

News story: Transport Secretary welcomes progress on East West Rail

- project works at Bicester will reopen Varsity Line connection closed in 1960s
- completion of enabling works on western section will enable construction to begin in September 2019

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling welcomed a milestone moment for East West Rail during a visit to Bicester today, (4 October 2018) as he saw how enabling works are laying the ground for construction.

Meeting with Network Rail staff on the western section of the route, the minister saw how preparations are laying the foundations for a world-class rail link and significantly better journeys for passengers between Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

East West Rail will transform journeys in one of Europe's most vibrant economic regions, providing passengers and businesses with a transport system that unlocks economic opportunity and drives forward new housing and jobs.

As a hub for technical and scientific innovation, home to world-class universities and a skilled workforce that drives growth, the success of England's economic heartland is imperative to the UK's prosperity and productivity.

Rapid progress on the project means we will see construction underway on direct, fast and reliable services from next year, delivering significantly better connections for passengers.

Chris Grayling met with Rob Brighouse, Chair of the East West Railway Company, who said:

East West Railway Company is working hard with Network Rail to open this line as soon as possible. We're delighted to have the work underway. When open this line will boost economic growth, and make it easier and quicker for people who live here to travel in the local area.

Nigel Tipple – Chief Executive of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership – said:

We welcome the Transport Secretary's visit to Bicester today, which emphasises Oxfordshire's global prospects supporting innovation-led growth, greater productivity and major 'place potential' as we move towards an ever-increasing internationally-focussed economy.

East West Rail has the potential to drive dynamic economic growth. With a GVA of £23 billion per annum, Oxfordshire is one of only 3 counties that are net contributors to the Exchequer and – by leveraging the 2 internationally-renowned cities of Oxford and Cambridge – we can ensure that both communities and 'UK PLC' can capitalise on the economic strengths of this region.

Professor Sir Peter Gregson Chief Executive and Vice-Chancellor of Cranfield University, said:

The Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford growth corridor is a beacon of innovation for the UK, featuring world-leading, research-intensive universities. For the UK to thrive, we must ensure that the potential of the region to boost the UK's skills and productivity is fully unlocked.

As a leading university at the heart of the growth corridor, we believe that increased connectivity across the region is vital to boosting skills and promoting innovation. East West Rail is an important step in that process and we welcome its progress.

Patrick Cawley, Director of Sponsorship for Network Rail's LNW route, said

The preparatory work we are currently carrying out will ensure we are ready to start construction as soon as we can. This will enable us to deliver a first class railway and all of the wider economic benefits it will bring to the local regions.

East West Rail is being built progressively in 3 phases. With phase 1 between Oxford and Bicester already complete, phase 2 will see major track and signalling upgrades extending services from Oxford to Bedford and Milton Keynes to Aylesbury. These works includes the reinstatement of the Varsity line between Bletchley and Claydon Junction, a mothballed section of railway closed since the 1960s.

The project is a vital part of the government's plans to provide the region with a road and rail network fit for the future, improving links to jobs, education, leisure and health services.

The government also recently announced the [preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge expressway](#) will run alongside the East West Rail route, improving links between 2 of the country's intellectual powerhouses and delivering faster, safer and more reliable journeys.

The East West Rail route is divided into 3 sections:

- the western section phase 1 (Oxford to Bicester) and phase 2 (Bicester to Milton Keynes/Bedford and Aylesbury to Milton Keynes)
- the central section (Bedford to Cambridge via Sandy)
- the eastern section (Cambridge to Norwich and Ipswich) – existing railway which could link into East West Rail