Cleethorpes and King's Cross.

Tim Mickleburgh, Grimsby

Tim is correct in his assumption that we only included selected stations due to lack of space. To have included all 135 would have needed 4.5 pages. Stations were selected firstly to illustrate points made in the accompanying text and then a few more to give a wide geographic coverage. Yes we did omit Grimsby Town but we also omitted the capital of Rutland, Oakham, but we did include a link to the data portal so readers could look up for themselves any station in the UK network.

Editor

Corby to London Rail Revival fuels massive passenger Growth and Economic opportunities along East West Rail Corridor

The revitalized railway line connecting Corby to London, initially launched as a reopened segment off the Midland Mainline, has dramatically multiplied its passenger count while simultaneously unlocking numerous investment prospects. This transformation serves as a powerful example of what East West Rail could potentially bring to regions spanning Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford, and Cambridge, according to area business and council leaders.

This line, operational since 2009 and managed by East Midlands Railway (EMR), serves as a vital conduit between Corby and London, touching several key locations such as Kettering, Wellingborough, Bedford, Luton, and Luton Airport Parkway, where passengers can transition seamlessly to the DART service for direct airport terminal access.

Given its popularity, Network Rail took steps to electrify the line and enhance its capacity in 2021, effectively doubling the frequency of service. These enhancements have significantly spurred growth and revitalization in Corby, catalysing both job creation and further investment opportunities.

Proponents of East West Rail, including Chancellor Rachel Reeves who has recognized the project within the Government's vision for an Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, anticipate it will deliver comparable benefits. This railway is expected to facilitate faster, eco-friendly travel between Oxford and Cambridge, augmenting job creation, especially in the tech and life sciences sectors—and improving access to affordable housing.

From its inception, the line operated hourly services, but burgeoning demand led to its upgrade and electrification, culminating in a service frequency that now accommodates half-hourly departures. This enhancement has seen passenger figures skyrocket from nearly 118,000 in the 2009/10 period to over 498,000 in 2023/24, showcasing the significant role that enhanced connectivity plays in urban regeneration and economic growth, as recognized by local authorities.

Sean Rose, Head of Policy at Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, said: “Corby has transformed. We’ve got new businesses moving into the town, new people investing in Corby and that is what the railway can do. It can unlock levelling up that really makes a difference for businesses and the local economy.”

Jason Smithers, Leader of North Northamptonshire Council, has seen many benefits that the line has brought to Corby. He said: “It was a massive impact. If you look at what that regeneration project has delivered, the railway station, you talk about the station quarter and all the building that’s going on there.

“A railway station is crucial to the economy of any town or city. Doctor Beeching, in his wisdom, removed a lot of smaller branch lines, which wasn’t really a long-term vision that’s held this country where it should be. So having more of these schemes in smaller towns and cities would be great.”

Naomi Green, Managing Director, England’s Economic Heartland, said: “Corby Station demonstrates the significant potential of rail to transform ►

◀ the places it serves – unlocking improvements to quality of life and growing economic prosperity which traditional appraisal methods sometimes fail to adequately capture.

“Likewise, East West Rail will transform our region – boosting our economy, reducing reliance on the car and removing barriers to accessing jobs and services. With the right door-to-door connectivity and seamless integration, these benefits will be felt by a wide catchment of communities and businesses. Indeed, people living in Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough will be just a short journey away from connecting into services to Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Oxford and Bedford.”

The new railway has also allowed more people to come and live and do business in the town. In fact, when the line first opened, a marketing campaign which branded Corby as ‘North Londonshire’ targeted the capital with the aim of attracting Londoners to move to Corby not just to live, but to also work and do business, providing a further boost to the local economy.

Mark Redding, Communications,

Communities, Partnerships and Marketing Manager for Urban & Civic, which manages Corby’s Priors Hall Park development, said: “We have examples of people who saw those adverts going up on the tube, come up to ‘North Londonshire’ on the train, saw what we have here, loved it and moved up here. They’ve moved their businesses up here as well.

“We know that connectivity is a really important thing for local people when they are looking for places to buy a new home or settle down so being able to be so close to that connectivity is a real benefit for people here at Priors Hall Park.”

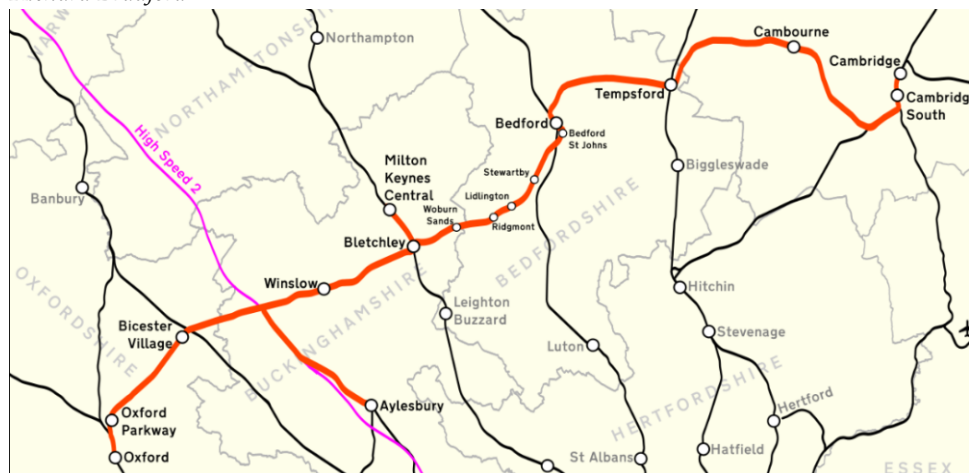
David Hughes, CEO, EWR Co, said: “The reopened railway line to Corby is a strong case study in the transformational power of investing in rail infrastructure to drive prosperity, more job opportunities and help regenerate towns and cities. East West Rail can emulate this by delivering similar benefits to places like Bicester, Bedford and Milton Keynes, whilst also providing vital connectivity for the science and business communities in both Oxford and Cambridge.”

*Source: Travel & Tour World, March 2025
(including photo.)*



On the wrong track: East West Rail

Richard Bradford



At first glance the East West Rail (EWR) project may seem to be only of marginal interest to the East Midlands since none of the route is in the region. However, its path and connections could, and should, impact travel and rail services over a much wider area.

So why this article now? At the end of October 2024, EWR announced that they were holding a non-statutory public consultation on their '[discontinuous] electrification plans' for the line they are currently reinstating. This ran until 24 January 2025, so by the time you read this the deadline for comments will have passed. However, a *statutory* consultation follows later – and this is the one which counts.

Reinstate and (re)connect

It will be helpful to review the revival of EWR. The project has 3 phases:

1. To reinstate the 'mothballed' line from Oxford to Bletchley. – Bicester to Oxford Parkway and then Oxford were completed in 2015 and 2016 and now host Chiltern services to London Marylebone. – Track laying from Bicester to Bletchley was completed in March 2024, and in October test trains

ran along the full length at up to the maximum line speed (100mph). Oxford to Bletchley and Milton Keynes services are planned 'from' 2025.

2. To connect to the existing Bletchley to Bedford 'Marston Vale' route. This will be upgraded, understood to include work on level crossings, 'consolidation' of stations as well as an increase in line speed, following which Oxford to Bedford services are pencilled in for 2030.

3. To reconnect Bedford and Cambridge by rail on a new and rather circuitous route through Tempsford where a 'new town' is planned, crossing the ECML, then through Cambourne before approaching Cambridge from the south. This alignment is claimed to best serve population growth and job opportunities and includes 2 additional EWR tracks alongside the 4-tracked MML for a short distance north of Bedford.

The meaning of connections...

As EWR cuts across country from south-west to north-east, it promotes 'connections' between its services and those on the routes radiating from ►

London to make travel easier over a wide area, including to five international airports. Yet all mention of 'services' and 'connections' are in the London Underground sense of 'interchanges', where passengers alight from one train and board another. This may be a hangover from the original intention to operate EWR as a self-contained entity – but see below. The planned interchanges are:

Oxford: north towards the West Midlands;

south to Didcot for the GWML as well as to the south coast.

Bletchley / Milton Keynes for the WCML.

Bedford for the MML.

Tempsford for the ECML.

Cambridge: north towards Ely, Newmarket and East Anglia or south to Stansted Airport and London Liverpool Street.

There are, though, *physical* connections to/from EWR, thus raising the possibility of scheduled or ad-hoc, e.g. diversionary, through services.

Starting from Oxford and running (north-)east, the physical connections are:

East of Bicester Village, to High Wycombe and London Marylebone. (There is no station where the EWR and Chiltern routes cross.)

At Bletchley to the WCML northwards.

At Bedford to the MML northwards.

At Cambridge northwards.

While in the opposite direction, (south-west) towards Oxford:

At Bedford to the MML southwards.

At Bletchley to the WCML.

At Claydon Junction (not a station, but near Steeple Claydon village) south to Aylesbury and London Marylebone, via Harrow or High Wycombe.

At Oxford south to Didcot.

What about freight?

Network Rail's Corridors and commodities and Intermodal sectors maps show the main rail freight flows around Britain. It is clear where EWR would fit in to provide an alternative cross-country route in both directions between various coastal ports and inland distribution hubs. Yet in all EWR's publicity, freight seems like an afterthought.

For example, there are 2 significant flows which reports have shown could be improved by using EWR. The first, is from Southampton's docks which handled 30.6 million tonnes in 2023. Over a third of the [container] freight handled by DP World at their terminal goes inland by a not-insignificant 32 trains per day to destinations including Cardiff, the East Midlands, Hams Hall (Birmingham), and Doncaster. Northwards, the flow is principally along the 'congested' south-west mainline to Basingstoke then up to Reading, Oxford and Coventry. From here it continues to Birmingham or via Nuneaton to Leicester.

Two decades ago this route was proposed to be part of an ambitious, high capacity freight and passenger route dubbed the 'Electric Spine'. Split at Oxford: one leg would continue to the West Midlands and the other use EWR to the East Midlands and South Yorkshire. The project was still on the list Network Rail's Investment Programme in 2015 but was deferred because of funding constraints. The route would be fully electrified at 25kVAC overhead and even included conversion of the 750VDC third-rail electrification from Southampton to Basingstoke line to allow higher-powered traction. In the light of developments in motive power, would a tri-mode 750V, 25kV, one wonders if a modest battery power-pack ►

◀ for ‘last-mile’ operation be feasible?

The second source of freight is Felixstowe, which handled 22.5 million tonnes in 2023 and currently despatches 76 trains per day. As with the Electric Spine, there are aspirations to electrify the route to the Midlands from the port via Ely and Peterborough to Nuneaton (sometimes abbreviated to ‘F2M&N’ or ‘F2N’) as well as EWR. The latter would bring some relief to the congested East- and West Midlands routes as well as to the southern WCML; electrification would also improve EWR's investment case.

In December 2023 the government announced a (modest) target of growing freight on rail by 75% by 2050 although it did not say how this could be accommodated. Nor did it specify modal shift, for which a capacity increase and reduction in the differential between freight- and passenger speeds would have to include electrification.

So, what has this to do with the EWR consultation?

Repeat after me: ‘Think of the network, not just lines!’

As recently as October 2024 there were mixed messages about the role of EWR. On the one hand, CEO David Hughes said they are working towards handing over the route to become part of Network Rail, but on the other hand he envisioned it being ‘much more like Crossrail’. Does he mean a self-contained passenger service extended slightly to run over part of the national infrastructure? Handing the route over to Network Rail would be a complete about-face compared to the original (2016) intention for it to be a separate operation, and being part of Network Rail surely implies that EWR should be open to a wider range of services making use of the physical links to other routes. To think of EWR as self-contained when it is part of the national

network is extremely short-sighted.

This has implications for traction. With ‘discontinuous electrification’, trains draw power from short sections of overhead line to both move and to recharge batteries for power over non-electrified sections. The battery technology to do this has so far been investigated for shunting in non-electrified yards, for short runs with infrequent (passenger) services along branch lines from an electrified main line or charging point, and to replace a diesel engine in a bi-mode diesel/electric multiple-unit. All these reports focus on showing the technical feasibility with more than a hint of ‘sales-pitch’. Nevertheless, the cost of providing the trains and charging equipment as well as the long-term running costs are uncertain. In the UK particularly, there is no alternative to continuous electrification to decarbonise freight.

In 2023 the DfT was still undecided on whether to electrify EWR or to use alternative traction. The 2019 planning enquiry reported that the stumbling block for full electrification was the replacement of 5 existing bridges to provide sufficient electrical clearance, at that time costed at £34.5m. Since then, though, electrification technology has evolved to increasingly allow electrification where the clearance was less than usually thought practical, for example at Cardiff. So perhaps a re-assessment should be made, with a comprehensive comparison of the cost and timescale of installing discontinuous electrification against those of full electrification – not only the infrastructure work, rolling stock, and interoperability but also ‘future ▶

proofing', including the route's use for freight. A regrettable aspect of the EWR saga is that the electrical infrastructure could have been installed without disruption to services while the route was being reinstated: such is the cost of indecision.

EWR's CEO has admitted that discontinuous electrification 'limits the opportunities of electric traction to be used for freight...' but 'delivers a cost-effective outcome' for the promoter, i.e.

the DfT. However, this a very narrow and short-sighted view and presents a real danger. When the usefulness of the EWR route for freight is eventually acknowledged, the cost of upgrading from discontinuous to full electrification could be laid solely at freight's door whereas *all* services would benefit.

Act in haste, repent at leisure... buy cheap, buy twice.

*Note: The author would be pleased to provide a more detailed version of this article with sources of information on request.
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FUTURE LINCOLNSHIRE BRANCH COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Wednesday, 16 July, 8 October 2025 and 14 January 2026. Venues to be arranged.

Non committee members are welcome to attend as observers.

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