

Your Questions Answered

East West Rail and COVID-19



The team at EWR is committed to doing the right thing for the communities we serve: this includes taking account of the immediate impact of COVID-19 while also planning connections for local communities which will last for the next hundred years.

How has COVID-19 changed rail travel in the UK?

COVID 19 undoubtedly generated immediate changes to working practices and travel patterns, with restrictions on movement causing understandable drops in rail passenger numbers in 2020. However no consensus has formed about the long-term effect this might have on rail demand within the UK.

Has COVID-19 changed the case for East West Rail?

East West Rail isn't a typical, capacity enhancing railway project. The purpose of East West Rail is to provide new connectivity across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, making it cheaper, easier and quicker for people to move around.

We recognise that some people may adapt their travel patterns as a result of COVID-19, and reduced passenger numbers could affect a range of decisions from the number of trains purchased to the frequency of service offered, so it's important we continue to model passenger numbers and work with Government to understand overall trends.

However, East West Rail is a key component of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, the UK's leading region for research, development and innovation, and the case for the new rail link remains robust. The Arc has been identified by the government as an area of growth for the UK and providing transport choices for businesses and residents is a vital part of that plan. East West Rail is expected to play a critical part in accelerating the region's recovery from the pandemic.

How can East West Rail support the economic recovery of the region?

As the country looks to recover from the pandemic, planning for EWR will continue to develop and construction will start, pouring billions of pounds into the local economy through our supply chain and creating thousands of jobs.

In early 2021, the Government committed £760 million in new funding for EWR meaning further vital construction work can begin on the part of the line between Oxford and Bletchley/Milton Keynes. Delivery of this stage alone is expected to create job opportunities for 1,500 people, injecting an estimated £1.1 billion into the local economy.

Your Questions Answered

East West Rail and COVID-19

Longer term, new services will give local people better access to local jobs and help businesses attract and retain the best talent in the region. EWR will connect this unrivalled knowledge arc by linking internationally renowned science parks and world-beating universities, in an environment where high-tech industries cluster, and organisations such as AstraZeneca are at the cutting edge of medical collaboration between private research and academia.

How are the EWR team keeping communities safe?

Where we already have teams onsite – such as at Bletchley – COVID-19 protection measures have been deployed within depots and on site to prevent onward transmission, and we have used online forums for meetings with local communities.

How have we kept in touch with communities over the COVID-19 pandemic?

When Government advice made further in-person meetings impossible, we reached out to local stakeholders across the area to understand how best we could communicate with communities remotely. We have continued to work with them and the local authorities across the route over the past year.

We have continued to meet with a wide range of elected representatives and interested groups, through a series of online meeting and have used their feedback to improve our communications:

- In October last year we launched our online Community Hub: a new platform where people can ask questions, take part in surveys and discussions, and access information relating to their local area.
- We also launched our *Keeping you connected* community newsletter last autumn which reaches out to over 5,000 people every three months to keep local communities updated on news about East West Rail.
- We published an expansive set of baseline maps, in a new interactive feature on the East West Rail Community Hub, outlining some of the complex factors which the team have been taking into consideration in ongoing design work

We worked with local media along the route to help us reach communities with these updates, and shared details of larger announcements such as our progress securing a fleet of trains, detail of our new approach to delivering EWR Co to reduce disruption for local communities, and the news of the £760m investment commitment by Government to build the part of the line between Oxford and Milton Keynes/Bletchley.

Your Questions Answered

East West Rail and COVID-19

How is the 2021 consultation responding to COVID-19

Ongoing restrictions mean that we have created a range of new ways to reach people in our 2021 consultation. A summary of the full consultation was sent to every address in the consultation zone, and we have made every effort to reach out to communities through town and parish councils, local authorities, rail user groups and other organisations

We have also made it easy to order printed versions of all our consultation documents – through the website, over email, using our freepost address or over the phone – and have sent copies of documents to elected representatives across the area. We will welcome people in a virtual consultation room and hold live-chats, giving the same access to our experts you would expect from an in-person event. Indeed, through our innovative use of digital technology, we believe that it will be possible for us to provide this level of direct engagement with our team to more people than ever before.



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