

Elizabeth line opens

May 24, 2022



With a vision which has roots as early as 1940s — maybe earlier — the Elizabeth line officially opens to the public.

Thousands of commuters across London will see their travel costs reduced by over a third and journey times massively reduced from today (24th May).

The idea for better east-west London connectivity goes back to the nineteenth century and the Regents Canal Company, which wanted a new surface railway for the capital. However, although it went nowhere, the core idea was picked up in 1943 as the Second World War came to an end and politicians began to envisage a world after conflict.

Crossrail as we know it was conceived in the 1980s, cancelled in the 1990s and got the go-ahead in the 2000s. Construction began in 2009, and the project took 13 years and cost £19 billion (three and a half years after the originally proposed completion date, and £4 billion over budget).

Now Crossrail has been realised, trains on the new line will reduce journey times from Abbey Wood to Paddington from 58 to 29 minutes. They will also cut ticket prices by more than a third, from £6.30 to £4.30.

Bringing an estimated £42 billion to the UK economy, the state-of-the-art line will see each train carry up to 1,500 passengers, increasing central London's rail capacity by 10%, transforming travel across the city and connecting local communities to the centre of London quicker than ever before.

To bring this line to life, more than 55,000 jobs and 1,000 apprenticeships have been created over the past 14 years with over 5,000 of these jobs given to previously unemployed workers. 96% of contracts for the project have been awarded to companies within Britain, with 60% of these going to businesses based outside of London – ensuring taxpayer money used to build the line will bring benefits to the entire UK for decades to come.

Secretary of State, Grant Shapps said: “As iconic as its namesake, the Elizabeth line is a beacon of British success, not just for this marvel of engineering but for the enormous benefits it brings to the entire nation with £42bn for the UK economy and 55,000 jobs just two of many.

“London's transport network is its lifeblood and the £9bn we've contributed to make the Elizabeth Line a reality is once again testament to our unwavering support for this marvellous city, its inspiring people and the millions of visitors it attracts every year.”

All Elizabeth line stations between Paddington and Woolwich provide level access with all 41 stations eventually being step-free, ensuring that everyone can enjoy cheaper and faster travel across London as well as the stunning new stations on route.

John Dickie, Chief Executive of London First, said: “By connecting airports, offices, homes, shops, and leisure activities more quickly, easily and accessibly, the Elizabeth Line will be transformative for Londoners and visitors alike.

“This project is a clear demonstration of what can be achieved when business and all levels of government work together for the good of the national economy.

“With a quarter of carbon emissions coming from transport, and the project's supply chain contracts awarded up and down the country, it is an investment in both a net zero future and levelling up. The Elizabeth Line is a project the whole country can be proud of.”

This £9bn investment in the Elizabeth line is the latest example of the Government's commitment to London and the transport network it depends on. The opening follows close to £5bn of funding given to Transport for London throughout the pandemic to keep vital transport services running. This is in addition to a billion pounds for each year of last October's Spending Review and a commitment to explore a long-term funding settlement, all at a time of significant financial pressure for the nation, because investment in UK infrastructure will drive productivity and create jobs – contributing to a high-wage, high-skill economy.

Today's opening follows a ceremonial opening last week in which Her Majesty The Queen unveiled a plaque at Paddington Station.

The light fantastic

Tower Bridge, the lastminute.com London Eye, City Hall and the Gherkin are among more than 30 iconic London locations that turned purple ton the eve of the Elizabeth line opening to passengers.

Prominent skyscrapers taking part include the third tallest building in the UK, One Canada Square, the second tallest building in the City of London financial district, 110 Bishopsgate, and the distinctive Leadenhall Building, often known as 'The Cheesegrater'.

Key bridges across central London – including the Grade II* listed Westminster Bridge – will have coordinated light displays tonight and tomorrow night. The unified, subtly moving artwork installation by New-York based artist Leo Villareal extends across nine Thames bridges, from London to Lambeth Bridge, to form the longest public art commission in the world.

The Elizabeth line will connect services from Shenfield and Abbey Wood in the east and Heathrow Terminals 4 and 5 and Reading to the west.