

Connecting Communities: The Preferred Route Option between Bedford and Cambridge

Executive Summary





What is the case for East West Rail?

The vibrant mix of urban and rural communities between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge blend beautiful landscapes and a rich cultural heritage with globally renowned centres of education, business, technology and an increasingly dynamic business scene.

It's a fantastic place to live and work, but people are being let down by a lack of good transport links, limiting their ability to enjoy everything the area has to offer – from easy opportunities to commute between home and work, to days out with friends and family. Creating better transport will be critical in building opportunities for prosperity among local communities.

East West Rail is a proposed new rail link under development which would connect communities between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge, creating new opportunities for people right across the area by:



Making it cheaper and quicker to get around the area - connecting people to their jobs, homes and families, as well as businesses to their employees, suppliers and customers.



Supporting new housing to make it more affordable and help your money go further - so people can afford to live and work in the area, and businesses can afford to create more jobs and increase productivity.

As well as improving quality of life for people locally, it would help the local economy to:



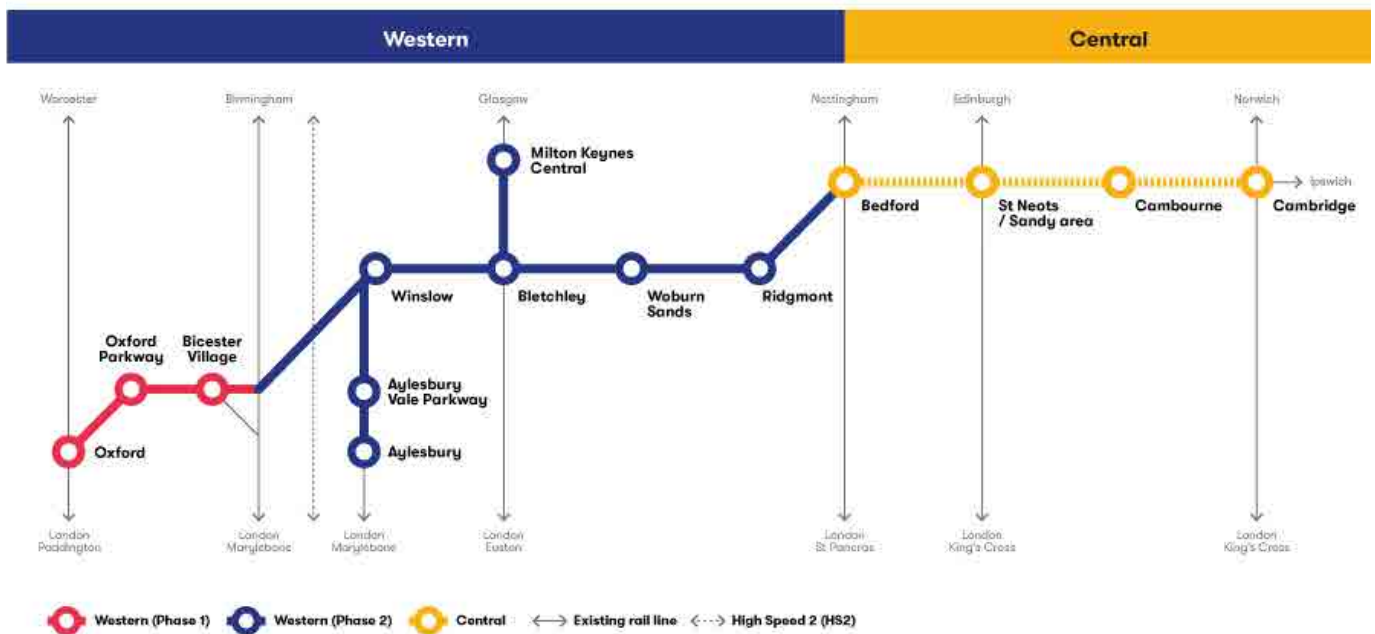
Making places more appealing for people wanting to start and grow businesses - attracting and retaining the best talent in the region, while encouraging new investment to support the economy.



Spreading prosperity across the UK - creating growth for towns and cities outside of London. The National Infrastructure Commission estimated that creating these transport links and supporting the area between Oxford and Cambridge was worth nearly £80bn extra each year for the British economy.¹

What's happened on East West Rail so far?

East West Rail is an ambitious project that proposes bringing back into use a section of railway that was closed to passengers in the 1960s, refurbishing existing railway lines between Bletchley and Bedford, and building brand new railway infrastructure between Bedford and Cambridge.



Oxford to Bicester: open

- Completed in 2016, this section combined upgrading the track between Oxford and Bicester Village with major improvements to local stations
- Chiltern Railways began running services from Oxford through to London via Bicester in 2017

Bicester to Milton Keynes and Bedford: in planning

- This complex section involves reinstating parts of the old track, upgrading stations, building a new station at Winslow and a large number of overbridges, footbridges and changes to crossings
- East West Railway Company and Network Rail are leading a team known as the East West Rail Alliance, who will design and deliver this section
- An application for the planning permission required, known as a Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) was submitted in July 2018
- The Secretary of State for Transport is expected to make a decision on this submission early in 2020. If granted, the TWAO will allow the team to start work
- Construction is expected to start this year, following the final investment decision by government

Bedford to Cambridge

- Having identified five promising route options between Bedford and Cambridge, EWR Co held an initial non-statutory consultation in early 2019, creating a strong foundation for our design work
- Following this consultation, we have now selected the Preferred Route Option, and we are concentrating on choosing the best alignment for this section

It is proposed that services would run all the way from Oxford to Cambridge before the end of the decade.

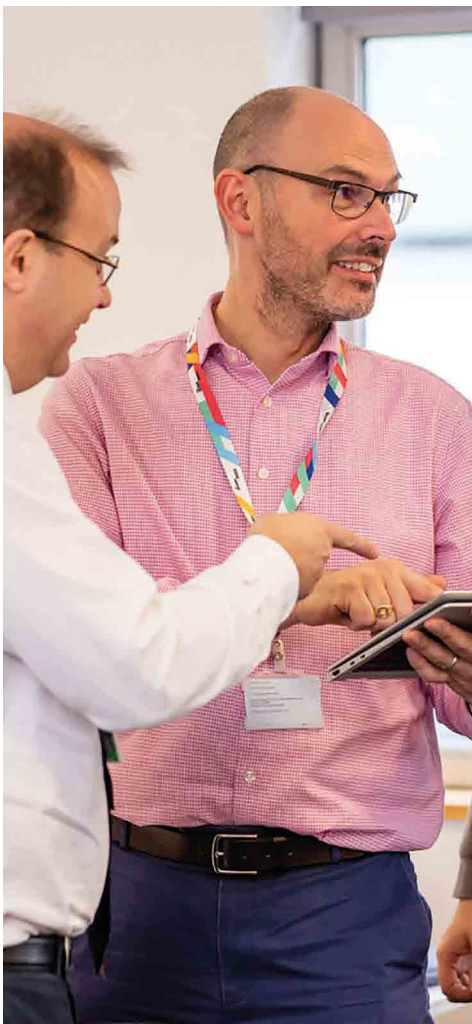
A quick history of East West Rail

A rail connection between Oxford, Cambridge, Bedford and Milton Keynes has been talked about for a long time. There was once a rail service between Oxford and Cambridge which opened in the mid-19th century, sometimes known as the Varsity Line. Services were slow and infrequent, and it later closed in stages when rail travel fell out of fashion, with most services stopping before the end of the 1960s.

However, the enthusiasm for reinstating a rail connection sprang up almost as soon as the last train pulled away from the buffers. The social, environmental and economic benefits of providing strong local public transport for the region gained prominence in the 2000s, thanks to organisations including the East West Rail Consortium - a group of local authorities and businesses who have long advocated for reconnecting the area by rail.

EWR Co – who are we and how are we different?

The East West Railway Company (EWR Co) was created to develop a railway with customers and communities at its core. We are passionate about developing a railway which best serves people living and working between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge.



We were set up by the Secretary of State for Transport in 2017 with the following role:

- Between Oxford, Bedford and Milton Keynes, our role is to oversee the work already underway
- Between Bedford and Cambridge, we are developing the case for the project.
- In addition, we will be integrating the two sections of the project to get the very best results for all the communities we'll be serving right the way from Oxford to Cambridge

We have a mission to innovate and challenge the status quo in the rail and construction industries, leading to a more efficient and cost-effective project delivery, and a great experience for passengers and the communities we serve.

Our distinctive outlook and commitment to doing the right thing for our customers and local communities runs through everything we do and every decision we make.



- **Creating connections:** not just laying down steel and concrete, we are focused on designing a railway that is most likely to create connections between local communities that will support the economic growth and prosperity in the area



- **Rooted in community:** at a very early stage in the design of the route between Bedford and Cambridge, we consulted local communities, asking for comments and points of view on the new route. The responses were central to the way we made our decision, and means the Preferred Route Option is fundamentally grounded in feedback from the community, stakeholders and local authorities



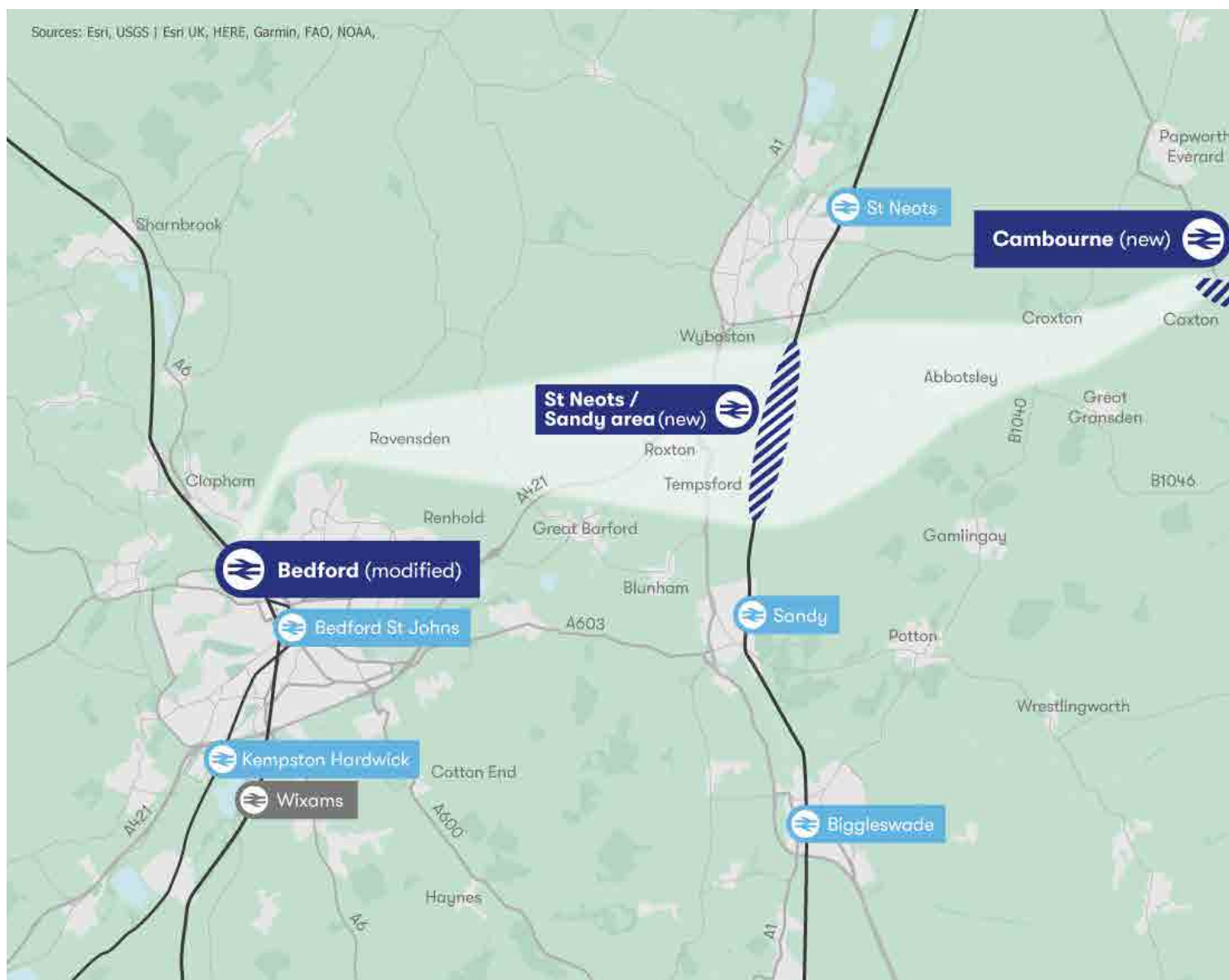
- **Environment at the forefront:** we developed route options with environmental considerations at the forefront. Rather than being an after-thought, we used environmental data as a fundamental part of our decision-making process. Our communities can have confidence that the Preferred Route Option has been selected to support ambitions for East West Rail to increase biodiversity and acting in a way which respects important environmental and heritage sites in the local area



- **Cutting-edge techniques to develop cost estimates:** taxpayers must have confidence in our ability to manage the financial side of the project and deliver value for money. To reduce the risk of cost over-runs later in the project, we used cutting edge techniques and new digital technology to produce our indicative cost estimates. Whilst there remains significant uncertainty in these cost estimates, these innovative techniques will help us to continue refining and improving our estimates, supporting better decision making now, and pointing to opportunities for potential cost savings in the future

The Preferred Route Option Between Bedford and Cambridge

Linking existing stations in Bedford and Cambridge with communities in Cambourne and the area north of Sandy, south of St. Neots, this route was the favourite among people who responded to our consultation on route options. It also provides the most benefits for every £ of taxpayers' money spent.



This route was labelled Route Option E in the consultation we held in early 2019.

Key



Preferred route option area



Potential EWR station



Potential EWR station area



Existing train line



Existing train station



Potential new Network Rail station

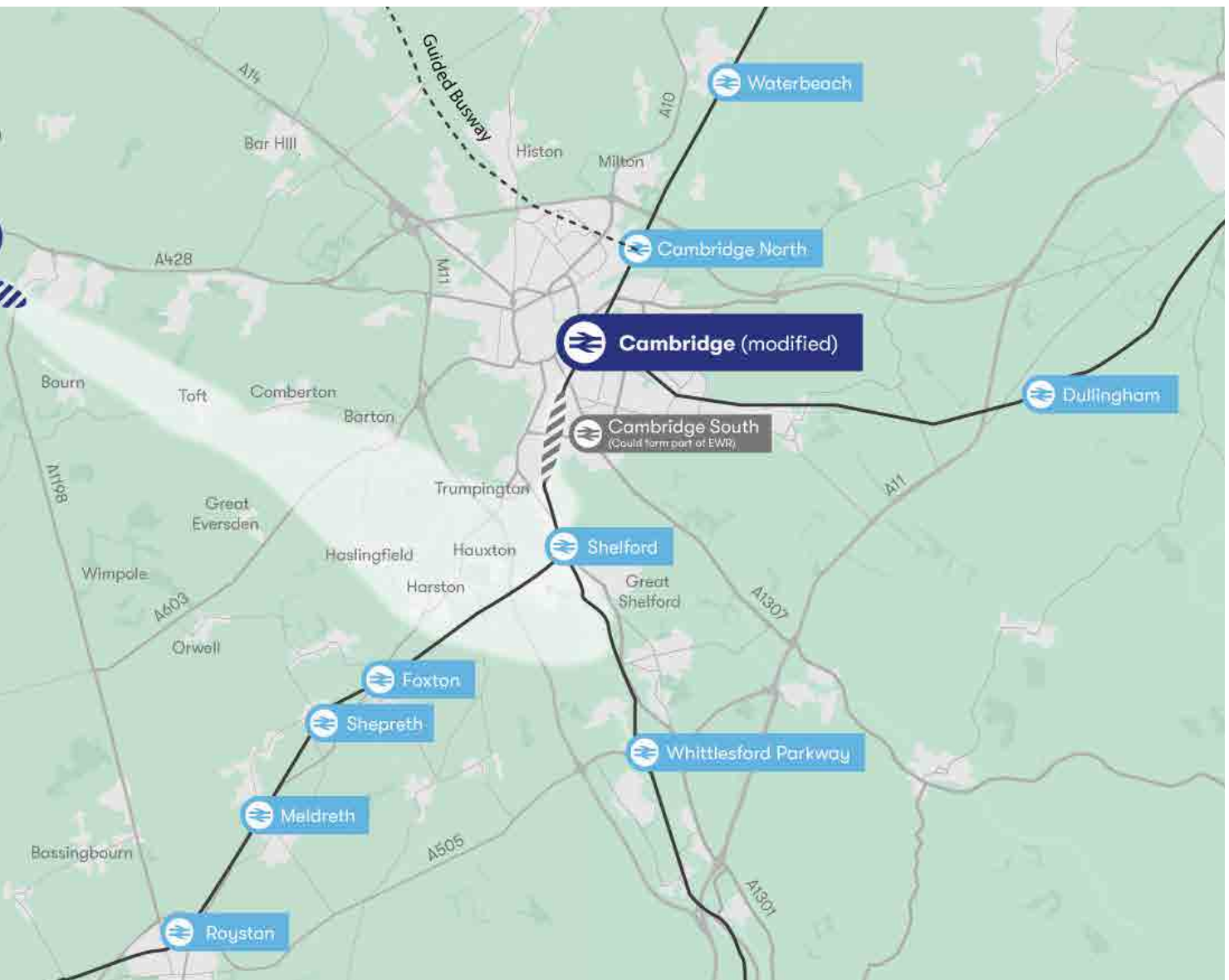


Potential new Network Rail station area



Guided busway

A more detailed interactive map is available at eastwestrail.co.uk



Sources: Esri, USGS | Esri UK, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA

Why is this the Preferred Route Option?

- People who responded to our 2019 consultation gave it the highest score on four of our five key criteria: benefits for transport users, environmental considerations, supporting economic growth and supporting new homes
- By taking a route via Cambourne we have the greatest opportunity to avoid the most environmentally challenging areas and potential direct impacts on irreplaceable or sensitive environmental features, including heritage assets, with good opportunities to achieve biodiversity net gain
- New links to Thameslink and Midland Mainline at Bedford the East Coast Mainline at Sandy/St Neots and the West Anglia Mainline in Cambridge will provide convenient additional inter-regional connectivity for people, making it easier to get to towns like Kettering, Leeds, Norwich and Nottingham.
- By serving Bedford Midland Station it provides easy connectivity into Bedford town centre and supports plans to regenerate Bedford
- It also connects the growing population of Cambourne with environmentally sustainable transport and could integrate with proposed improvements to the local transport network in south Cambridgeshire such as the busway extension and Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro
- The route could support much needed development of more affordable housing in areas including Bedford, between Sandy and St Neots and at Cambourne
- Most responses from local authorities in the Bedford to Cambridge area supported this route

A more extensive explanation of the process used to arrive at the Preferred Route Option can be found in the Route Option Report.



It delivers the best value for the taxpayer, returning the most benefit for every pound spent



It was the most popular option with people who responded to our consultation



It delivers the best opportunities for the environment



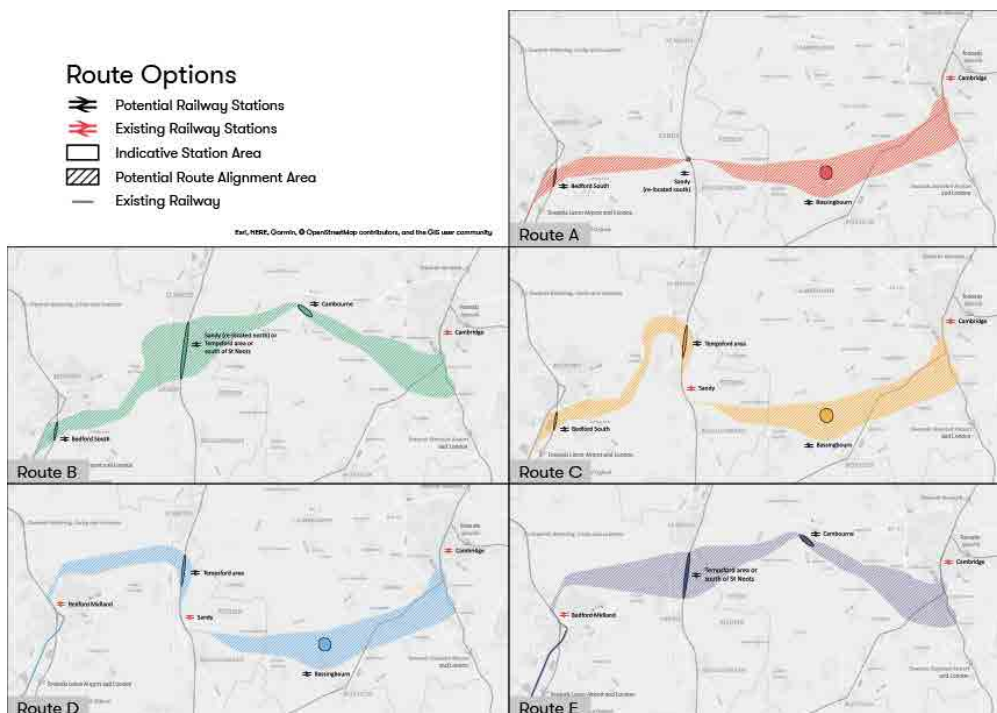
Listening to the community

Feedback and observations from the community have been critical in the decision-making process which lead to the selection of Route E as the Preferred Route Option.

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During the six week early stage, non-statutory consultation, we asked for comments on five possible route options. Over 3,500 people took the time to come to our events, and 7,000 responded to the consultation via telephone, email, directly through our website, or by using the freepost feedback form. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who gave their time and expertise to respond.

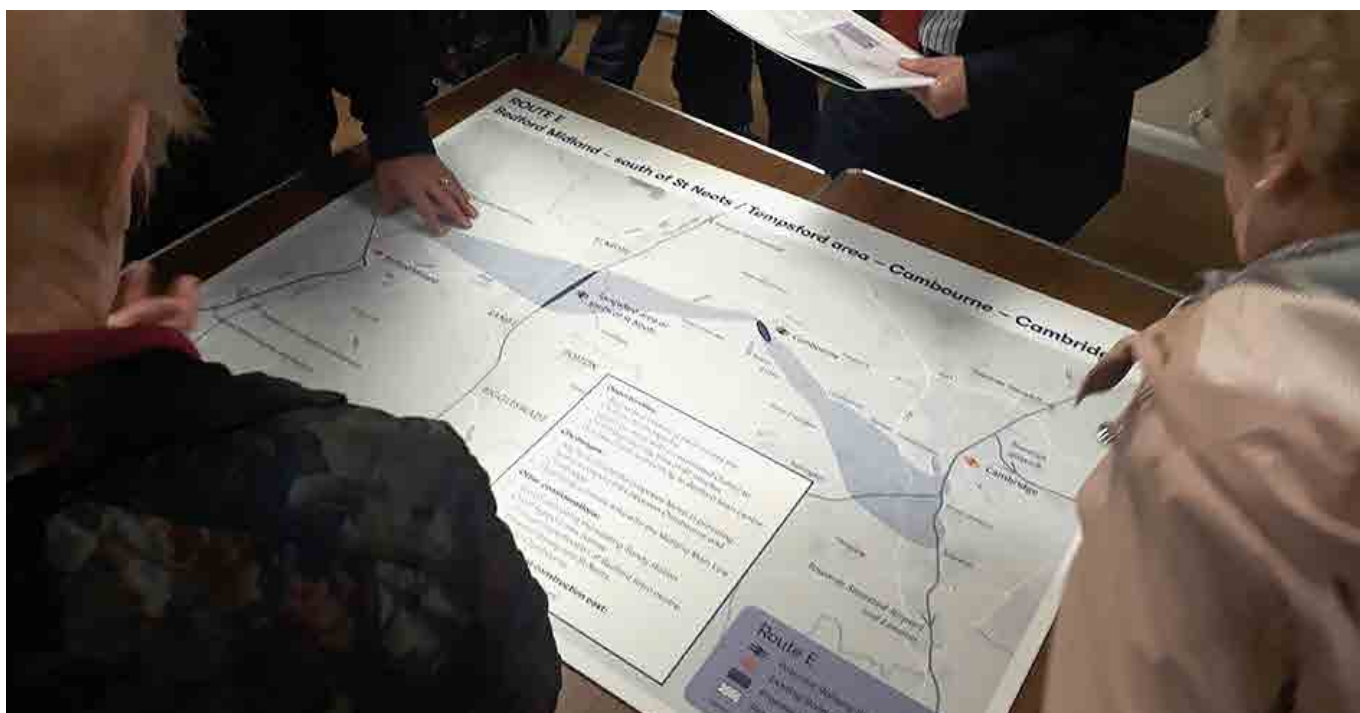
Although Route E was the favourite among respondents, the feedback covered a wide range of opinions, and by analysing every line of the responses, we made five key findings:



Five key findings from the consultation:

- 01.** Overall, route options serving Cambourne (Route Options B and E) were favoured more than route options via Bassingbourn (Route Options A, C and D).
- 02.** People raised a wide variety of environmental and heritage concerns, most notably that southerly route options through South Cambridgeshire (route options A, C and D) could have negative impacts on ancient woodland, Wimpole Hall, Sandy RSPB and Biggleswade Common.
- 03.** Using the existing Bedford Midland station (Routes D and E) was preferred to using a new Bedford South station (Routes A, B and C).
- 04.** There was a general preference to keep Sandy station open in its current location.
- 05.** The majority of respondents were either supportive or neutral about the final approach to Cambridge being made from the south with many responses highlighting the opportunity to serve the proposed Cambridge South station directly as a benefit of this approach.

We have published an extensive report, detailing the breadth of feedback received during consultation and our responses.



The consultation in numbers



120,000+

postcard
notifications
sent



6,988

responses



3,500+

visitors to
our events



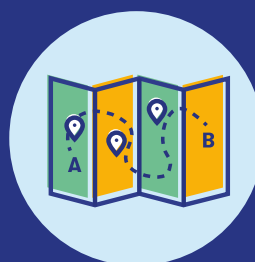
8

public events



6

weeks of public
consultation



5

route options

Reaching out

We advertised the consultation in local media and sent postcard notifications to people in communities from Bedford to Cambridge, encouraging everyone to come to our events and read the proposals, which were available both online and in hard copy.

Parish Councils, Local Authorities and a wide range of other interested people were offered briefings too.



What happens in the next few months?

Having announced the Preferred Route Option, we will continue to talk with local communities and local authorities, both informally and through formal consultation, to develop a specific route alignment, so we can begin the process of applying for planning consent.

We will do this by applying for a “Development Consent Order” - often referred to as a DCO.

Over the coming months, we will be holding events in communities across the Preferred Route Option, so you can meet the team and talk to us about the next steps.

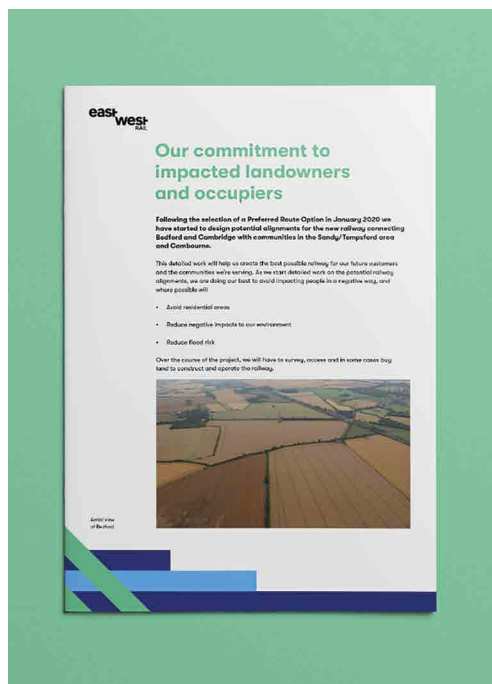
We will also begin environmental surveys in the area around the Preferred Route Option, to help us create the right alignment. These surveys will help us understand the environmental conditions of the area we will be working in, such as things like the plant and animal species that live in the area, the historical features or the soil and geological conditions that will affect the engineering designs.

From February onwards, we will be contacting local landowners to arrange access for these surveys. The surveys will take part over a much wider area than the area we might eventually need for constructing or operating the railway so that we can build a full picture, and this will help us to make critical decisions as the project progresses.

Later in the year, we will launch a community hub on our website, to provide more ways for local people to talk to the team and access information.

What happens in if you live, work or have a business in the Preferred Route Option area?

As we begin work to choose a Preferred Route Alignment, we will need to survey and access land to construct and operate the railway.



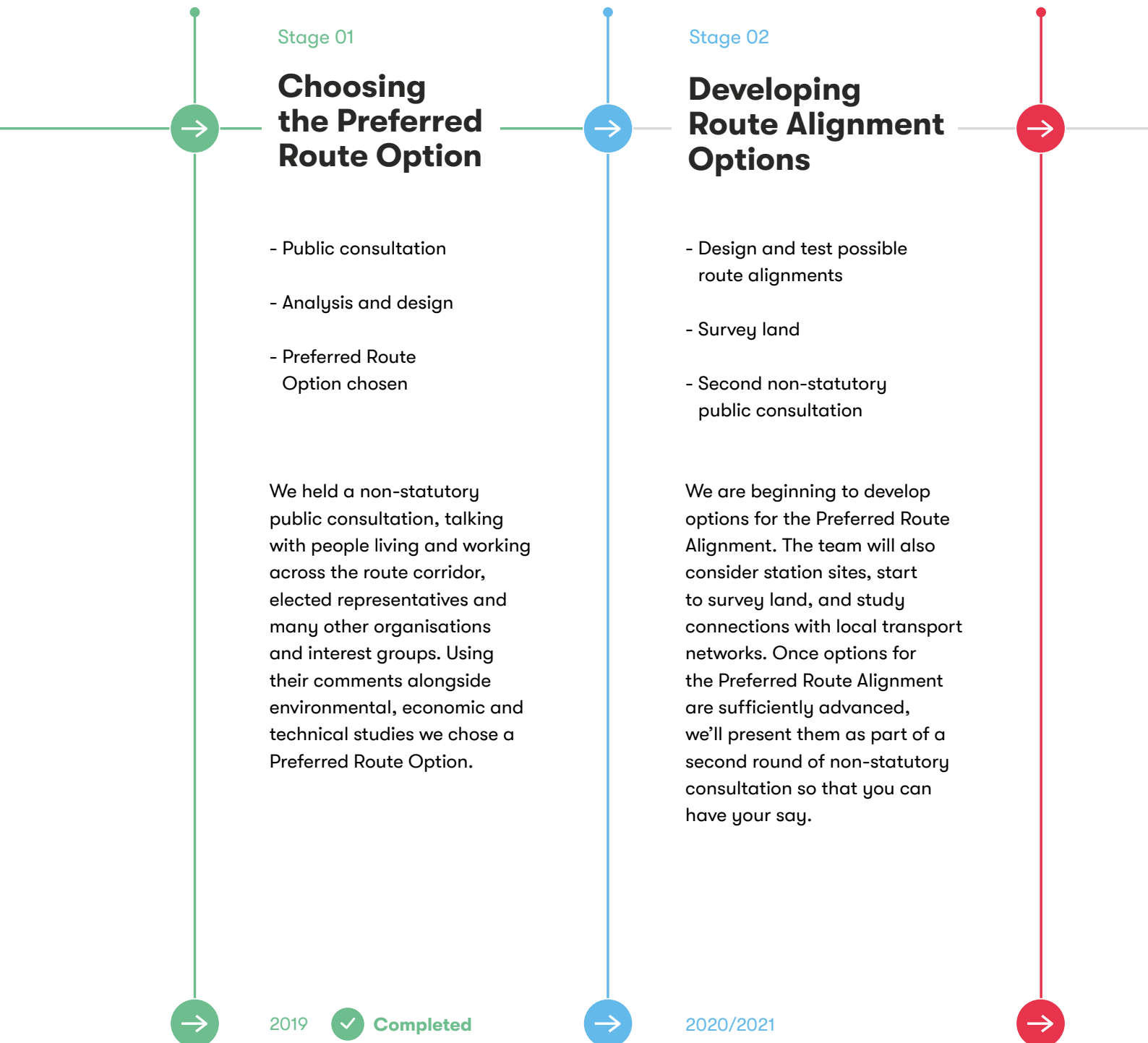
We will work hard to earn the trust of anyone who might be impacted by the railway by being transparent and clear at every stage.

Before the Preferred Route Alignment is chosen, there will be more opportunities for you to comment on the plans and we will continue to use feedback from communities as part of our decision-making process throughout the life of the project.

We are doing our best to avoid impacting people in a negative way, and our aim is to avoid adverse effects on residential areas and existing communities. As the project and our design progresses, we will discuss the evolving detail with individual landowners and occupiers directly.

Legal safeguards are already in place for people impacted by projects like ours, and we will publish our own detailed approach before the statutory consultation begins.

Bedford to Cambridge: what comes next?



The project will move through a number of development stages and approvals before we start constructing your new railway. At every step, we hope you and your community will get involved and talk to us so we can deliver the right connections for you.

We are always looking for ways to accelerate your new railway. The dates below are included as a guide. As the team progress with designing and planning the railway we'll know more about how long the different stages will take. We promise to be realistic about the timings and will share new dates with you if the programme changes.

Stage 03

Choosing a Preferred Route Alignment

- Analysis and design
- Preferred Route Alignment chosen
- Statutory public consultation

We will choose a Preferred Route Alignment using feedback from two previous consultations and continuing environmental, economic and technical studies. It will be presented to the public alongside other parts of the project, including the proposed design, in a statutory consultation. The information from this consultation will be used to finalise our proposals for the railway. We will also seek the next stage of funding and approval from government.

2022

Stage 04

Securing development consent

- EWR Co submit application
- Planning Inspectorate holds an Examination
- Secretary of State for Transport makes a decision

We submit the proposals to the Secretary of State as part of an application for a "Development Consent Order". On his behalf, the Planning Inspectorate will carry out a public examination of our application which normally lasts up to six months. People will be able to comment on the application. The Inspectorate goes through a strict process of examination and hearings, before making a recommendation to the Secretary of State on whether our proposals should go ahead. A final decision is usually given within six months of the examination closing.

2023/2024

Stage 05

Construction begins

- Construction begins

Once we've complied with any initial conditions or requirements included in the Development Consent Order, the Government will consider the full business case for the project to make the final decision to proceed. Following further conversations with the public and stakeholders, can start to construct your new railway.

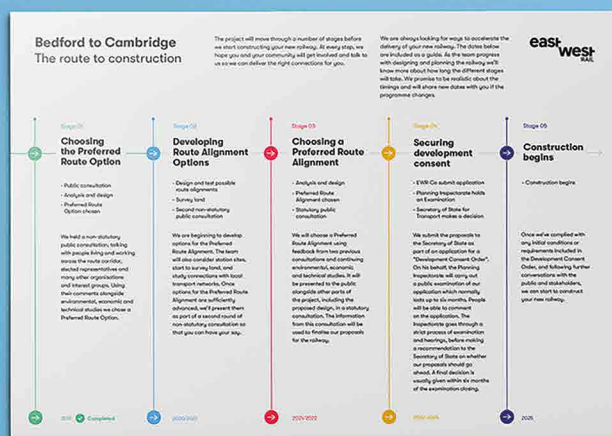
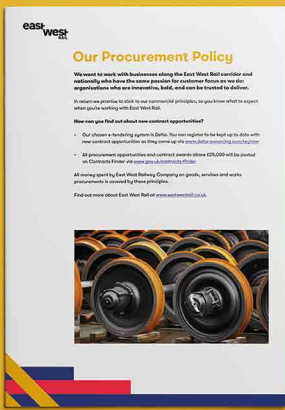
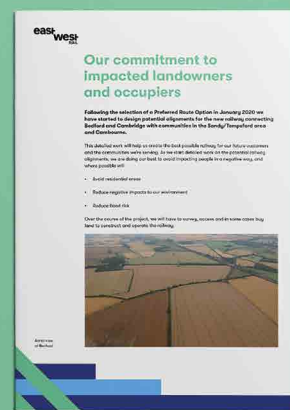
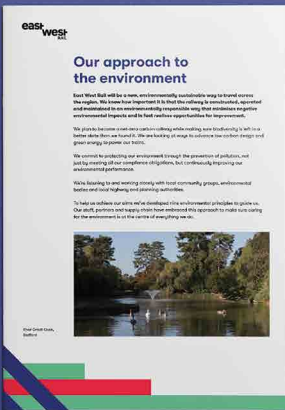
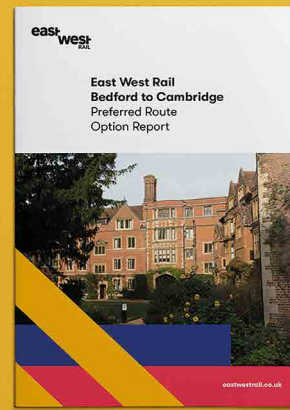
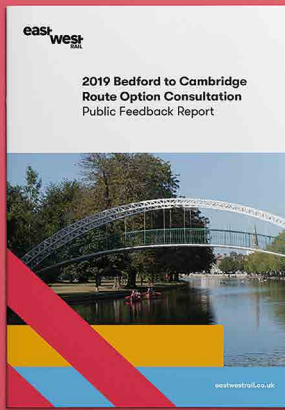
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Find out more

We have published detailed reports on how we chose the Preferred Route Option, the benefits of East West Rail and a full account of the public consultation we held in 2019, along with a number of helpful documents explaining our approach to the environment, landowners, engaging with our communities and working with suppliers.

If you'd like copies of any of our documents, you can download them directly from our website at eastwestrail.co.uk, or get in touch using any of the methods listed below and ask us to pop them in the post to you.





Get in touch

Whether you'd like to share your ideas on East West Rail, ask a question, or just find more information on the recent announcement, we'd love to hear from you:

- Visit our website at www.eastwestrail.co.uk
- Email us at contact@eastwestrail.co.uk
- Send us a message online at www.eastwestrail.co.uk/get-in-touch
- Send us a letter to FREEPOST EAST WEST RAIL
- Call us on 0330 1340067
- Chat to us at community events we'll be hosting throughout the year

You can also use any of these methods to sign up to our **newsletter** so you're always kept up to date.



¹ <https://www.nic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Economic-analysis-Cambridge-Econometrics-SQW-report-for-NIC.pdf>

² Thameslink and Midland Mainline at Bedford, The East Coast Mainline at Sandy/St Neots and the Anglia Mainline in Cambridge

