



Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
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EEH Business Unit
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Date: xx December 2021

Dear Secretary of State

On behalf of the Strategic Transport Leadership Board, the group of leaders and members who form the EEH partnership, we write to you to confirm our total commitment and stress the significance of East West Rail to the region and the United Kingdom as a whole.

A National Priority

The delivery of East West Rail was recognised by the National Infrastructure Commission in 2017 as a 'once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure the area's future success'.

Indeed, the NIC identified improvements in east west connectivity as crucial to expanding the labour markets of key towns and cities, as well as improving connections with international gateways such as Heathrow. The NIC recognised the vital role East West Rail has in developing a strategic transport corridor connecting East Anglia to the west of England and south Wales and beyond that: unlocking many new east west journeys that, until East West Rail is built, are only possible with an interchange through London.

The 'Union Connectivity Review', published by government in November 2021, further reinforced the role of East West Rail as a piece of infrastructure of national significance.

A Regional Priority

Delivery of East West Rail in full remains the single biggest connectivity priority for the region. Political leaders for the region are committed to harnessing the opportunities that East West Rail unlocks. The Heartland region has some of the highest growth areas in the country – both economic and housing. The region is a net contributor to the UK economy, leveraging funds that benefit communities and businesses across the country. EEH leaders remain committed to supporting and enabling our region's economic growth capabilities.

In the last few years, ministerial statements regarding the government's Oxford-Cambridge Arc initiative have reiterated the importance of East West Rail. However, the need for an east west rail connection has been a priority, driven by local leaders, since 1995 with the creation of the East West Rail Consortium. It is a vital scheme in its own right.

The government's announcement in the November 2017 Budget that it would deliver the Oxford to Cambridge link of East West Rail in full during this decade, as well as its inclusion in the 2020 National Infrastructure Strategy, has allowed the region to plan our economic and housing growth commitments with confidence.

Many locally-led partnerships across the region, driven by both the private and public sectors, are also planning how they fully lever the opportunities that the scheme will unlock. The region's businesses, science and technology clusters, and universities are investing in the region on the basis of East West Rail's delivery.

In February 2021, England's Economic Heartland published its regional transport strategy. The strategy set out in more detail why East West Rail was fundamental to the long-term success of our region and demonstrated how the it would form the basis of our transport system in the future.

In this regard we are delighted that construction work is well underway on the section between Oxford and Bletchley, which is due to be operational by 2025 under the direction of the East West Railway Company. We are keen to see the rest of the core scheme to Cambridge (and including the Aylesbury-Milton Keynes link) delivered as soon as possible after this, in order to fully realise its transformational potential and maximise the government's return on investment

East West Rail is enabling our local planning authorities to identify new sites that are capable of delivering sustainable, transit-led housing and economic development. By investing in East West Rail, we reduce the pressure on our already constrained road network: a network that could not sustain the level of housing and economic growth planned within the region. At the same time, we have a once in a generation opportunity to create new economic and housing communities that have public and sustainable transport at their core.

East West Rail will act as a catalyst allowing us to further improve the region's transport system. It will allow us to reduce reliance on the private car and cut emissions in accordance with the government's plans for net zero. The local transport plans and strategies of our local authorities have been produced with East West Rail at their centre.

East West Rail is not just for new communities, it is about maximising the potential of our existing communities. East West Rail will bring the region's existing housing and employment markets closer together, increasing the pool of skilled labour accessible to our world-leading science and technology companies while improving productivity.

It will link the business clusters and universities in the region. In so doing, East West Rail will help the region further contribute to the UK Treasury and Britain's place on the global stage.

Supporting government's investment

We are committed to ensuring that government's investment in East West Rail is maximised.

As an example, England's Economic Heartland has worked with the East West Railway Company to better understand opportunities to improve local connectivity by sustainable transport to stations, maximising the number of people who can access and use East West Rail services. We have secured funding for the Bicester-Bletchley section to include digital infrastructure which will provide enhanced digital connectivity to both passengers and the rural communities near the line.

In addition, through the East West Main Line Partnership (formerly the East West Rail Consortium), member authorities have committed funds totalling up to £50 million in 'work in kind' that is enabling delivery of the scheme – a ground-breaking arrangement which again signals the level of commitment the region has to East West Rail.

We will continue to work with the East West Railway Company, and government, to ensure the full benefits of East West Rail can be realised. To do so, we are accelerating delivery of a piece of work that – four years on from the NIC report and government's commitment to East West Rail – will refresh the evidence base for the scheme. This will more clearly define how local areas are responding, and will continue to respond, to enable the maximum benefits of the investment to be realised.

Once completed, we will write to you again with a presentation of the report's key findings.



Yours sincerely

Cllr Richard Wenham
Chair, England's Economic Heartland

Cllr Liz Leffman
Vice Chair, England's Economic Heartland