

East West Rail Western Section



East West Rail is a major project to re-introduce rail services for passengers and freight between East Anglia, Central and Southern England.

The 'Western Section' is a live, funded project which involves re-opening and upgrading disused and underused rail track between Bedford and Oxford via Bletchley, Winslow and Bicester. In Central Bedfordshire, this will mean the upgrade and electrification of the existing Marston Vale Line. Elsewhere, this will include re-opening the link between Bicester and Bletchley, upgrading tracks from Bicester to Oxford, a new station at Winslow, and electrification throughout.

The Western Section is included in the National Infrastructure Plan, as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in November 2011, and will not only provide a sustainable regional transport solution but will become part of the national strategic rail network. The Western Section will also form part of the Government's planned railway 'Electric Spine' as announced in June 2012 by the Department for Transport.

Economic, Social and Environmental Benefits

More than just a railway, East West Rail is a key economic driver that will deliver economic, social and environmental benefits to Central Bedfordshire and beyond.

The Western Section will:

- Is forecast to create up to 12,000 regional jobs and boost the regional GDP by £38m per annum, according to Oxford Economics¹;
- Will create more journey possibilities and reduce journey times for local and long distance journeys, with better connection to mainline train services avoiding the need to travel via London;
- Will give local businesses and employers access to a wider base of labour, talent, and skills, and gives individuals improved access to employment;
- Will enhance connections to major centres such as Bedford, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bicester, and Oxford;
- Makes the region it serves more attractive for businesses, helping existing businesses to grow and attracting new businesses and inward investment;
- Offers an alternative to journeys by road, helping to reduce the impact of traffic on local communities and CO₂ emissions;
- Electrification will enable modern, electric trains to operate which are quieter, cleaner, and more efficient than the current diesel trains.

Project Status

The target date for East West Rail services to start on the Western section is December 2017. Construction work be phased, and is expected to start in 2015 in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. On-site works to upgrade the existing Marston Vale Line in Central Bedfordshire are

¹ The Oxford Economics report and the East West Rail Business Case are published online at www.eastwestrail.org.uk

currently planned to take place in 2017, with the route being fully electrified by 2019. Until then, the new East-West Rail services will be operated by diesel trains.

Next steps include conducting Environmental Impact Assessments and structural surveys, producing detailed designs, obtaining planning consent and public consultation.

Funding and Return on Investment

The total cost of the project is c.£500m funded by the Department for Transport and a £50m local contribution from authorities along the Western Section, which will include 'work in kind'. East West Rail offers exceptional value for money for a rail project with a Benefit to Cost Ratio of 6.3 to 1. Services are expected to operate without public subsidy within five years of opening.

Management and Governance

The scheme will be delivered by Network Rail in partnership with the East West Rail Consortium (of which Central Bedfordshire Council is a member) and jointly promoted. It is overseen by a Project Executive Board of officers and a Joint Delivery Board of elected members from each local authority in the railway's footprint, Network Rail and the Department for Transport. Both boards are attended by representatives from Central Bedfordshire Council.

Public, Political and Private Sector Support

The scheme has been promoted by the East West Rail Consortium since 1995. There is a high level of public, business and political support (of all colours) at local, regional and national level for the rail link. The Consortium is pro-actively engaging with stakeholders to raise awareness of the project and to help shape plans prior to formal consultation which is likely to start in 2014.

Anticipated Rail Services

Actual service patterns for the December 2017 timetable will be announced by Department for Transport in early 2016. It is anticipated that there will be four passenger trains per hour in each direction, as follows:

- Retention of the existing **Bedford to Bletchley** service, stopping at all stations between Bedford and Bletchley. This includes the Central Bedfordshire stations of Millbrook, Lidlington, Ridgmont, and Aspley Guise.
- **Reading to Oxford and Bedford**, stopping at Water Eaton Parkway, Bicester, Winslow, Bletchley, two Marston Vale Line stations (provisionally Woburn Sands and Lidlington), and Bedford.
- **Reading to Oxford and Milton Keynes**, stopping at Water Eaton Parkway, Bicester, Winslow, and Bletchley.
- **Milton Keynes to Aylesbury and London Marylebone**, an extension of the existing service between London Marylebone and Aylesbury Vale Parkway, with stops at Bletchley and Winslow.

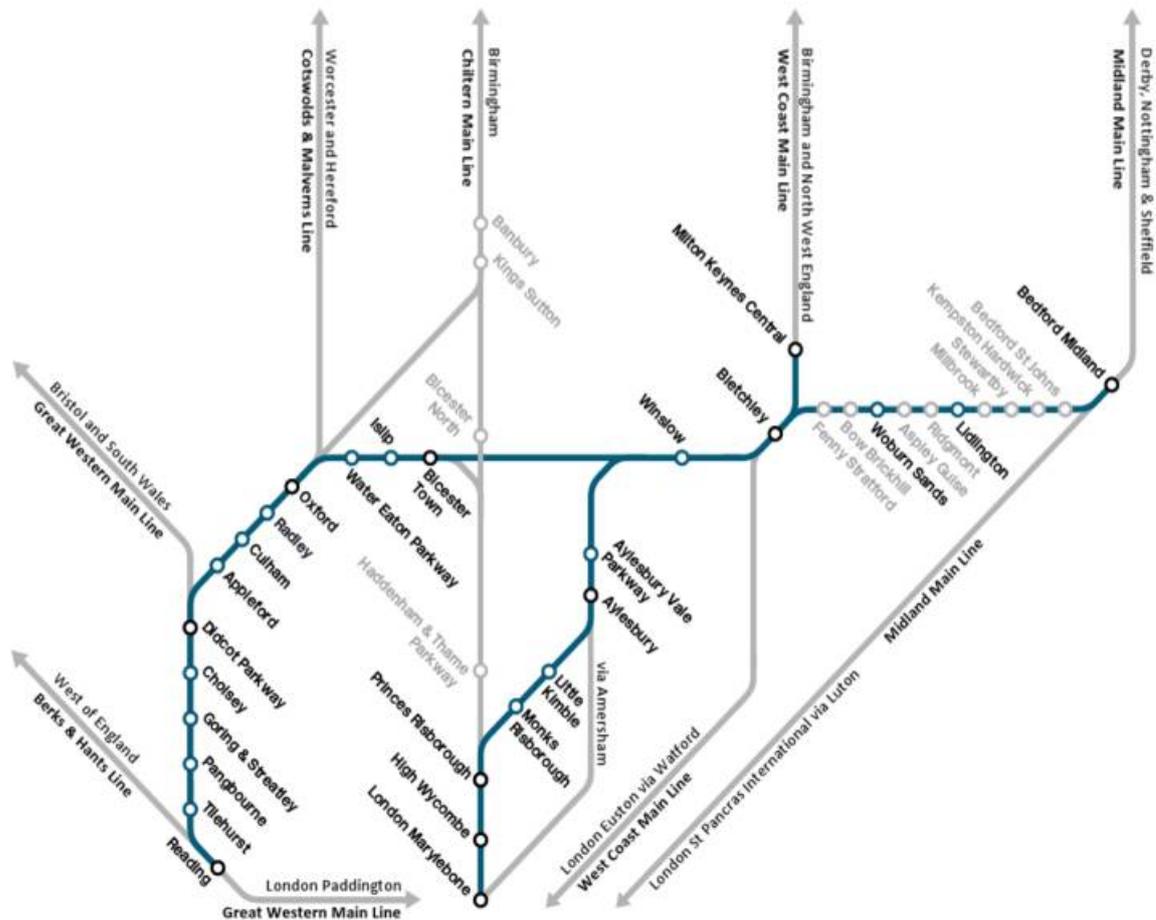
There may ultimately be a long-distance cross-country service up to one train per hour Southampton to Manchester via the Western Section plus additional freight services. In the longer term with the delivery of the new western access to Heathrow (circa 2020), train services from Milton Keynes, Bedford and Winslow to Heathrow via Reading will be possible.

Central Section

Delivery of the Western Section is of fundamental importance to delivering the East-West Rail Central Section between Bedford and Cambridge, otherwise known as 'the missing link'. Simply, without the Western Section, the Central Section stands almost no chance of delivery.

The Consortium is currently looking to commission further technical work to identify a single 'preferred option' for a route between Bedford and Cambridge. This will look at potential demand and transport requirements, reviewing a number of identified route options using new and existing infrastructure, including routes via Sandy. Central Bedfordshire is closely involved in this work. There are currently no timescales for when this work will be complete, but the Consortium plans to commission this work by the summer.

Map of East West Rail Western Section Services



More information

For more information on the project, please contact James Gleave in the Transport Strategy Team on james.gleave@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

Alternatively, the website www.eastwestrail.org.uk includes news, answers to 'frequently asked questions', the East West Rail manifesto and a short video that brings the project to life. They're also on Twitter @eastwestrail.