The Government has identified that the corridor between the cities of Oxford and Cambridge could produce an extra £163 billion in annual economic output and one million new homes by 2050. However, current public transport routes between the two cities, which require an expensive and time-consuming diversion via either London or Coventry, are acting as an economic stranglehold on the area and its booming tech industry.

East West Rail is designed to unlock economic growth across central England and provide local residents with a safer and more reliable rail service.
WHAT IS EAST WEST RAIL?

East West Rail involves building and upgrading over 95 miles of rail lines between the cities of Oxford and Cambridge. The project is due to be completed in three ‘Connection Stages’:

• **Connection Stage 1 (CS1):** Oxford to Bicester, Bletchley and Milton Keynes
• **Connection Stage 2 (CS2):** Bletchley to Bedford
• **Connection Stage 3 (CS3):** Bedford to Cambridge.

Phase one of CS1 has already been completed at a cost of £270 million, with trains running between Oxford and Bletchley since 2016. The final phase of CS1, taking the line via Bletchley to Milton Keynes, secured Government funding of £760 million in January 2021, and trains are due to start running from 2025.

Public consultation on options for CS2 and CS3 will be held in 2021 and the whole line is expected to be fully operational by 2030.

Delivering an Infrastructure Revolution

Whilst economic and social infrastructure projects are often in the headlines due to the amount of money spent on them and the disruption caused during their construction, they generate huge long-term benefits. By providing better local services, new jobs, cleaner air and faster connections, modern infrastructure helps to level up opportunity and prosperity across the UK.

**Build UK’s factsheets** cover a range of local and national projects explaining what they are and why they are being built in Britain today.
WHY WE NEED EAST WEST RAIL

East West Rail will unlock economic growth across central England by creating a safer and more reliable connection between neighbouring regions. Once completed, it will:

- Provide new jobs along the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, including within the booming tech businesses of the ‘Silicon Fen’ area of Cambridge
- Allow new houses to be built within commutable distance of major economic centres
- Ease reliance on motor vehicles for personal transport, reducing carbon emissions and helping the country meet its long-term net zero targets
- Facilitate the movement of freight between Eastern and Western England, reducing the strain on London and the number of lorries on the road.

KEY ISSUES

- The disused railway between Bicester and Bletchley is due to be reinstated as part of the final phase of CS1 and this has become a haven for local wildlife and ecology. The project has committed to minimising the impact on the local environment and delivering a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This represents the most ambitious BNG target for an infrastructure project of its size, and will ensure any ecological impact of the works is offset.
- There were concerns that the public would be frozen out of the planning process and the views of local residents ignored. Plans have been determined in consultation with the public, with over 7,000 responses received across six weeks for CS3 of the project. As a direct result, the proposed route is the most environmentally beneficial and represents best value to the taxpayer.

EAST WEST RAIL IN NUMBERS

- £1.03bn investment to date
- 95 miles of new or upgraded railway
- 1m new homes made possible
WHO WILL BENEFIT?

The Economy

- Oxford and Cambridge have been designated as two of the least affordable cities in the country, limiting the supply of new employees and stifling economic growth. New rail connections will allow more areas to be within commutable distance, providing a larger pool of talent to regional businesses.
- Improved transport efficiency along the Bletchley to Bedford route alone will result in direct economic net benefits of up to £500 million during the lifecycle of the railway, while increased connectivity between businesses will lead to an additional £170 million in wider economic benefits.
- Better transport connections will lead to estimated productivity improvements of £4,000 - £6,000 per worker per year by 2050.

The Local Community

- 900 jobs will be created during construction of CS2 alone, with 1.1 million jobs expected to be supported by 2050 that may not otherwise be possible without significant transport upgrades.
- Journey times will be significantly reduced, with Oxford to Bedford taking 66 minutes rather than 144, making commuting viable for a greater number of people.

The Environment

- The railway aims to be carbon neutral by using low-carbon design and green energy to power trains. As rail is up to seven times more carbon-efficient than travel by car, emissions created during the construction process will be balanced by reduced levels throughout the project’s lifecycle.
- There will be a net gain in biodiversity along the route by protecting existing species and providing new habitats for other species to thrive.

Further Information

Centre for Cities (2017) Cities Outlook 2017
East West Rail Company (2020) Our Approach to the Environment
East West Rail Company (2018) The Case for East West Rail, Western Section Phase 2
East West Rail Company (2020) Preferred Route between Bedford and Cambridge
HM Treasury (2011) Autumn Statement
Network Rail (2020) Key Projects: East West Rail