



Connecting with Bedford

Bedford station is already an important transport hub for the region, providing a gateway into the town centre and easy connections to Thameslink and East Midlands Railway (EMR) services on the Midland Main Line (MML). Following consultation feedback, we've looked again at serving central Bedford alongside alternative alignments that pass to the south of the town or re-use parts of the former alignment of the closed Varsity Line.


We've also undertaken extensive work to test whether we can run services on the existing MML without building additional tracks – and we've expressed a clear preference to build a new station serving Bedford Hospital.

A new station serving Bedford Hospital

The railway at Bedford St Johns is unable to accommodate the proposed EWR train services, as there's only one track on this part of the railway and only one platform at Bedford St Johns station, which limits capacity. The track is also on a very tight curve, limiting the train speed to 15mph.

To accommodate EWR services, we presented two options to relocate Bedford St Johns station during the 2021 consultation:

- **Option 1:** Relocating Bedford St Johns to the west, closer to Bedford Hospital between Amphill Road and Cauldwell Street.
- **Option 2:** Relocating Bedford St Johns to the south on the existing railway alignment close to Amphill Road/Elstow Road pedestrian link bridge.



Our preference remains Option 1, which will bring a brand new station for Bedford Hospital, making life easier for NHS staff, patients and visitors.

Three-fold increase in services on the Marston Vale Line

The updated proposals would see trains run roughly every 20 minutes in each direction between Bedford and Bletchley, with line speeds faster than the current 60mph but capped below the 100 mph originally proposed in 2021. This would reduce construction requirements and disruption in residential areas, but still provides a faster service than currently available.

Serving central Bedford and connecting with the wider rail network

Bedford station is already an important transport hub for the region, providing a gateway into the town centre and easy connections to Thameslink and East Midlands Railway (EMR) services on the Midland Main Line (MML).

Introducing EWR services would strengthen the hub, improving east-west connections and driving town centre regeneration, providing more jobs and opportunities for the people of Bedford.

Serving Bedford station supports prosperity and growth for the town centre and greater access to jobs and opportunities for the people of Bedford.

Improvements to Bedford station would also contribute to regeneration of the

area immediately around the station and the town centre, unlocking further growth opportunities.

Considering alternatives to serve central Bedford

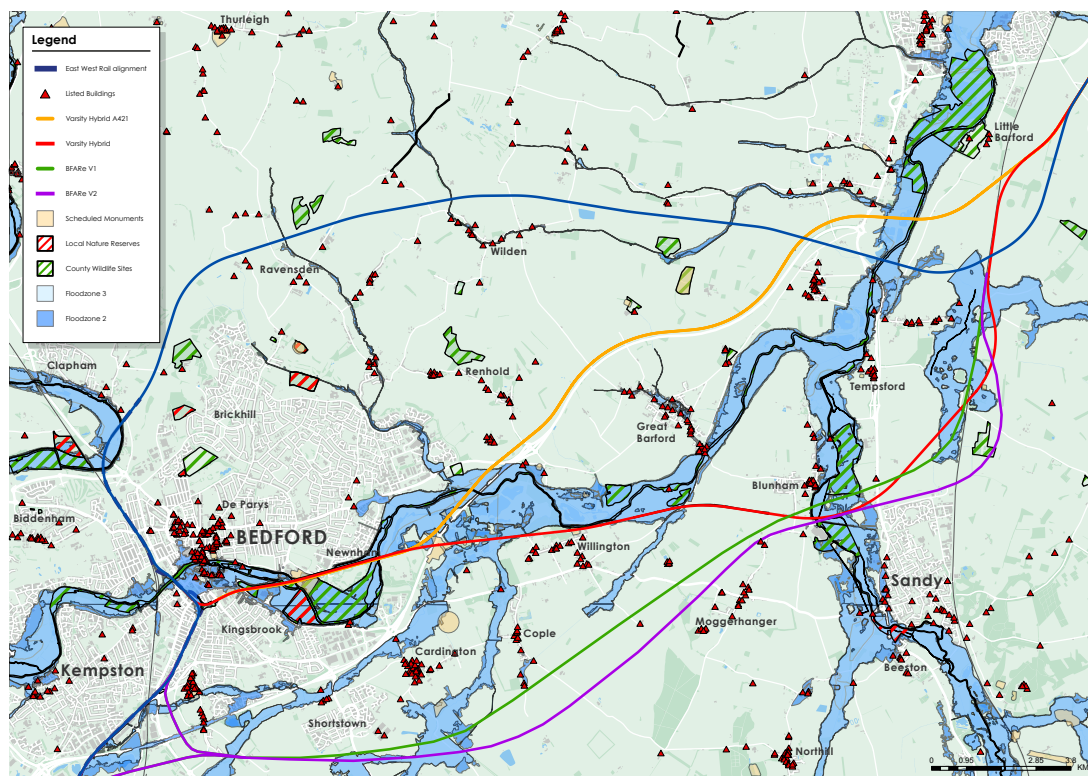
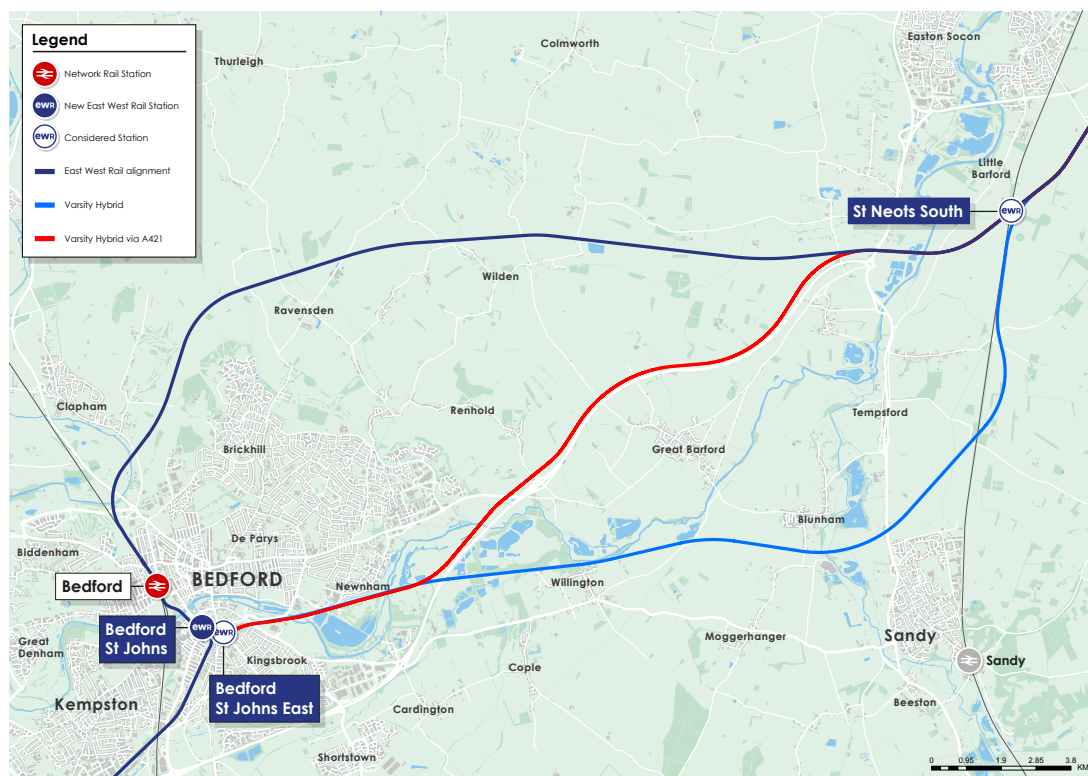
Following consultation feedback in 2021, we carefully considered whether an alignment passing to the south of Bedford might be a better option than an alignment going through Bedford station.

We looked in detail at the two most promising alignments:

- **Varsity Hybrid alignment:** This alignment option would pass to the south of the town. It would relocate Bedford St Johns station further east and would make use of part of the route of the former Varsity Line.
- **Varsity Hybrid via A421 alignment:** This option would be similar to the Varsity Hybrid alignment above, however, when travelling east it would more closely follow the A421, aiming to limit impacts on the environment.

Both alternative alignments have significant environmental impacts and require land to be taken from parks and other green spaces. This includes increased flood risk, as the Varsity Line is in the flood plain of the River Great Ouse. Embankments here could increase the risk of flooding in Bedford and would require viaducts to be built high above the flood plain, including in Priory Country Park, which has protected status.

Bypassing Bedford town centre using alternative routes would also reduce the opportunity to interchange with Thameslink or East Midlands Railway services, reducing access to destinations further afield.



Protecting the reliability of existing services using the busy Midland Main Line

When the route leaves Bedford, the preferred option in 2021 was to build two additional tracks to the existing four Midland Mainline tracks north of Bedford station. Following consultation feedback, we've closely examined whether EWR services can run on the existing Midland Main Line north of Bedford without building additional tracks. This work has found that an additional two tracks north of the existing Bedford station are required to ensure EWR can provide a reliable service which does not conflict with other train services.

We found that an additional two tracks north of Bedford station is the only viable option because of the current level of congestion on the existing four tracks:

- The four-track section of the MML that runs through Bedford has been identified as one of the most congested sections of track in the country
- Services using the lines have largely fixed paths because they have to reach other parts of the network at the right time
- Services currently using the lines are also expected to grow

We recognise the impacts that two additional tracks has on local residents and businesses and, by challenging the design, we've found ways to reduce the number of properties affected in this area from 98 to 66, and we're looking at ways to reduce this even further. We're aware of the significant effect our

proposals would have on people whose homes and businesses may be affected by the construction of the new lines and we'll continue to talk to those people potentially directly affected by our plans in this area and will continue to work to reduce the impact of our proposals.

The Need to Sell Property Scheme

We've also launched the Need to Sell Property Scheme, which has been developed following feedback we received during the 2021 consultation. It supports eligible property owners who have a compelling need to sell but who have been unable to do so other than at a substantially reduced value because of the EWR Project by enabling them to apply for their property to be purchased at its unblighted market value. More information is available at:

www.eastwestrail.co.uk/needtosell

Next steps

We're continuing to refine the designs and will 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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