

Why are two additional tracks needed north of Bedford station?

Following feedback received as part of the 2021 non-statutory consultation, we've revisited the case for a route alignment to the south of Bedford as part of the [Economic and Technical Report](#). Our analysis showed that the preferred alignment announced in 2020 (and further consulted on in 2021), which would continue to the north of Bedford, remains our preferred option.

That's because of the benefits associated with connecting the new railway with Bedford town centre. The preferred option is to build two additional tracks to the existing four Midland Main Line (MML) tracks north of Bedford station. We've explored options to deliver EWR using the existing four tracks. However, after extensive railway capacity and performance modelling, we have concluded that it's not viable to deliver a reliable dedicated service of four EWR trains per hour on the already congested MML.

This factsheet explains some of the factors which helped us reach this conclusion.

Why are six tracks required?

Operational modelling¹ shows that an additional two tracks north of Bedford station is the only viable option because of:

- **Current levels of congestion**

The current four-track MML north of Bedford station has been formally designated as 'congested infrastructure' by Network Rail. Only four other places in Great Britain have received this status. This is due to the high volume of traffic currently passing through or at Bedford station, and trains at platforms which block the lines and prevent other services from running. This is before the significant uplift in services that would be provided by EWR and without taking account of other factors, such as the potential expansion of other operator services or potential changes to freight service levels.

- **Timetabling issues**

It would be extremely difficult to introduce EWR services on the existing four tracks and within the existing train timetable. Thameslink and freight operators already have fixed paths on these tracks and their services need to be preserved, meaning it would be unlikely EWR trains could meet the aim of four trains per hour. In addition, existing train services would likely be prioritised in times of disruption, meaning frequent delays to EWR services.

- **Constraining future growth**

A four-track option would also constrain potential future growth of passenger and freight services on the MML in the Bedford area, meaning further substantial upgrades to the railway may be required in the future.

- **Speed reductions**

The four-track design shares approximately 900m of the MML on the current slow lines. This would make it very difficult to signal and maintain both EWR and existing services effectively within such a short section without negative impacts on the speeds and effective flow of both the approach to the station and platforms.

- **Impacts on Wixams station**

There would be reduced benefits and challenges to the long-term viability of the proposed Wixams station if EWR proceeded on the basis of four tracks. This is due to an increased use of the existing platforms at Bedford station, which would exacerbate the performance and growth constraints in the area.

This video helps explain why an additional two tracks are required: [East West Rail: Why an additional two tracks are needed north of Bedford - YouTube](#)

¹[Appendix 12 of Economic and Technical Report](#)

Why can you not use an 'Up Fast platform'?

It would be possible to create some additional capacity through an Up Fast platform at Bedford station for East Midlands Railway (EMR) services. However, this option would be expensive, does not solve the operational constraints that EWR would face and would cause a lot of disruption to services during construction.

Although an Up Fast platform would reduce the interactions and impacts of the EMR services on the slow lines, it would do little to mitigate the interactions between freight, Thameslink and EWR when assessed over the whole day.

What is an 'Up Fast platform'?

An Up Fast platform would be a new singular platform at Bedford station that would enable the realignment and separation of faster and slower services through the station, preventing the need for fast services to cross the slow lines at Bedford north junction and allowing them to call at the station.

Minimising the impact on communities

We recognise the potential impact of two additional tracks on local residents and businesses. By challenging the design, we've found ways to reduce the number of properties affected in the Poets area from 98 to the current figure of 66, and we continue to consider how we could potentially reduce this figure even further.

We are in conversations with those potentially directly affected by our plans. We're also working hard to find ways to potentially minimise the impact of EWR and its construction to communities in this area more widely and will invite you to share your views and any suggestions for how we could improve this at the statutory consultation in due course.

Why could the route north of Bedford not be pushed west to avoid the properties?

Moving the proposed EWR tracks west to avoid properties would also require moving the existing MML railway tracks to the west. This would be extremely complicated and costly, as it would involve the realignment of approximately two miles of the MML which is a high-speed railway (120-125 mph). The scale of disruption caused by moving existing lineside equipment, overhead line equipment and re-aligning the MML would be far too complicated and inefficient and would be disruptive to local residents and those who use the MML service.

Get in touch

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