

Marston Vale Line

East West Rail (EWR) is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect people in the towns and villages between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge with the region's main centres of employment and cultural heritage. It will bring a wealth of benefits to the region by cutting travel times, easing congestion on local roads and bringing more jobs within reach of local people.

Improving services and reducing disruption along the Marston Vale Line

At the 2021 consultation we explained that it's not possible to introduce a fast and frequent service between Oxford and Cambridge without making a significant investment in the Marston Vale Line (MVL).

The current infrastructure has not had significant upgrades for decades, which has affected reliability, time and the current passenger service has been suspended since December 2022. The communities it serves have grown considerably over time and lack the reliable connections they need to centres of education and employment in Bedford, Milton Keynes and beyond.

Our proposals in 2021 Two concepts for the Marston Vale Line

We set out two concepts for future train services and stations on the MVL that would provide improvements to the existing railway and stations between Bletchley and Bedford. Both of these concepts would need extensive

infrastructure renewal to raise the line speed of the railway to up to 100mph, potentially including a lengthy closure of the railway to enable works to be carried out.

Concept 1 would retain the existing hourly service that stops at all intermediate stations and introduce fast limited-stop Oxford to Cambridge services alongside it. This means there would be 5 trains per hour on the MVL, as follows:

- Four fast trains per hour, which would stop each way at Woburn Sands and Ridgmont stations only
- An additional hourly stopping service, calling at all 10 intermediate stations

Concept 2 would be five new merged stations on the Marston Vale Line. All five would benefit from at least two EWR services every hour, and some would have four. This would mean more communities would have access to more frequent and faster services, direct to more locations:

- Two stopping trains every hour between Bletchley and Cambridge, calling at all five new stations.
- Two faster Oxford to Cambridge trains every hour, only stopping at Woburn Sands and Ridgmont when travelling between Bletchley and Bedford.

Level crossings

Alongside these two concepts we also reviewed the 31 level crossings on the MVL. Network Rail already has permission to close 11 of these crossings, which we would intend to implement. At the 2021 consultation we presented our proposals to close all the remaining level crossings on the MVL to ensure a safe and reliable train service, and replace them with between 16 and 19 new bridges or underpasses together with new links to existing bridges.

Work done since the 2021 consultation

Feedback from the 2021 consultation showed that people were concerned about the speed of trains through residential areas, the level of disruption during construction of the renewed infrastructure, and the loss of connectivity due to the proposed closure of level crossings and stations. The work undertaken since then has allowed us to make progress in addressing these concerns, while still seeking to deliver benefits of more frequent services to more destinations.

Three trains per hour on the Marston Vale Line

We've looked further at the potential number of passengers that could use stations on

the MVL and we believe that three trains per hour (tph) would meet the needs of local communities, rather than the four to five tph that we set out previously.

This change in frequency allows us to maintain the benefits of EWR and requires less construction work to upgrade the line. This will reduce disruption to local communities and passengers, as well as cut costs.

At the next stage we'll consider all three services together in identifying the best timetable and stopping pattern for communities along the line of the railway.

Line speeds and level crossings

We're also suggesting capping the line speed below the 100mph originally proposed in 2021, but above the current speed of 60mph. This would reduce disruption in residential areas, but still provide a faster service than currently available.

Combined with our updated view on frequency, the lower line speed means that some level crossings – for example at Woburn Sands and Lidlington – could still meet the appropriate safety standards and so could be retained. This would be one of the many ways we maintain local connectivity across and between communities. A summary of our current proposals for level crossings on the MVL can be found on page 69 of the Route Update Report www.eastwestrail.co.uk/routeupdatereport


Stations on the MVL

Feedback from the 2021 consultation was relatively evenly split in relation to the two concepts for services and station stops on the MVL. While members of the public showed slightly more support for concept 1, statutory consultees preferred concept 2. We're continuing to work with local stakeholders to help us identify the best solution for communities along this section of the route and we'll present these for comment at the statutory consultation which we expect to take place in the first half of 2024.

Get in touch

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