

First section of East West Rail Phase Two railway commissioned

September 14, 2021



The first section of railway on East West Rail Phase Two was successfully commissioned over the August Bank Holiday weekend.

Engineers from the East West Rail Alliance, comprising VolkerRail, Laing O'Rourke, Atkins and Network Rail, started construction of the 440 metres of new twin track railway, between Gavray Junction and Charbridge Lane, near Bicester, in early spring 2021.

Following the completion of signalling, power and communications works, which were required to connect the track to the main line rail network, the section of new railway was officially commissioned at 04:48 on Tuesday 31 August.

The works also involved the temporary closure of London Road level crossing in Bicester, as signalling changes were made to the level crossing's control system and the Gavray Junction area signalling systems. These changes have reduced barrier 'down time' to 26 seconds for passenger trains and 42 seconds for freight trains - thereby shortening the amount of time road users need to wait as trains pass.

New 'Standing Red Men' pedestrian signals, similar to those used at UK pedestrian road network crossings, were also installed, to make it safer for people to cross on foot.

The new 440 metre section of railway is the first of 31 kilometres of new track that will be delivered by the project, which will connect Bicester to Bletchley. However, bringing it into use is as strategic as it is symbolic, as EWR Alliance director, Mark Cuzner, explains: "The commissioning of the new section of railway between Gavray Junction and Charbridge Lane is a significant milestone in the delivery of the project, not just because it is the first section to be commissioned, but also because it is key to our strategy to allow engineering trains to carry out their works and deliver materials to site, thereby reducing the number of construction vehicles on the local road network.

"I'd like to thank and recognise everyone from the Alliance, and our supply chain partners involved in the successful completion of the works – in particular, our track and signalling, power and communication project teams, who have worked tirelessly to ensure the railway was safely commissioned and brought into use on programme."

Simon Blanchflower CBE, chief executive at the East West Railway Company, said: "This is an important moment for the East West Rail project, as it highlights the solid progress that is being made to develop a railway that will bring huge benefits and improve connectivity for people who live and work across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

"This latest development means that the local community in Bicester will experience an improvement in their day-to-day use of the level crossing, as well as a reduction in HGV lorries on their roads. All of this paves the way for us to continue building a safe and secure railway, that is better for the customer and better for the environment."

Photo credit: VolkerRail