

Business leaders welcome plans to fast-track East West Rail's Bedford to Oxford services

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Business leaders have hailed the news that works on the Bletchley to Bedford section – the Marston Vale Line (MVL) – of **East West Rail** will be bought forward.

The Government reaffirmed its commitment to delivering EWR in full in the 2024 Spring Budget by announcing that £240 million in existing funding would be made available to fast-track works on the MVL.

These works will enable passenger services between Oxford to Bedford (EWR Phase 2) to start by the end of the decade as a supplement to services on the first phase of the project between Oxford and Milton Keynes/Bletchley, which are due to start next year.

This investment will allow people living between Oxford and Bedford the chance to reap the benefits of EWR much sooner than originally planned. It will improve access to innovation and economic hubs in Oxford, Bedford, and Milton Keynes, boosting connectivity and unlocking productivity across the region as well as allowing better access to jobs, education, healthcare and leisure opportunities.

The accelerated works will bring forward level crossing works, track and signalling upgrades, as well as safety and accessibility improvements to allow a one train per hour service between Bletchley and

Bedford.

Richard Tunnicliffe, Regional Director (East of England), Confederation of British Industry, said: “The CBI welcomes the commitment to fast-track the Bletchley to Bedford section of East West Rail. New infrastructure can bring major benefits to businesses and help fuel local economies, so it’s vital that towns like Bedford and the businesses there get the transport connections they need so they can prosper.

“East West Rail will be a key driver of economic prosperity, providing businesses with the confidence to invest in the area with the prospect of greater connectivity, giving greater accessibility to more trade and a larger labour market. This can only be a good thing for business in the region and we look forward to its many benefits”

Charlotte Horobin, CEO, Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce, said: “We welcome the news that the Government has reconfirmed its commitment to building East West Rail in full to Cambridge and are delighted that plans will be brought forward which will allow services to start running between Bletchley and Bedford much sooner.

“The East West Rail project represents a unique opportunity to drive both local and national growth. Its benefits extend far beyond transportation, promising to transform our region into a dynamic and prosperous economic hub. This is good news for businesses, commuters and everyday people looking to use East West Rail both in Cambridgeshire and across the wider region as part of their daily lives.”

Suzanna Austin, Development Manager (Beds, Cambs and Herts), Federation of Small Businesses, said: “It is good to see the next stage of East West Rail receive the green light to proceed with upgrading the existing section of line between Bletchley and Bedford. When complete this upgrade will enable faster greener connections for the many small businesses in the area, connecting key towns and cities across the wider region.”

Beth West, CEO, EWR Company, said: “This announcement is great news for people living between Bedford and Oxford as it means some work can now start earlier than planned to enable a quicker introduction of a new Oxford-Bedford service so that local communities and businesses can enjoy the benefits of EWR sooner.

“East West Rail will give people living between Oxford and Cambridge better access to jobs, education and improved healthcare, as well as to their family and friends and leisure – the things that matter in our daily lives.

“These accelerated works demonstrate Government’s ongoing commitment to the full EWR route and will allow us to progress with further work, including securing Government approval, to deliver the full Oxford to Cambridge service in parallel.”

Business leaders’ backing for the fast-tracking of works along the MVL comes after the final section of track was laid on the first stage of EWR between Bicester and Bletchley, which was marked with a ceremony last week.