

Progress for Oxford-Cambridge Arc as government announces preferred East West Rail central section

- preferred central section route announced in a step forward for East West Rail
- new rail line, if approved, could present opportunities to boost 'innovation corridor' and improve passenger access
- announcement follows launch of separate £500 million fund established to bring back lines and stations lost under the Beeching cuts of the 1960s

The government has today (30 January 2020) announced the preferred route for the central section of East West Rail (EWR), which could see a significant boost delivered for local transport connectivity across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc ('the arc').

Following consultation last year, the preferred route could see the new rail line run from Bedford to Cambridge, serving new stations along the way. This will lead to the government making a final decision on whether to take this project forward, and to make an application for a developed consent order (DCO).

Paul Maynard, the minister responsible for East West Rail, and minister George Freeman, who is visiting Cambridge today following the announcement, both welcomed progress on the vital project as an important step towards improving connectivity in the region and supporting economic growth in the arc. The East West Rail Company will now take forward work to develop more detailed route alignment proposals, in consultation with the local communities.

Minister for Future of Transport George Freeman said:

East-West Rail has the potential to improve rail links to support opportunities for new housing, reduce congestion and pollution and unlock the economic potential across the region.

By boosting rail connectivity we can improve access to economic opportunities for people in this area, and boost the quality of life in this vital arc.

Minister for East West Rail Paul Maynard said:

East West Rail could help us revolutionise transport in the Oxford-Cambridge arc, increasing people's access to job opportunities while making travel quicker, cheaper and easier.

Today's announcement, following our £500 million fund to bring back lines and stations lost during closures in the 1960s, shows we're backing up our commitment to improving access to opportunities across the country.

On top of connectivity and travel benefits, EWR has the potential to support new homes and jobs in the arc, dubbed the UK's own Silicon Valley. The government is committed to ensuring that future development demonstrates high standards of design and environmental sustainability and with local infrastructure and affordable housing in place.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Today's announcement is great news for the region. These plans could see significant improvements to transport links across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, one of the most exciting economic growth opportunities in Europe, while also potentially helping us to deliver the homes that people need.

I want to make sure that any of these new homes are built to a high standard and all future development in the area is well designed, beautiful, environmentally friendly and embrace the latest technologies. These communities will be world class and a blueprint for forward looking design across the country.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Esther McVey MP said:

Today's announcement could further boost jobs, growth and opportunities across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, where so many of the greatest innovations in the world come from.

We know we need to build more houses so this generation has somewhere to call their own – that's why we will continue to support projects nationwide as we make strides towards our target of delivering at least one million much-needed new homes over the next five years.

Today's announcement follows the opening of a [£500 million Beeching reversal fund](#) on Tuesday 28 January, ensuring isolated communities who lost vital rail links have the connectivity they need. Communities have been invited to pitch for investment that could see local lines reopened, helping to level up regional economies and boosting access to jobs and education.

East West Rail is a major ambition to revitalise 21st century connectivity on the old route of the Varsity line, one of many lines across the country closed during the Beeching cuts.