

The Quadrant
Elder Gate
Milton Keynes
MK9 1EN

26th November 2025

Gareth Clancy, Head of Access and Licensing
Office of Rail and Road
By Email

Dear Gareth,

Re: EWR Programme: Train Service Specification and Capacity Needs

East West Rail (EWR) is a priority project for the Government's growth mission and a central element of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. As part of the 2025 Spending Review government reaffirmed its commitment to delivering EWR. This included allocating £2.5bn to progress the next stages of project delivery.

Given this confirmed commitment, it is appropriate for East West Rail Limited to provide a formal overview of the capacity required to deliver the programme's objectives. We are providing the specification below to ensure that the ORR has a comprehensive view of the route's future utilisation, allowing upcoming capacity allocation decisions to be fully informed by the long-term needs of the government's objectives.

East West Rail Limited is tasked by Government with designing, upgrading and constructing the railway between Oxford and Cambridge. The completed infrastructure will be managed by Network Rail.

The strategic case for East West Rail can be summarised as:

- Open up new areas for business to grow: connecting cities across the region to unlock constrained capability
- Bring more jobs within reach of local people: bring down travel times by creating better transport connections
- Provide a greener way to travel: remove cars and lorries off local roads and aim for a zero carbon railway.

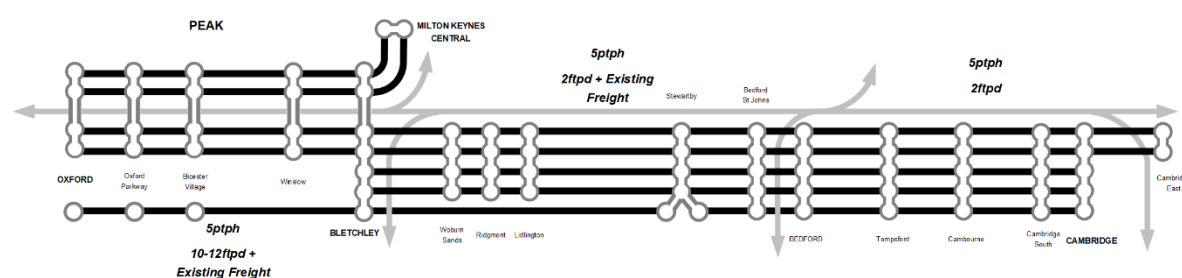
Emerging proposals for a major leisure resort near Stewartby represent a significant step-change in projected passenger demand. To accommodate the substantial footfall associated with a development of this scale, EWR is required to maximise service frequency.

Consequently, the Train Service Specification described below is essential to ensure these volumes can be managed effectively without compromising network stability.

End State Train Service Specification

The end state train service specification for EWR is for up to 5 passenger trains per hour (tph) across the length of the route from Oxford to Cambridge. Given the key locations of demand and the likely passenger flows along the route, the off-peak timetable is planned to be delivered using a combination of services as follows:

- 2tph Oxford to Bletchley and Milton Keynes
- 2tph Oxford to Cambridge (potentially extending to a new station at Cambridge East)
- 2tph Bletchley to Cambridge
- 1tph Oxford to Stewartby. This service is intended to be a faster, limited stop service. It could also extend to Cambridge to provide a 5th train path between Stewartby and Cambridge.



It is intended that these services will form part of the Great British Railways timetable. Chiltern Railways currently have rights to operate the 2tph service from Oxford to Milton Keynes and these services are shown in the diagram above. West Midlands Trains have the rights to operate existing services from Bletchley to Bedford. Although not shown specifically in the diagram above the West Midlands Trains services will be replaced by services shown in the diagram.

The Railway Undertaking(s) that will operate each service in the end state timetable is not yet confirmed. But it is expected that the operator or operators will be part of DfT Operator Ltd (DFTO). It is expected that the existing rights held by Chiltern and West Midlands will be transferred to the end state Railway Undertaking.

Plans are for these services to be operated by electric trains. EWR intends to provide discontinuous electrification along the route which would support operation using battery electric multiple units (BEMUs).

EWR will provide additional freight capacity across the route. We are expecting to provide for 2 freight services per day in each direction between Cambridge and Oxford and beyond. We

will provide for 10 additional freight paths per day in each direction between Oxford and the West Coast Mainline via Bletchley once East West Rail is complete.

To support the intended train service EWR is tasked with delivering the following infrastructure interventions:

- Additional infrastructure and station enhancements in the Cambridge area including construction of Cambridge East station.
- Construction of a new railway from Bedford to Hauxton Junction (located between Foxton and Shepreth Branch Junction) including new stations at Tempsford and Cambourne.
- Additional platforms and capacity at Bedford station.
- Upgrading of the Marston Vale line between Bletchley and Bedford to allow for increased train service frequency.
- Construction of an enhanced four platform Stewartby station to accommodate terminating services and pedestrian flow associated with the Universal Theme Park.
- Interventions to provide additional freight capacity between Oxford and Bletchley

Delivery of the East West Rail timetable is also dependent on the completion of other projects that are not being delivered by East West Rail Limited. This includes completion of Oxford stage 2 works and reopening of the Cowley branch. These schemes provide the necessary capacity for East West Rail services and Chiltern services from Marylebone to serve Oxford from the Bicester direction.

We have worked with Network Rail to assess the feasibility of the train service described here. While the extent of utilisation varies by location, the proposed EWR service combined with freight growth and necessary performance buffers effectively utilises the route's capability in some locations. A concept train plan has been created that allows for all the planned services. Further work is needed to ensure the timetable into Oxford is robust. Pathing all services across Oxford North Junction is particularly challenging. With the full East West Rail service the area is at maximum capacity. Introducing additional movements beyond the core EWR specification would likely compromise performance. As a contingency East West Rail would plan to terminate one of our planned five services at Oxford Parkway if a solution to the constraint at Oxford North cannot be identified.

The date for completion of the East West Rail railway is not confirmed as it is subject to consultation and obtaining a Development Consent Order. The Development Consent Order is essential as without it the existing infrastructure cannot be upgraded to allow the planned service level. It is anticipated that the railway will be complete in the mid 2030s.

Construction Programme

Construction and upgrading of East West Rail will happen in stages.

Work to upgrade the line from Bicester to Bletchley is now largely complete, although some further work will be required to provide loops to support additional freight traffic and to provide some other infrastructure enhancements such as electrification. Upgrading from Bletchley to Stewartby is likely to be the next section of the route to be completed. This will provide additional capacity on the Marston Vale line allowing additional services to approach Stewartby from the west. Upgrading of the line from Stewartby to Bedford will be the next section that will be completed. The upgrade of this section is likely to be slightly after the Bletchley to Bedford section due to the scale of works to rebuild Bedford station and relocate Bedford St Johns station. Completion of the route from Bedford to Hauxton will be the final section to be completed.

The possession regime to enable upgrade of the route between Bletchley and Bedford has not yet been confirmed. However, the scale of work to upgrade the Bletchley Bedford route will be significant and will necessitate sustained blockades, making the route unavailable for extended periods during the construction phase.

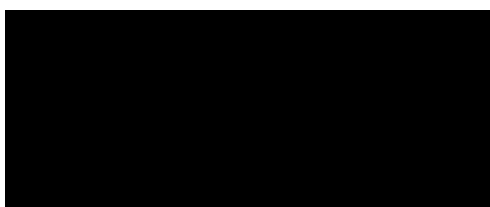
The intention is that East West Rail will increase the passenger service offered as infrastructure is upgraded and completed.

Next Steps

East West Rail is currently working with Network Rail to set out these access requirements in a Track Access Options Application.

In the interim, we trust this specification provides the necessary context to assist the ORR in its duties.

Yours sincerely



Benjamin Rule

Rail Operations Director, East West Rail