

# Rail project connects Oxford with Bletchley for first time in 50 years

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The final section of track connecting Bicester and Bletchley has been laid as part of the [East West Rail \(EWR\)](#) project to improve rail connectivity between Cambridge and Oxford. The project began by rebuilding Bletchley flyover, the first phase of the track work started in 2021. Since then 66 kilometres of new track has been laid. Passenger services are expected to start next year.

Once up and running, the new service will provide a fast sustainable transport option for local communities improving connectivity between Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge, reducing travel times and providing better access to jobs, healthcare and education.

The fully Government-funded programme is being delivered by the East West Rail Alliance (EWRA) which is a collaboration of four organisations including Network Rail, AtkinsRéalis, Laing O'Rourke and VolkerRail. Close collaboration with Network Rail's Supply Chain Operations (SCO) team and supply chain partners has allowed EWRA to overcome challenges such as industrial action and national material shortages.

Key features of the first phase of the project have included:

- Use of a New Track Construction train (NTC) to install up to 85 per cent of track
- 63 shifts completed with the NTC, one shift achieving 1.4km of new track in ten hours
- Delivering all track materials via rail rather than lorries, reducing traffic and carbon emissions
- 66,353 metres of track laid
- 99,320 railway sleepers laid
- 267,266 tonnes of ballast (railway stones) used
- 18 switches and crossings (that help trains to switch tracks)
- 427 rails delivered by Long Welded Rail Train (LWRT) totalling 216 metres in length

East West Rail Alliance is on track to hand over the project to Network Rail later in 2024, with remaining work this year including the installation of signalling, testing and the construction of Winslow station. Passenger services are due to start from 2025.

Rail Minister Huw Merriman said: “This is a significant milestone for one of the country’s most important rail projects and part of this Government’s plan to invest in rail infrastructure.

“Having grown up in the area, I know just how much of a boost East West Rail will bring to local people. When complete, it will serve as a catalyst for economic growth in the region, bringing communities closer to job opportunities and education while making it easier to see friends and family.”

Eoin O’Neill, Capital Delivery Director, Network Rail, said: “The completion of the track construction is a major achievement for the EWR project as they move towards the commissioning of the new railway. The challenges faced by the EWR Alliance in reaching this project milestone were not insignificant. Strikes, ballast supply issues and large parts of the network being unavailable due to a viaduct closure all meant that original plans and commitments were made more difficult to achieve.

“Despite these challenges, the EWR Alliance team continuously adapted their plans and built a fantastic working relationship with our colleagues in Supply Chain Operations, and it was through this teamwork were able to deliver and overcome the challenges without affecting the infrastructure ready date. A lot of people talk about collaborative working but to me this is a tangible example of it working in practice to jointly deliver the programme.”

Mark Cuzner, EWR Alliance Director, said: “Joining the track east to west is clearly a hugely significant milestone for the project that has been achieved through the collaborative and innovative approach used by the project team. It is also a hugely symbolic moment as this is the first time the railway has been connected through this area in over 50 years. With the majority of our civil and track works now complete it signifies that we are entering the final stages of the project, with testing and commissioning already underway and the team on track to hand the project over to Network Rail later in 2024.”

Beth West, CEO, East West Railway Company, said: “This marks a significant milestone for our project and brings us another step closer to delivering a railway which will help people to access jobs, education and healthcare while making it easier to see family and friends, and travel for leisure.

“I’d like to thank everyone who has helped to build this part of East West Rail which will connect

communities and improve everyday journeys as we look forward to passenger services starting on the first phase between Oxford and Bletchley from 2025, as planned.”