

Our approach to the environment

2021 Update

Caring for the environment is at the centre of everything that we do. At each stage of planning and developing East West Rail we work to ensure nature has a proper place in our plans. We want to change the environment for the better, delivering biodiversity net gain.

Protecting the environment is never an afterthought for EWR - it is a fundamental part of our decision-making. We are listening to and working closely with local community groups, environmental bodies and local highway and planning authorities to assess the environmental impacts of our plans on areas such as environmentally important sites and priority habitats. We take a proactive approach to avoid or minimise negative environmental impacts.

East West Rail will be a new, environmentally sustainable way to travel across the region. Our aim is to become a net zero carbon railway. To achieve this, we are looking at ways to advance low carbon design and to use green energy to power our trains.

We first published Our Approach to the Environment in 2019, and we remain committed to the environmental principles we outlined:



Respecting important sites and locations: building and operating so we don't damage the important environmental and heritage sites in your local area.



Respecting our neighbours: effectively managing and controlling noise vibration and pollution to avoid affecting your health or quality of life.



Sourcing responsibly: sustainably sourcing what we need and reducing our waste to get the maximum use out of everything we buy.



Protecting your farmland: protecting soil resources and agriculturally important land.



Protecting you from flooding: working carefully to make sure your water sources are protected, and that we don't cause any increase in flooding through our construction or operations.



Caring for your landscapes: enhancing the quality of landscapes and townscapes and considering how what we build can be designed to blend in with your local environment.

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Protecting species: delivering biodiversity net gain by approaching development so biodiversity is left in a better state than we found it.



Contributing to the fight against climate change: designing, constructing and operating in a way that helps us to be a net zero carbon railway which will mean our greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by removal of an equal amount of those gases from the atmosphere.



Preserving your heritage: protecting your historic environment through preserving and enhancing your heritage assets.

How are we doing?

Here are some of the ways we are living up to the environmental principles we first published in 2019:

Striving for net zero carbon

- We are committed to delivering a net zero carbon railway, in line with existing and developing net zero carbon policy and legislation
- As the Project advances, we will continue to develop our approach to delivering on this aim and provide further information around the scope of our target during our statutory consultation.

Committing to biodiversity net gain

- We want to build on the commitment of 10% biodiversity net gain made in relation to the part of EWR between Bicester to Bletchley
- To achieve this, we will continue to prioritise avoiding high value and priority habitats. We will consider enhancing some existing habitats and look at opportunities to create new habitats. We will provide further information on our plans for achieving biodiversity net gain during our statutory consultation.

A sensitive approach to developing route alignments

- It's really important that from start to finish EWR strives to be environmentally responsible. That's why all the alignment options we have designed for the new railway from Bedford to Cambridge avoid directly impacting the most important environmental and heritage sites in the area, such as listed buildings and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

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- We're also trying to avoid other environmental sites such as priority habitats. Where that's not possible, we will be looking to reduce the area of habitat required as much as practicable and mitigate the impact that any loss may have in line with our commitments on biodiversity net gain (as we explain above).
- Where there are other impacts as a result of the new railway, like those relating to landscape, we'll work hard to reduce these through sensitive design. More detailed information on this will be shared during our statutory consultation.

Developing our resilience and mitigating flood risk

- We take climate change seriously and we will continue to develop our approach to understanding and mitigating any Project-related risks linked to climate change. We will consider changes to climatic conditions and extreme events within the design of the Project.
- We will also develop flood risk assessments to help inform the design process, which will incorporate uplifts to take account of the changing climate.
- We will provide further information during our statutory consultation.

Using sustainable energy for our trains

- Although no commitment has yet been made by Government to electrify the railway between Oxford and Cambridge, we will need to ensure the railway aligns with relevant policy and complies with relevant legislation related to net zero carbon efforts.
- We will include information on this during our statutory consultation.

Surveying for protected species

- We understand the importance of biodiversity and protecting the habitats of local wildlife. As part of our commitment to changing the environment for the better, we are thinking carefully about protected species and their habitats when designing the railway. This includes the colony of barbastelle bats in Wimpole and Eversden Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is located within the route option area and within 3-4km of the emerging route alignments between Bedford and Cambridge. Throughout 2020 we carried out a number of surveys to better understand the barbastelle population in the area and we will carry out further bat surveys in 2021.

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- We are also mapping where the new railway may encounter habitats used by other important protected species, such as badgers or great crested newts, so that we can consider how best to avoid impacting them altogether or to mitigate impacts upon them. Our programme of habitat surveys and species-specific surveys is designed to help us understand where species and habitats are in the landscape and how they use it, enabling us to consider their needs as we design the railway.

Farms and land holdings

- We understand the importance of agriculture in the communities the railway will serve, which is why we are focused on finding solutions that avoid or mitigate negative impacts to farmland. At each stage of our planning and development process, we are assessing the environmental impacts on important areas like farmland, including avoiding areas with the highest-grade agricultural land where we can.
- Managing impacts on arable farmland and quality soil is an extremely important element of our commitment to delivering a net gain for biodiversity. We are exploring ways to reduce the impact of the railway on agricultural practices and soil resources.

Thinking about impacts on the community

- It's really important to us that urban and rural communities don't experience unnecessary disruption as we plan, build and operate these vital rail links. We will continue to consider the impact of planned work as the Project progresses and work with affected communities and their representatives to ensure people impacted by the work are kept up to date with our activity.
- It's important that we're building East West Rail not just in the right place, but in the right way too. We will prepare a Code of Construction Practice for the Project, which will explain the steps we will take to eliminate, minimise or mitigate disruption to local people, communities and the environment.

Visit our website for more information: www.eastwestrail.co.uk

Get in touch

You can email, call or write to us

By email: contact@eastwestrail.co.uk

By phone: 0330 1340067

By post: FREEPOST East West Rail