



The Affordable Connections Project

Recognising the wider economic climate, we've carefully considered the cost and affordability issues that underpin a project like EWR. In December 2021, we agreed with the Department for Transport that we should set up the Affordable Connections Project (ACP).

This was based on a drive for lower costs, reflecting the impacts of Covid-19, and a focus on ensuring the benefits could be supported through local leadership. The ACP therefore considered whether there remained a strategic case for investing in EWR and if there were solutions which could deliver the majority of the expected benefits of EWR at a lower capital cost to the tax payer.

This factsheet provides more information about the ACP. Please note, alongside this Route Update Report, we've also published the [Economic and Technical Report \(ETR\)](#) detailing results of the ACP. You can view this document and the full list of the other information being published, download documents, or request copies at www.eastwestrail.co.uk/routeupdate

Option Families

From the outset of the ACP, we took a fresh look at the potential options for connecting Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge.

When we consulted in 2021, our proposals were based on agreed Project Objectives. As part of the ACP, we disapplied these Project Objectives to ensure we considered a wide range of alternatives. This resulted in more than 170 ACP options.

We then considered the credibility, expected cost, transport effectiveness and attractiveness to passengers of each option. This derived a shortlist which led to 10 option families that reflected a range of transport modes and a series of routes.

Strategic need

In parallel with developing our option families, we also tested the strategic need for the Project. We undertook what's known as a Theory of Change analysis alongside traditional transport appraisal modelling for the entire Oxford-Cambridge region. This identified where focussing investment could deliver especially strong benefits.

This highlighted that Cambridge, in particular, has been growing rapidly and that this momentum is expected to continue. We identified that 80,000 new jobs could be created in Cambridge by 2050, an increase of over 40% and worth £4 billion to the Cambridge economy.

However, we also identified that this growth was likely to be constrained as there was

insufficient space for businesses to expand to create these jobs, and there was insufficient access to the labour market to fill these roles.

Releasing constraints on growth

Housing is already expensive in Cambridge and there are limited opportunities to expand the city, as it's surrounded by green belt. Existing transport connections are poor and already congested, especially to the west, which means that the city's catchment area to access skilled workers is limited.

We found that to release these constraints on growth, new transport links were necessary to allow businesses to expand geographically, spreading new jobs and prosperity to a wider catchment area. Increasing the number of people within easy reach of the high value jobs being created in Cambridge, as well as other established centres in the region, such as Oxford and Milton Keynes, will be critical to unlocking the region's potential for transformational economic growth.

Shortlisting potential options

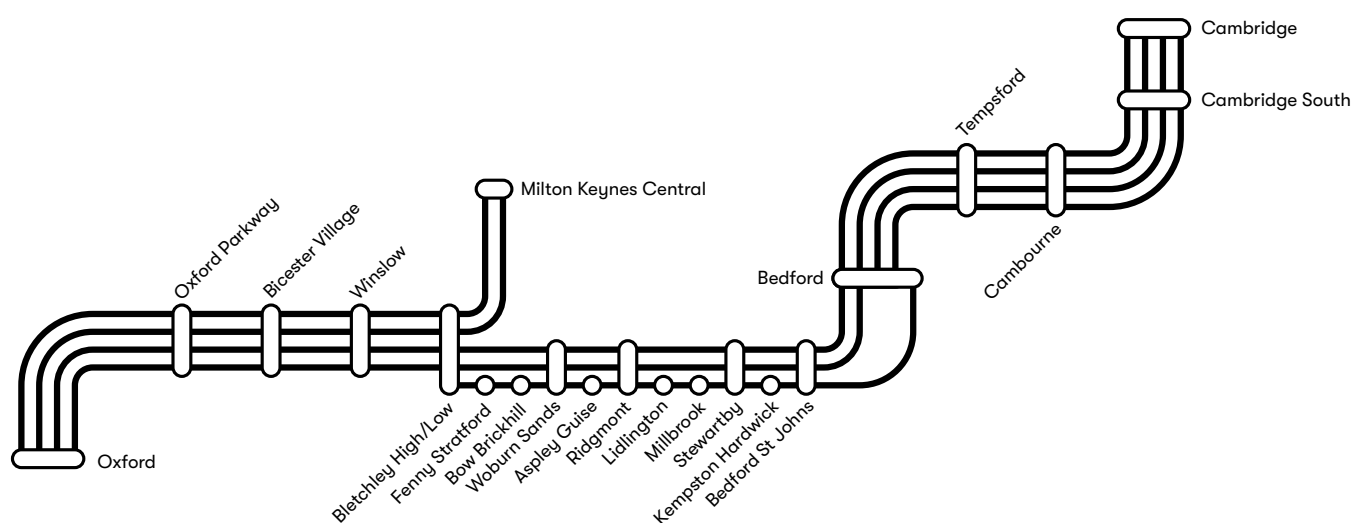
We applied this theory to the option families, which found that only a heavy railway could provide the capacity and travel times to expand catchments that would unlock growth. This led to four heavy rail options – which included different approach options at Bedford and Cambridge that reflected feedback we received during the 2021 consultation.

We then considered the option families in light of our established Assessment Factors to derive a single preferred option.

Updated service pattern

The total number of trains needed between Bedford and Cambridge to meet the growth predictions will be four per hour – two originating in Oxford and two originating in Bedford. This work helped us identify an updated service pattern for EWR, which will provide:

- Four trains per hour from Oxford – two progress to Milton Keynes, two continue to Cambridge
- A further two trains per hour travelling between Bedford and Cambridge
- An additional service between Bletchley and Bedford



Key findings from the Affordable Connections Project can be found in the www.eastwestrail.co.uk/economicandtechnicalreport that was published alongside the www.eastwestrail.co.uk/routeupdatereport

For more information, please visit www.eastwestrail.co.uk/routeupdatereport

Get in touch

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