East West Rail Eastern Section Board

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TRANSPORTEAST

East West Rail – East: The Case for Investment in the Eastern Section of the East West Railway

July 2025

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Foreword

East West Rail (EWR) is planned to serve Oxford-Cambridge by the mid-2030s. Partners across the length of the route have a vision to ensure this new part of the rail network becomes a true coast-to-coast main line serving growing communities, innovation centres and future-focused businesses from Bristol to the East coast. Achieving this would make a huge difference to nationwide rail connectivity and economic growth.

The East West Rail Eastern Section Board is the partnership committed to progressing (EWR) east of Cambridge, represented by local planning and transport authorities, supporting bodies including the regional Sub-national Transport Bodies, and rail industry experts.

Bringing together those responsible for planning communities, economic development including tourism, transport and attracting inward investment, the Eastern Section Board understands clearly how improvements to rail services are central to creating investable places with thriving communities and driving productivity.

The East of England makes a significant contribution to the UK's economy, with a Gross Value Added (GVA) of £163 billion and home to 270,000 businesses and 3.2 million jobs.

The region is home to Europe's largest centre of medical research and health science in Cambridge, some of the country's busiest international gateways in Essex and Suffolk, a global equine cluster around Newmarket, the nation's energy coast, and world-leading food and plant research institutions in Norfolk. The East powers, feeds and supplies the country.

But the region's potential is being held back by poor East-West transport connections.

If EWR was running today, passengers arriving at Cambridge would face waiting up to an hour for onward connections to major economic centres including Norwich, Ipswich and Stansted. These centres and the growing communities between them are also home to skilled, talented people.

These poor connections are a barrier to growth, risk inward investment, reduce the attractiveness of EWR services and restrict opportunities for thousands of people.

There is a clear window of opportunity while EWR is being developed to plan for the next phase east of Cambridge to maximise the impact of the new services and drive rail-led sustainable economic growth. Climate sustainability will be supported by EWR development east of Cambridge as more freight and passenger journeys can be taken off our busy roads.

The Eastern Section Board commissioned this report which sets out the compelling economic case for focussing on this challenge now. As regional partners we commit to doing all we can to accelerate improvements and ask Government to work with us on the next stage – and make EWR to the East Coast a reality.

Cllr Alexander Nicoll

Chair of the East West Rail Eastern Section Board and Vice-Chair of the East West Main Line Partnership

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.1 Introduction

This report has been prepared by Transport East, the sub-national transport body, on behalf of the East West Rail Eastern Section Board. It presents an economic narrative to promote investment in infrastructure that unlocks the enormous potential of the East of England. While the scope of this work focuses on expanding east-west passenger rail services between the East and the rest of Great Britain, it complements wider efforts to boost connectivity and drive economic growth along major east-west corridors.

The East West Rail Eastern Section Board is the sub-board of the East West Rail Mainline Partnership and represents partners from Local Authorities at Mayoral, County and District level, across Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire. It provides a unified voice for those committed committed to maximising the benefits of the East West Rail project with a particular focus on the wider Cambridge area and the East region.

The focus is on delivering sustainable transport and improved connectivity to drive growth and support economic prosperity in the East. This aligns with the priorities set out in the Transport East Strategy.

This report focuses on rail passenger and rail freight transport on the following key corridors and sub-regions:

- Strategic regional journeys between Norfolk – Cambridge.
- Strategic regional journeys between Suffolk (including Ipswich and Felixstowe) and North Essex – Cambridge.
- Strategic regional journeys between Cambridge – Midlands via the planned new East West Railway (EWR).
- Local journeys within the Cambridge Travel To Work Sub-region, including journeys between Cambridge and Stansted Airport.

This report provides a narrative that spans across multiple political and institutional boundaries. The authors are particularly grateful for support and contribution from stakeholders in the East and Cambridgeshire areas, including the respective councils and England's Economic Heartland Sub-national Transport body

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.2 Economic Context

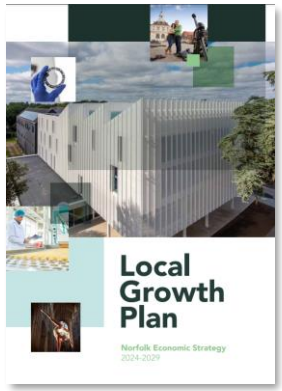
The East of England region makes a significant contribution to the UK's economy, with a Gross Value Added (GVA) of £163 billion and home to 270,000 businesses and 3.2 million jobs[1].

The region is known for its high employment rates and productivity, driven by key sectors such as life sciences, digital services, agri-tech, clean energy generation, creative industries, tourism and advanced manufacturing. The region is a critical location for passenger and freight transport services, which play a pivotal role in supporting economic growth, housing distribution, and strategic connectivity.

The region is also a centre of innovation, home to Europe's largest centre of medical research and health science in Cambridge, some of the country's busiest international gateways in Essex and Suffolk, a global equine cluster around Newmarket, the nation's energy coast, and world-leading food and plant research institutions in Norfolk.

However, despite these strengths, the East region faces challenges that are holding back its potential, including connectivity - linked to a historic underinvestment in infrastructure. Addressing this funding gap could fuel sustainable, high-productivity export led growth that benefits both the region and the wider UK.

The Economic Strategies for the region is clear on the need for rail enhancements as part of the wider connectivity strategy, which includes better connections on an East-West basis in addition to enhanced local rail frequencies supporting connectivity within the region to support the growth of high-value sectors. These opportunities have been outlined in several recent studies, including the Opportunity East Report, Suffolk Economic Strategy and Growth Plan and Norfolk's Local Growth Plan and are explored in more detail by sub-region below and summarised in **Figure 1** (page 13).



1: Opportunity East, EELGA, 2024, https://www.eelga.gov.uk/app/uploads/2024/07/Opportunity-East-Report.pdf

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.3 Norfolk

Norfolk is a vital contributor to the East of England's economy, offering a mix of urban innovation, rural enterprise, and growing connectivity.

Norwich is a hub for financial services, creative industries, life sciences, and agri-tech. Greater Norwich is a £9.9 billion economy, supporting 158,000 jobs and 10,500 businesses[2]. Norwich boasts one of the UK's largest insurance sectors outside London, as well as a growing cluster of digital and creative firms that account for over 6,000 jobs.

Norfolk Research Park

The Norwich Research Park (NRP), one of Europe's largest single-site concentrations of life sciences, underpins much of the area's innovation. Employing over 12,000 people and housing more than 40 companies, the NRP focuses on agri-tech, food security, and genomics, aligning with the UK's strategic priorities in sustainable agriculture and health[3].

The **Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor** is one of the region's most exciting growth stories, linking two of the UK's fast growth cities. This 100km corridor stretches across Cambridgeshire—Suffolk—Norwich, offering a wealth of opportunities for businesses and investors[4].

At one end of the corridor, Cambridge boasts a world-leading life science cluster and a strong, well-established deep-tech sector.

At the other end, Norwich is known for its fast-growing digital tech sector and internationally renowned research in food and agri-tech. The city also has a strong connections to the renewable energy sector along the Norfolk and Suffolk coast.


Double helix (discovered at Cambridge)

The corridor is anchored by a diverse base of engineering and manufacturing expertise, capable of transforming cutting-edge research into real-world products and services. This diversity positions the region to tackle major global challenges, including climate change, food security, and healthcare. It also enhances the region's resilience, making it more robust than other parts of the UK. Over 170,000 people are employed in knowledge-intensive industries in the Norwich to Cambridge Corridor including global brands such as ARM, Multimatic, Baxter International and Lotus. There has been £3bn invested in Lotus since 2017 and a major expansion is planned that could leverage over £750m of investment and create over 500 jobs.

2:https://www.norwich.gov.uk/news/article/799/new_report_uncovers_further_evidence_for_a_greater_norwich_unitary_council
3: https://www.norwichresearchpark.com
4: https://techcorridor.co.uk/about

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.3 Norfolk

By 2031, the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor is projected to support an additional 70,000 jobs and drive GVA growth of £7 billion per year[5]. Towns like Thetford are contributing to this growth significantly.

However, Norfolk's economy is not without challenges. Productivity levels lag the UK average, with GVA per head approximately 75% of the national figure[6].

Connectivity remains a key barrier to growth, particularly along the A11 corridor. Rail routes linking Norwich to Cambridge are slow and low-frequency, and wider connections are limited.

Dualling of the A11 has improved road links, however, there has been little investment in rail capacity and frequency, meaning businesses and residents in Norwich, Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford cannot fully capitalise on the wider region's economic opportunities. Investment in rail is key to unlocking opportunities and enabling greater growth.

The ports of **Great Yarmouth** and **Lowestoft** (in Suffolk) have become strategic centres for offshore wind sectors in the UK, corresponding with Norfolk and Suffolk's position as the leading producer of clean energy in the country.

Further down the coast in Essex, Freeport Harwich is also perfectly located for supporting the offshore wind industry with plans to create a port and logistics hub for offshore and green energy projects.

Offshore windfarm

5: https://www.cambridgenetwork.co.uk/news/cambridge-norwich-tech-corridor-create-over-ps500m-local-economic-growth
6: https://safe.rbi-umbrella.com/doc/docview/viewer/docN27E4FB5F7F96d60c41ae651e46cb35249cd24fe196de1a9a22b7f87349261e0322672aa66045

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.4 Suffolk


Port of Felixstowe

Suffolk has a £21bn economy, with tech clusters centred around Ipswich and East Suffolk, with BT Adastral Park and Innovation Martlesham hosting over 150 high tech ICT companies[8]. The University of Suffolk's DigiTech centre and Digital Futures Institute drive research and technology innovation.

East-west connectivity remains a key barrier, particularly for rail along the A14 corridor, linking Felixstowe and Ipswich to Cambridge and to the Midlands and the North via Ely.

The Cambridge – Suffolk corridors serve several fast-growing communities, including Bury St Edmunds, Thurston, Stowmarket and Ipswich. These places are home to significant employers including the Greene King Group. British Sugar and BT's Adastral Park.

Businesses have asked for greater access to road and rail networks for goods and services to drive investment and growth in the region.

The county has 14 NSIP energy projects in development, including Sizewell C, which is expected to create thousands of local jobs and contribute around £4 billion to the regional economy with construction supported by rail freight[9]. Offshore wind farms to the east of (and serviced from) Felixstowe provide a key part of local net zero energy infrastructure.

Felixstowe Port is the UK's largest intermodal port and a critical logistics gateway. It handles 4 million containers and 2,000 ships a year[10] and provides some of the deepest water close to the open sea, providing the best location in Britain for importing and exporting goods and handles trade with over 200 countries and overseas territories each year[11]. The port plays a vital role in international trade and logistics, supporting the regional and national economy. The port's rail volumes account for around 29% of its UK domestic throughput, rising to 50% of traffic to the North and West Midlands[12]. Improved east-west freight connectivity and network resilience is crucial to support the UK's economy.

Freeport East, encompassing Felixstowe, Harwich, and the Gateway 14 logistics hub near Stowmarket, is central to the UK's ambitions for economic growth and global trade. Offering tax incentives and streamlined customs processes, it has recently secured over £250 million in private investment and secured 1,800 jobs across its sites[13]. But to deliver its full potential it requires increased rail freight capacity to reduce reliance on increasingly unreliable roads. Plans include unlocking up to 10 daily rail freight paths from Felixstowe to the Midlands by 2050.

Investments in rail, including the Ely and Haughley capacity schemes, are key to unlocking these opportunities, enabling growth in both passenger and freight transport while easing pressure on the highway network. By addressing these challenges, Suffolk can drive sustainable growth and regional connectivity, securing its role as a vital area for trade and innovation.

8,9 :Suffolk Economic Strategy and Growth Plan, 2024, https://suffolkeconomy.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/SCC-Economy-Strategy-24.pdf
10:https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c8713vzxyydo#:~:text=Felixstowe%20facts%20and%20figures&text=Hutchinson%20Ports%20took%20full%20control,action%20over%20pay%20in%202022
11: Keeping Trade on Track, Transport East, 2024, https://www.transporteast.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Keeping-Trade-on-Track-2024.pdf
12: https://freeporteast.com/our-locations/felixstowe/
13: https://freeporteast.com/freeport-east-celebrates-successful-year-of-attracting-jobs-and-investment-to-the-region/

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.4 Case study: Newmarket's global equine industry

The corridor between Cambridge and Ipswich and the Suffolk coastline is rich with economic opportunities.

Newmarket is renowned for its equine cluster, which includes a concentration of horse racing institutions, stud farms, and world-leading veterinary services. This cluster significantly contributes to the local economy through employment, tourism, and international recognition.

The economic impact of the horse racing industry in Newmarket is substantial, with the town hosting 44% of the UK's stallions (and several of Europe's top stallions) as well as 62% of all UK mares[7].

The wider horse racing industry and ecosystem in Newmarket also includes the British Racing School and the National Stud, which play key roles in specialist training for the UK's valuable horse racing industry.

The supporting infrastructure in Newmarket is of very high quality, with facilities such as the Jockey Club Estates training grounds, and three world-leading equine veterinary hospitals. The town's racecourses host more turf races than any other UK town, including a quarter of all top-level races and two of the country's five classic races. However, for the cluster to reach its growth potential, transport connections and infrastructure constraints must be addressed.

Horses at Newmarket

7: Newmarket's Horse Breeding and Racing Cluster 2022 Local Impact Report, 2023, https://westsuffolk.inconsult.uk/gf2.ti/-/1579170/196917989.1/PDF/-/newmarkets-horse-breeding-and-racing-cluster-2022.pdf

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.5 North Essex

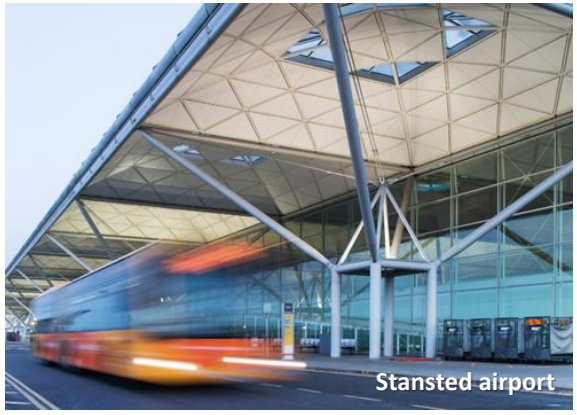
Essex is home to **Stansted Airport**, which has plans to grow its passengers to over 50 million passengers per annum[14]. This growth will support local employment and enable increased global connectivity.

Expanding and enhancing connections to the airport cluster would widen the talent pool, supply chain opportunities and passenger base as well as supporting modal shift in airport surface access. Businesses are supportive of development of improved global links potential through the development of Stansted but note that high quality onward connections by public transport are important to maximise the benefits of enhanced global connections.

Freeport East Harwich at Bathside Bay is developing a green energy hub within Essex and a key component of the Freeport supporting freight growth in the region. 5,100 new jobs are expected with 104,000 sqm of manufacturing and office space[15].

Northern Essex includes the expanding University of Essex in Colchester and the linked Knowledge Gateway research and technology park, with existing strong connections with the rest of Essex and London. However, it has far poorer connections to the West, with no direct service to Cambridge from Colchester.

Colchester and North Essex also have a high proportion of construction businesses, a sector which needs to expand to support the government's objectives for housebuilding, net zero and supporting wider infrastructure development.


Stansted airport

1.6 Wider East

With a mix of onshore and offshore renewables, gas and nuclear generation, and emerging hydrogen opportunities, the energy industry in the East is set to be worth billions, creating an additional 6,150 full-time jobs in the region by 2032[16]. Offshore wind from the region is forecast to be delivering the energy needed to supply 19.2m homes by 2035[17].

The region's abundance in future industries focused on digital and agri-science expertise, as illustrated by Space East, establishes cross-sector innovations in satellite and artificial intelligence applications, food production, transportation and construction. This benefits the low carbon economy, competing at global level and exporting services and skills. There is a need to improve collaboration with Cambridge and Peterborough to build on the region's strength and expertise in clean energy.

Job growth in the region needs to be supported by sustainable transport capacity to ensure opportunities are spread across the region, in addition to ensuring businesses can access opportunities through close connections with other growing regions.

14:London Stansted Sustainable Development Plan 2024, https://assets.live.dxp.maginfrastructure.com/f/73114/x/c274ea2d93/stansted-sdp-summary-final-1.pdf
15: https://www.harwich.co.uk/about-us/bathside-bay
16: Norfolk & Suffolk Economy Strategy, New Anglia LEP, 2022, https://newanglia.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/FINAL-Norfolk-and-Suffolk-economic-strategy-Jan-2022.pdf
17: https://www.fakenhamtimes.co.uk/news/24922464.east-anglias-offshore-wind-farms-power-20m-homes-2035/#:~:text=In%20the%20next%20decade%20the,to%20power%2019.2m%20homes

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

1.7 Cambridge City Region

The Cambridge city region describes the areas in and around the City of Cambridge, that are heavily influenced by Cambridge's economic power, with high levels of commuting and overlapping housing markets. This includes Cambridgeshire, West Suffolk and North Essex.

Cambridge is a global economic powerhouse, transitioning from a manufacturing base to a knowledge-driven economy anchored by its prestigious universities and world-renowned research commercialisation. The city has become a magnet for life sciences, digital services, clean energy, creative industries, and advanced manufacturing. Over half the workforce is employed in education, research, and professional services, with the life sciences sector accounting for a proportion of jobs 18 times the UK average[18].

Despite its success, Cambridge faces significant challenges. Rapid growth has outpaced housing, water, space for innovation expansion and transport infrastructure, driving up house and land prices and increasing congestion.

Economic benefits have not been evenly distributed, with higher wage growth in corporate sectors leaving lower-paid workers behind. Limited development space and a small labour catchment accessible by public transport further constrain its potential.

Transport links are pivotal to Cambridge's future. While East West Rail will improve westward connectivity and busways strengthen north-south links, eastern access remains inadequate, with poor public transport options forcing reliance on cars for businesses and amenities in and around eastern Cambridge.

The city's growing population and economy have driven housing demand and employment space beyond affordability for residents and businesses alike, threatening its status as a hub for technology and science. Without urgent action from government and local partners to address these pressures, Cambridge risks losing its competitive edge to rival cities globally, lessening its ability to generate sustainable domestic growth through innovation.

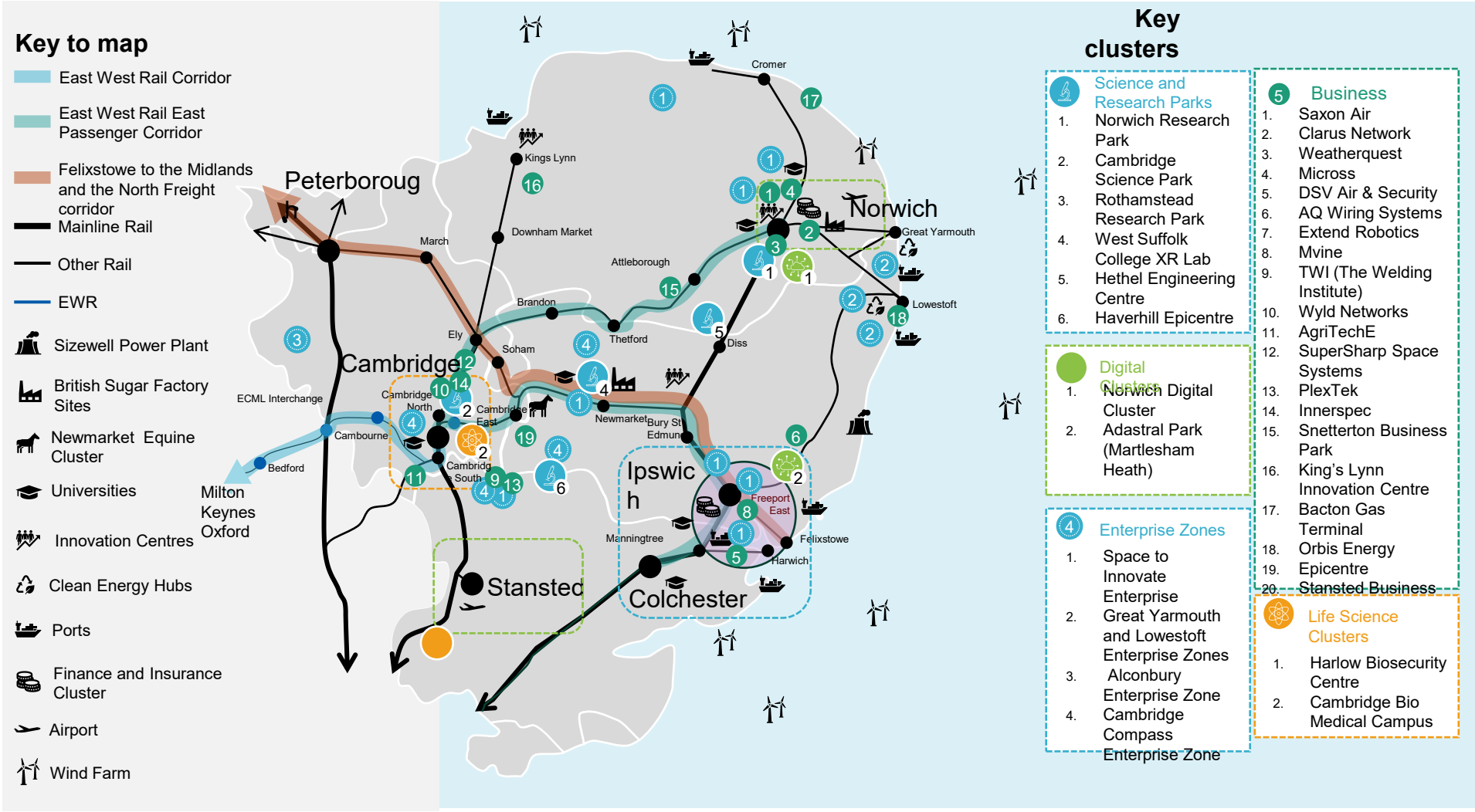
The government has made the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor a priority for growth but there are significant opportunities to extend these connections to the east within the wider Cambridge area. This would provide significant additional sustainable commuter capacity linked to new and existing development, supporting job markets and sustainable housing growth. Growth in Cambridge, alongside improved connections to key eastern region towns and cities, will further support the Growth Corridor's impact across the Eastern Region, spreading benefits beyond Cambridge.


Cambridge

18: https://consultations.greatercambridgeplanning.org/sites/gcp/files/2024-09/EBGCLPGSSSep24v1Sep24.pdf

1.0 Introduction and Economic Context

Figure 1: Economic Geography of the East



2.0 Transport Context

2.1 Passenger Rail

Rail services across the East of England are essential for supporting economic growth, housing distribution, and strategic connectivity across the UK.

Cambridge has seen significant improvements in passenger rail services in recent years, thanks to investment in new stations at Cambridge South and Cambridge North, and the expansion of the Thameslink network to Cambridge, providing direct connections to Gatwick Airport and Brighton.

The corridors to the east of Cambridge, towards Norwich and Ipswich, have not received the same level of infrastructure investment enabling higher frequencies. However, they are now mostly served by modern rolling stock, and there have been incremental improvements in passenger information, ticketing, and fares systems.

Figure 2: December 2024 peak hour passenger rail service pattern

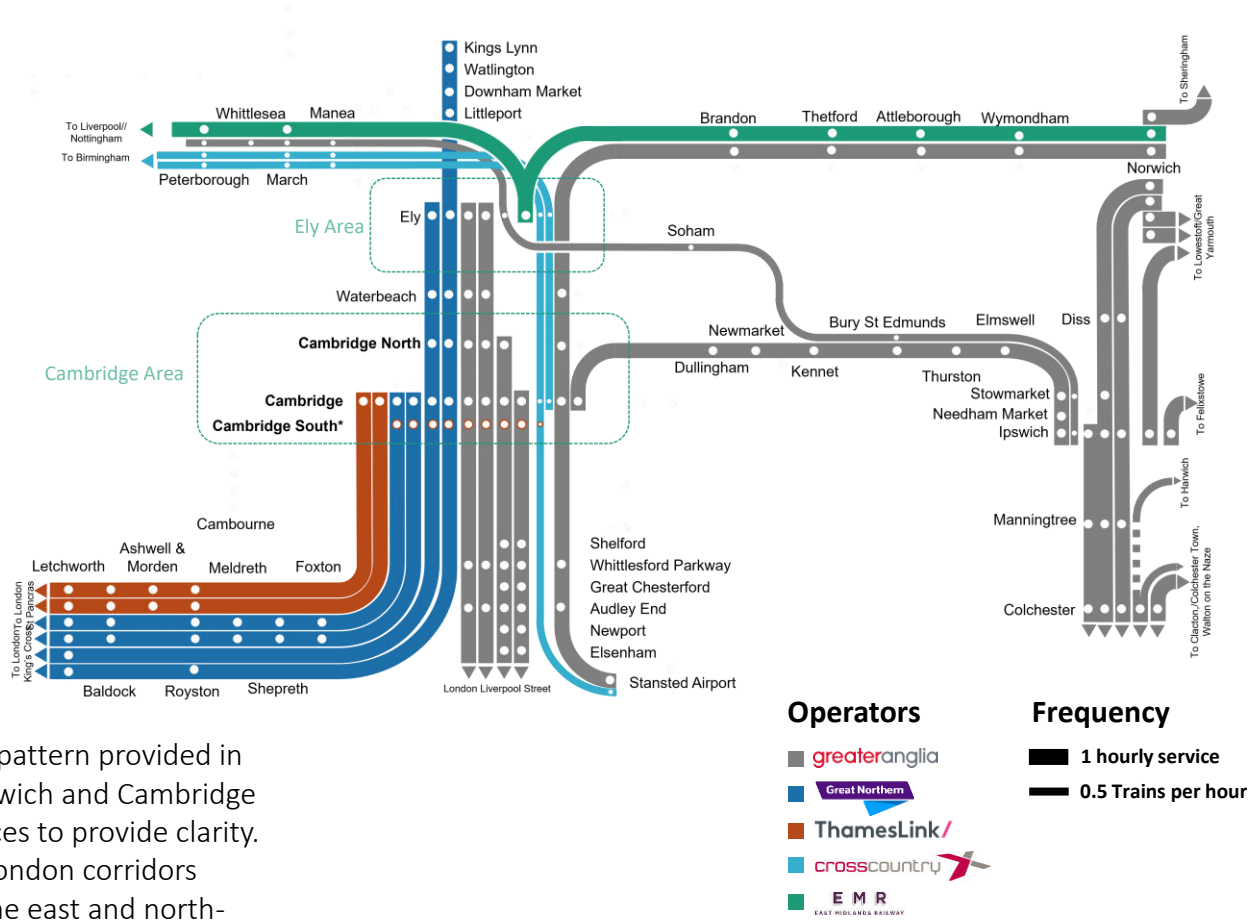


Figure 2 shows the "standard peak hour" service pattern provided in the Cambridge area and on the Cambridge – Norwich and Cambridge – Ipswich corridors. This is simplified in some places to provide clarity. It shows the imbalance in service patterns with London corridors being far better served by rail than corridors to the east and north-east towards Ipswich and Norwich.

2.0 Transport Context

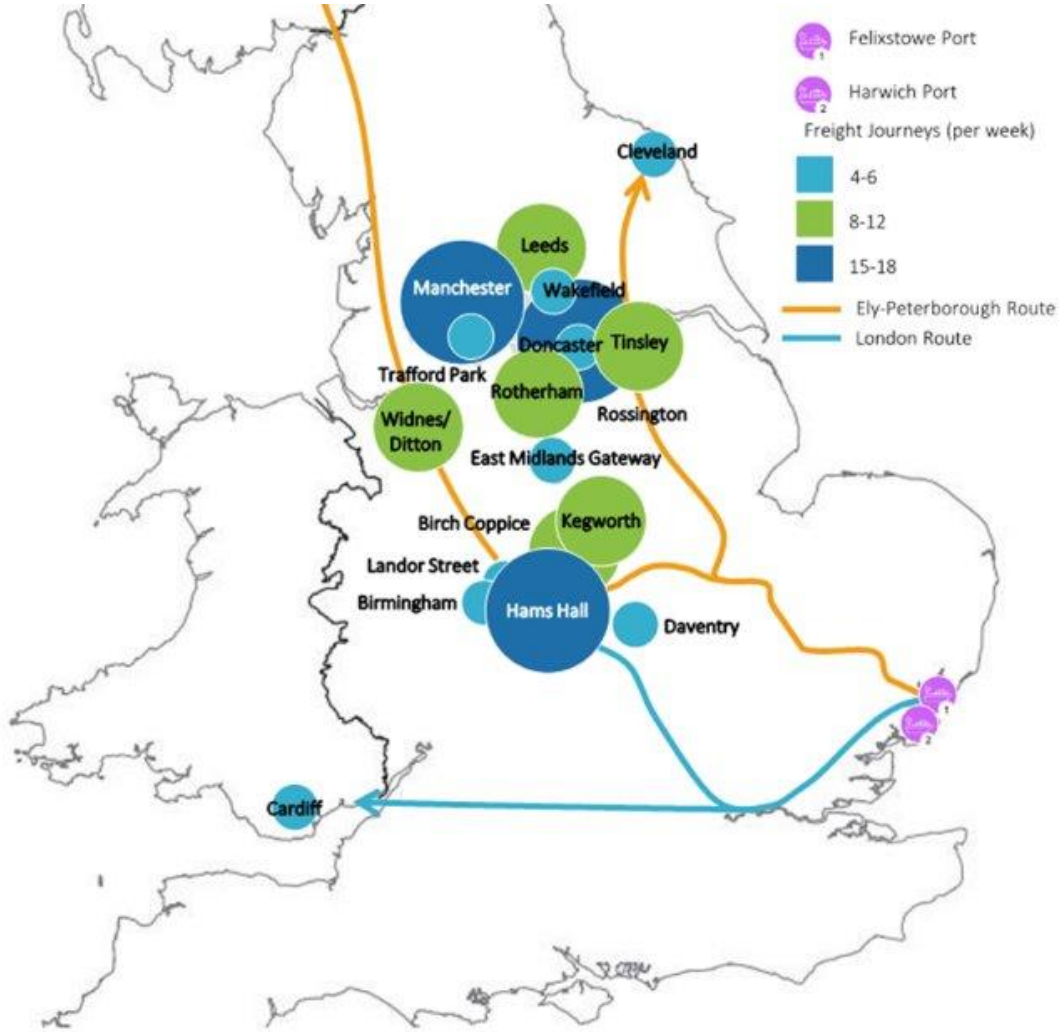
2.2 Freight

Freight in the region is primarily focused on connecting the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich with intermodal rail. There are up to 76 rail freight movements per day, saving over 100 million HGV miles a year. Rail freight serves key destinations such as Trafford Park in Manchester, Hams Hall in Birmingham, and "iPort" in Doncaster, highlighting the region's critical role in the UK supply chain and in supporting growth in the Midlands and North. Figure 3 shows the key corridors that serve these important freight flows.

Currently, freight can use the Ipswich to Peterborough route to access the East Coast Main Line, but capacity is constrained by track limitations and bottlenecks at Ely and Haughley Junctions. Freight connecting to the West Coast Main Line is primarily routed via Ipswich and the North London Line, joining the main line at Willesden and constraining further passenger services in London, or alternatively enabling other freight services, from Thames ports for example.

Other freight services in the region include those serving Harwich Refinery and supporting the construction of the Sizewell C nuclear power station on the Suffolk coast.

Figure 3: Key freight flows from the East (ports of Felixstowe, Harwich and Ipswich)



2.0 Transport Context

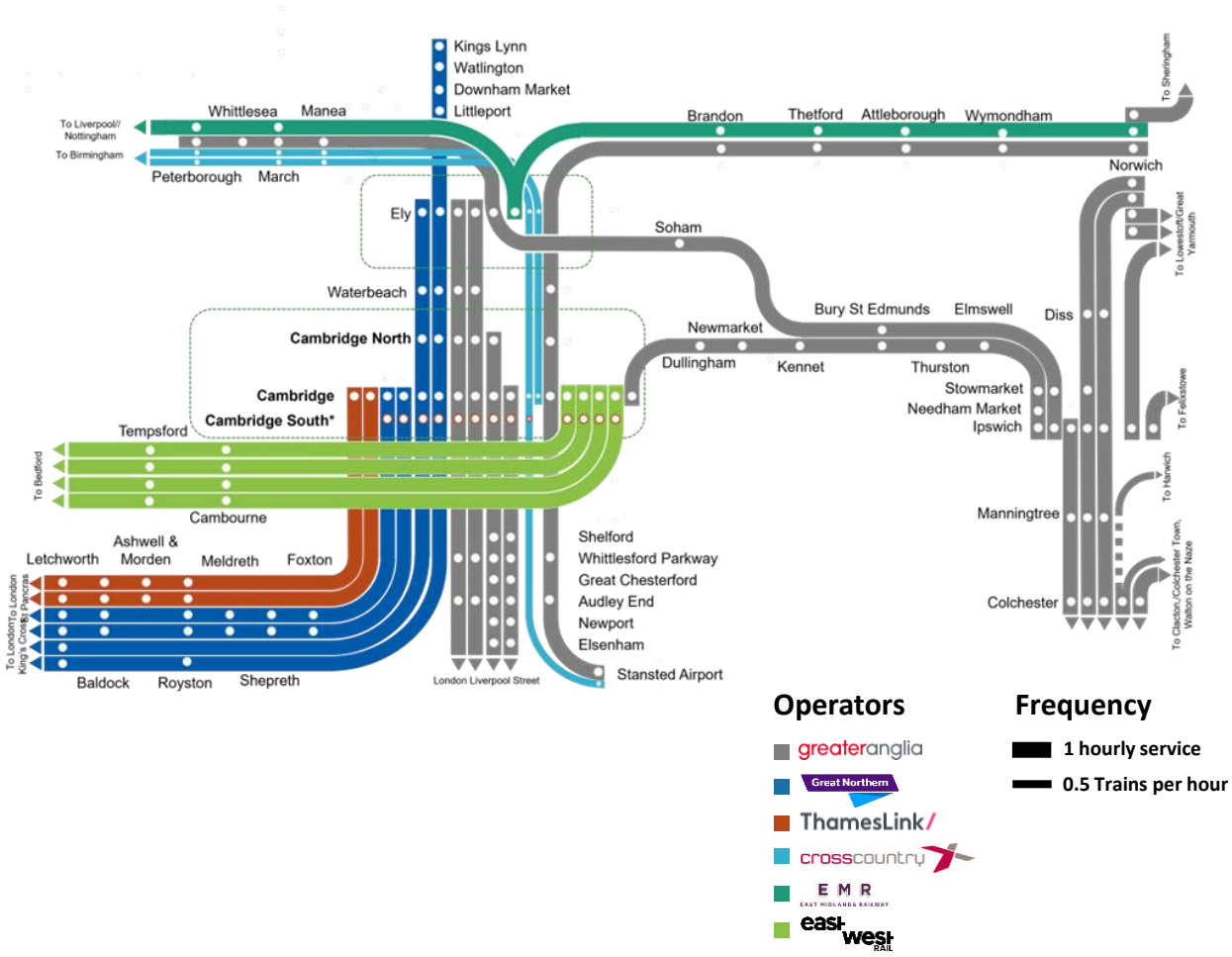
2.3 Planned Interventions

Several important interventions are planned for the railway that serves the East of England.

East West Rail will unlock new connections west of Cambridge, providing direct and fast passenger services between Cambridge, Bedford, Tempsford, Bletchley, and Oxford, and enabling freight services to the Midlands. However, it will also highlight the stark gap in rail service provision between areas to the west and east of Cambridge. This imbalance could put less well-served areas at a structural disadvantage, limiting their potential for sustainable economic growth and attractiveness for investment. Many stakeholders have indicated that, as development opportunities in the west of Cambridge are taken up, demand for growth will increasingly shift eastward—making this a key risk. Further improvements at Ely and Haughley would enable the railway to carry more passenger and freight services towards Ely, Peterborough, and beyond.

Figure 4 illustrates how service patterns will evolve when East West Rail reaches Cambridge in the early 2030s. While passenger services through Cambridge will increase, the disparity in rail connectivity to the east—compared to the south and west—will become even more evident.

Figure 4: Future peak hour passenger rail service pattern



2.0 Transport Context

2.3 Planned Interventions (continued)

East West Rail (Bedford– Cambridge section) has the potential to significantly enhance connectivity by providing direct services to Bedford, Milton Keynes, and Oxford, while linking 6 key national rail routes, including the East Coast, Midland, and West Coast Main Lines. These improvements will strengthen both regional and national transport networks. The line will also expand public transport options west of Cambridge, supporting commuter demand from the growing town of Cambourne and potential new developments at Tempsford.

Despite its transformative potential, the current East West Rail proposals do not fully address connectivity challenges in the east of the country. Slow and infrequent rail services limit the attractiveness of interchanging at Cambridge, reducing East West Rail's appeal for commuters, leisure travellers, and businesses at both local and regional levels.

Alongside East West Rail, delivering the Ely and Haughley capacity schemes remain a critical regional priority. These schemes will unlock additional freight train paths and allow for increased passenger services on the Ipswich–to–Peterborough and Norwich–to–Peterborough routes, supporting both passenger and freight growth.

While the Ely and Haughley schemes will provide up to six additional freight paths, bottlenecks persist at the eastern end of the line — limiting the ability to maximise the opportunities available via the new line.

In addition, the lack of a chord at Milton Keynes restricts direct freight connections between the Port of Felixstowe and key intermodal hubs such as Daventry on the West Coast Main Line. Addressing these capacity limitations is essential to unlocking the full potential of East West Rail and ensuring sustainable passenger and freight growth across the region.

Keeping Trade on Track

Transport East and England's Economic Heartland (EEH) have highlighted the key role the Ely Junction plays in the movement of goods across the UK[19], and how proposals for upgrading Ely and Haughley junctions would unlock significant benefits for the UK, including:

- its potential to boost economic growth in the Midlands, North and East
- its remarkably high benefit-cost ratio
- its potential to cut carbon and congestion
- its potential to benefit passenger and freight markets
- the widespread support the scheme enjoys across the UK
- its potential to support the government's Freeport East initiative

The Ely and Haughley investments would be a key step towards increasing rail passenger and rail freight services in the region. Further strategic investment in infrastructure and services would further maximise the potential of these schemes.

15: Keeping Trade on Track, Transport East, 2024, https://www.transporteast.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/Keeping-Trade-on-Track-2024.pdf

2.0 Transport Context

2.4 Leveraging the benefits of East West Rail

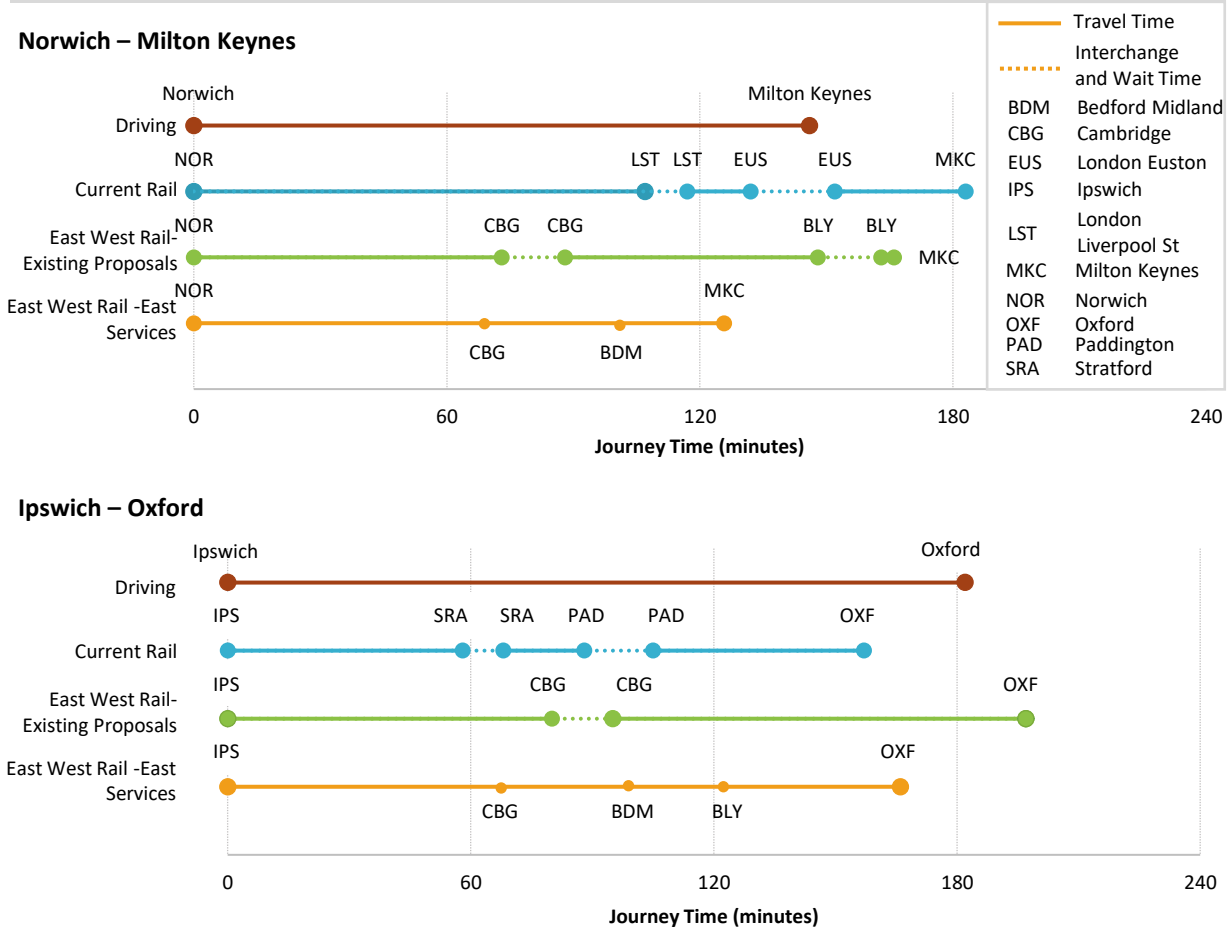
A key priority for Transport East and our stakeholders is improving rail connections between the eastern regions and the west, not just to Cambridge, but also to key cities such as Milton Keynes and Oxford, as well as the wider regional links these locations provide.

Direct rail services that bypass London make journeys more convenient and seamless, reduce congestion on key radial routes into the capital, and offer a far more seamless travel experience. In many cases, these services are also faster than the equivalent car journey.

Figure 5 shows the journey time comparisons between key towns and cities on the East West Rail corridor. This shows:

- Norwich – Milton Keynes rail journeys would reduce from over three hours today to just over two, a saving of 30% or 57 minutes compared to today, and 25% compared to EWR's existing proposals.
- Ipswich – Oxford journeys would not reduce from two-and-a-half hours today but would be direct compared to requiring the current two interchanges at congested London mainline stations.

Figure 5: Journey comparisons for key regional corridors



Journey times above are based on an indicative express service between Ipswich/Norwich and Cambridge, indicative EWR journey times and current alternatives journeys.

2.0 Transport Context

2.5 Post-pandemic Recovery

Figures 6-8 show that, in contrast to other rail markets, demand for passenger rail services in the East have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 6: Ely – Norwich Stations

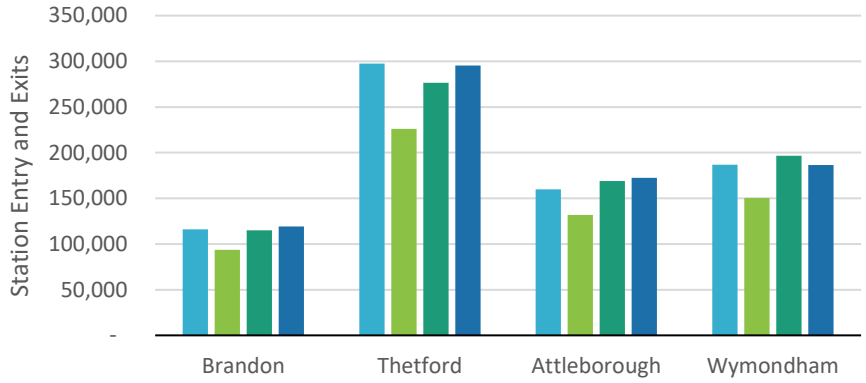


Figure 7: Key Hub Stations

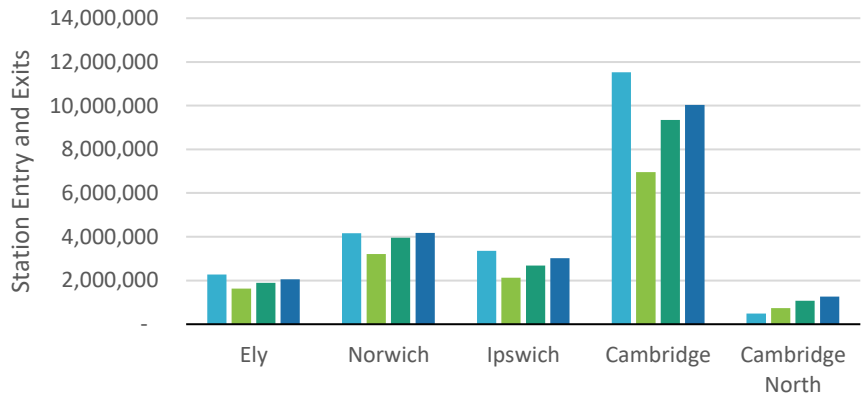
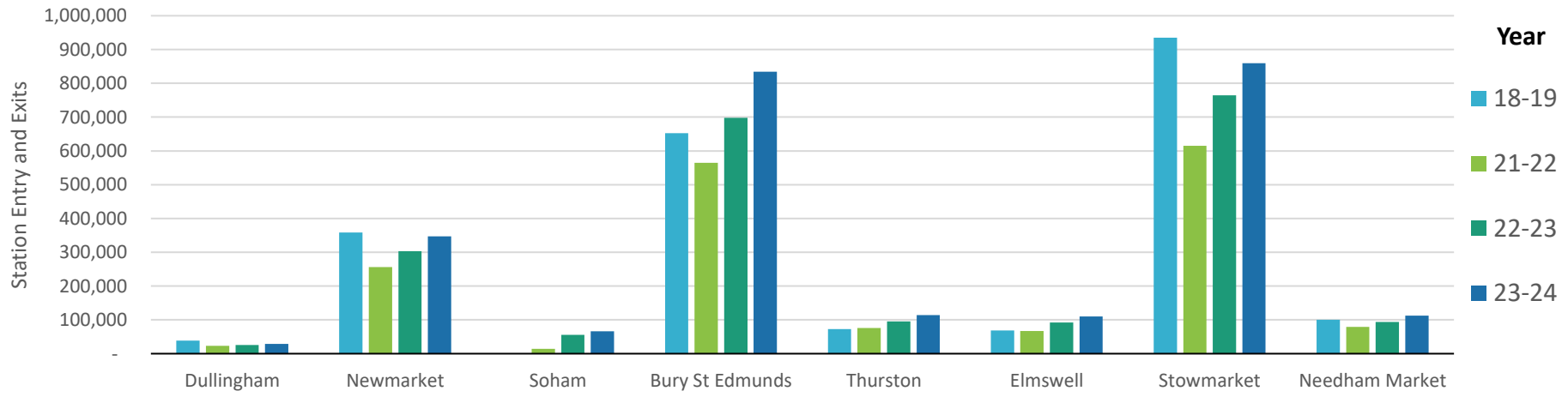


Figure 8: Ipswich – Cambridge/Peterborough Stations



3.0 Issues and Opportunities

3.1 Norwich – Cambridge Corridor

Stakeholders have highlighted the following issues and opportunities for the areas they represent. These are outlined below by corridor, starting with Norwich – Cambridge.

The corridor between Cambridge and Norwich is crucial for regional connectivity. Both cities are growing, with strong research centres and expanding service sectors. Increasing the number of direct rail services would connect renowned universities and research communities in Oxford, Cambridge and Norwich, with the potential to significantly boost commuter rail use and enhance agglomeration between the cities of Norwich and Cambridge and the towns in between. Development opportunities exist along the route, particularly in the Thetford area, supporting a corridor that is already growing in terms of population and jobs.

As shown in Figures 6–8, rail travel is increasing across the region, highlighting the corridor's rising economic integration.

The Ely capacity enhancements are essential to enable more passenger services through Ely, in addition to increasing freight paths from the ports. Options for services include an extended service via Cambridge North and Ely, increasing the Ipswich to Peterborough service, or via Cambridge East and Soham.

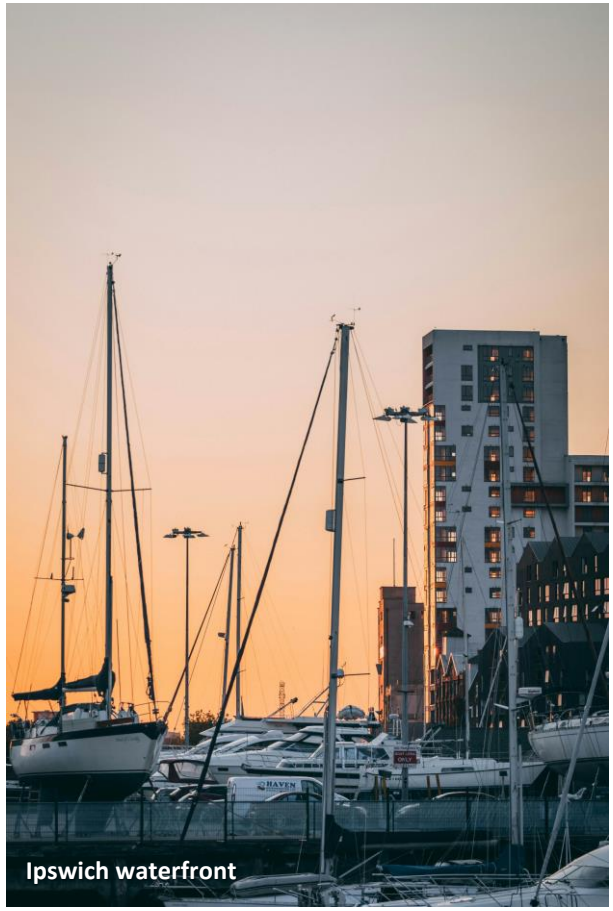
Stakeholders have also told us they wish to see improvements in regional connectivity, with more frequent services to support local commuting, development opportunities, and wider regional connections, including better services to Stansted Airport.

Norwich station


New homes in Norfolk

3.0 Issues and Opportunities

3.2 Ipswich/Colchester – Cambridge


Ipswich waterfront

The Ipswich/Colchester–Cambridge corridor plays a vital role in regional connectivity. The Ely and Haughley capacity schemes will support an increase to six freight paths and expand passenger services, enabling the current two-hourly Ipswich service to become hourly.

Investment in East West Rail will improve connectivity between Cambridge and cities to the west. However, the current proposals are not being maximised in the east of Cambridge, where slow and infrequent rail services fail to provide an attractive option for interchanging onto East West Rail services at Cambridge.

While many parts of the country are seeing rail demand remain below 2019 levels, demand on the Cambridge–Ipswich and Cambridge–Norwich lines is growing rapidly, already surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

Stations such as Bury St Edmunds, Thurston, and Elmswell are among the fastest-growing stations in the UK (excluding those served by the Elizabeth Line). However, this increasing demand risks being constrained by capacity unless service improvements are made.

Stakeholders along this corridor have highlighted the need for better local connectivity to support sustainable growth around world-class clusters, particularly in and around Cambridge, Newmarket, and the expanding employment hubs in Bury St Edmunds.

Additionally, Freeport East sites in Stowmarket and Ipswich, along with port connections to Felixstowe and Harwich, require stronger rail links. Stakeholders are also keen to see enhancements to freight services to help alleviate congestion on the A14 by enabling direct rail connections to East West Rail, the West Coast Main Line, and greater freight capacity via Peterborough.

3.0 Issues and Opportunities

3.3 Cambridge City Region

Cambridge faces multiple challenges in realising its full potential, primarily due to limited space for development, a small labour market catchment accessible by public transport, and an increasingly congested highway network. There is little opportunity to expand road capacity for commuting into Cambridge's growth areas, making increased car commuting unfeasible.

Providing better connectivity to encourage businesses with strong links to sectors in the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor will support sustainable growth in Cambridge and drive economic growth to the east, optimising existing capabilities from the regions science and research parks, digital and life science clusters, businesses and enterprise zones. Enabling the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor to thrive whilst enabling economic and housing growth in the East.

East West Rail will significantly enhance connections from the west, complementing the existing busways to the north and south and the strong north–south transport corridor. However, the east suffers from weaker links to Cambridge, with no rail interchange and limited bus priority. This results in greater reliance on driving and longer commuting times for those travelling from the east, including access to key employment sites and amenities such as the Cambridge Science Park and, Addenbrooke's and Fulbourn Hospitals.

A new station and interchange at Cambridge East would provide direct services on East West Rail and serve as a key transport hub with interchanges to other modes. This would help alleviate platform constraints at Cambridge Station while significantly improving connectivity for East Cambridge. It would enhance local journeys within the city and offer better links to London, Stansted Airport, and destinations across the wider region, both east and west.


Cambridge

3.0 Issues and Opportunities

3.5 Regionwide Issues

Across the region, there is a strong desire for a more integrated transport network, particularly greater coordination between bus and rail services, alongside improved active travel options. Cycling is already a popular mode for accessing key hubs, such as Cambridge, and new facilities are being developed at stations like Bury St Edmunds.

However, low service frequencies on key cross-regional links mean they fail to provide the essential connections between towns and cities to enable seamless multi-modal journeys.

By combining investment in enhanced bus services—including Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT)—with improved interchange facilities and better active travel links to stations, the benefits of rail investment can be maximised. This integrated approach would create co-benefits and synergies that drive greater rail usage and broader growth in rail passenger numbers.

Demand growth across the region has been returning to trend, as illustrated in **Figures 6**, **7** and **8**. Network Rail's Cambridgeshire growth study identified potential growth rates in the region based on pre-COVID trends for passenger growth. The high-growth scenario suggested strong annual growth on the Ipswich corridor (7%), Norwich corridor (4.8%), and Broxbourne corridor (which includes Stansted) (6.2%).

However, rail growth cannot be fully achieved if services become increasingly congested and service frequencies are not improved to attract marginal passengers away from alternative modes of transport.

Government objectives for increased housebuilding and economic growth in the Cambridge city region and the wider area have the potential to increase demand for rail beyond those established in the 2019 baseline. These objectives need to be included in future assessments of rail demand on the corridors, especially in a region where house price affordability incentivises significant levels of commuting and increasing leisure demand.

Other studies from Network Rail, such as the Suffolk – Cambridge corridor, have shown significant demand growth, with a fourfold increase from 2005 to 2020 and strong post-COVID demand recovery (see **Figure 8**). In the short term, this may take the form of additional peak-time journeys, should this be viable.

20: Cambridgeshire Corridor Study, Network Rail, 2019, https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Cambridgeshire-Corridor-Study-2019.pdf
21: Suffolk Corridor Strategic Advice, Network Rail, 2023 https://sacuksprodnrdigital0001.blob.core.windows.net/regional-long-term-planning/Eastern%20region%20-%20planning%20documents/Suffolk%20Corridor%20Strategic%20Advice%202022.pdf

3.0 Issues and Opportunities

3.6 Sustainable Development Opportunities

Significant growth has been allocated to communities to the east of Cambridge, including Thetford, Attleborough, Wymondham, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich. Improved connectivity would provide sustainable access to jobs and services in and around Cambridge. There may also be opportunities linked to the government's New Towns policy and transport agenda that high-quality, sustainable, and well-connected new towns are a priority. The corridors provide an opportunity to support this vision, benefiting both existing communities and new developments. This approach could not only help secure funding for necessary infrastructure investment but also drives demand growth, ensuring the long-term sustainability of services.

The Cambridge area has significant demand for inbound rail commuting, driven by high wages in the growing financial and tech sectors, alongside high housing costs. This is evident in the strong rail usage already seen from areas such as Ely.

Towns with stations that could benefit from improved connections such as Bury St Edmunds, Thurston, and Elmswell are among the fastest-growing in the UK (excluding those served by the Elizabeth Line). However, this rising demand risks being constrained by low capacity due to infrequence services unless service improvements are made.

Stakeholders along this corridor have expressed a strong desire for better local connectivity to support sustainable growth around world-class clusters, particularly in and around Cambridge, Newmarket, Thetford and the expanding employment centred in Bury St Edmunds. They also see improved connections as essential for the development of Freeport East sites in Stowmarket and Ipswich, as well as links to the ports of Felixstowe and Harwich.

Additionally, stakeholders are keen to see enhancements to freight services, enabling rail to play a greater role in easing congestion on the A14. Direct connections to East West Rail, the West Coast Main Line, and increased freight capacity via Peterborough would further strengthen the region's transport network by providing an alternative east–west freight corridor that avoids congested areas around London and Peterborough.

Bury St Edmunds station (credit GA)

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Objectives

We have worked closely with key stakeholders and the East West Rail East Partnership Board to agree four key objectives for a future railway.

Objective 1

Improve regional rail connectivity between Norwich, Ipswich, Colchester, and Cambridge, leveraging the current East West Rail improvements

This Objective aims to:

- Enhance regional connectivity between the East of England's major cities, strengthening economic ties and supporting regional agglomeration to boost prosperity.
- Enable broader regional connections via East West Rail, including links from the east to Bedford, Milton Keynes, Oxford, and key mainline routes.

This Objective is broken down into two Sub-Objectives as follows:

- 1A: Norwich – Cambridge corridor
- 1B: Ipswich/Colchester – Cambridge corridor

Objective 1A: Norwich – Cambridge connectivity

- Strengthen local connectivity to widen labour markets and support sustainable growth around world-class clusters, particularly in Cambridge and Norwich, while fostering economic growth in surrounding towns.
- Promote modal shift to sustainable transport, advancing decarbonisation goals and supporting local development, including housing along the Norwich–Cambridge corridor.

Objective 1B: Ipswich/Colchester – Cambridge connectivity

- Enhance local connectivity to expand labour markets and drive sustainable growth around key clusters, particularly in Cambridge and Newmarket, while enabling economic development in towns along the corridor.
- Promote modal shift to sustainable transport, advancing decarbonisation goals and fostering local development, including housing between Ipswich and Cambridge.

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Objectives

We have worked closely with key stakeholders and the East West Rail East Partnership Board to agree four key objectives for a future railway.

Objective 2

Improve cross-Cambridge city region connectivity.

This Objective aims to:

- Enhance local connectivity to expand access to labour markets and drive sustainable growth around Cambridge and in towns along the Norwich and Ipswich corridors, driving economic development and growth.
- Support modal shift to sustainable transport, advancing decarbonisation goals and fostering local development between Ipswich/Norwich and Cambridge.

Objective 3

Maximise freight capacity and enhance rail freight opportunities

This Objective aims to:

- Boost global connectivity to international gateways at Felixstowe and support growth at Freeport East, linking the region, the Midlands and the North to similar clusters overseas to enable business growth and export opportunities.

Objective 4

Enhance rail connectivity from Stansted Airport

This Objective aims to:

- Strengthen global connectivity through improved links to Stansted Airport, connecting the region to international clusters and opportunities to enable business growth and exports.
- Support inward tourism and encourage modal shift for sustainable airport access.

5.0 Key Constraints

5.1 Key Infrastructure Constraints

Figures 9 and 10 on the following page highlight the key constraints in the rail network that prevent or restrict the objectives highlighted above from being delivered. These include:

- Capacity constraints on the West Anglia Main Line through Cambridge South and Cambridge stations, which may limit scope for additional terminating and through services through Cambridge beyond those planned for East West Rail, and constraints between Cambridge North.
- Capacity, speed, and traction constraints between Cambridge and Newmarket owing to a slow, single-track, unelectrified railway and single-platform layout at Newmarket. The tunnel at Newmarket may represent a significant constraint to freight growth.
- Capacity constraints at Trowse Bridge and Junction on the approaches to Norwich station which limit the number of services that can serve Norwich.
- Potential capacity constraints at Cambridge, Ipswich, and Colchester stations, which may limit the scope for a significant growth in passenger services, limiting the scope for reliably providing direct services.
- The lack of direct rail access to Soham from Cambridge, owing to the historical removal of a chord between Newmarket and Soham, and the single-track configuration of the railway between Newmarket and Soham.
- The lack of direct rail access to Milton Keynes from the Marston Vale line, which prevents passenger or freight services from the east connecting directly onto the West Coast Mainline.
- Additionally, level crossings on the line between Cambridge and Ipswich, and Ely to Norwich may present a challenge to growing frequency without increasing congestion and may require mitigation.
- Delivering the Ely and Haughley capacity schemes remain a critical regional priority. These schemes will unlock additional freight train paths and allow for increased passenger services on the Ipswich/Norwich–to–Peterborough routes.


Cambridge station

Single track at Newmarket

5.0 Key Constraints

5.1 Key Infrastructure Constraints

Figure 9: Regional constraints

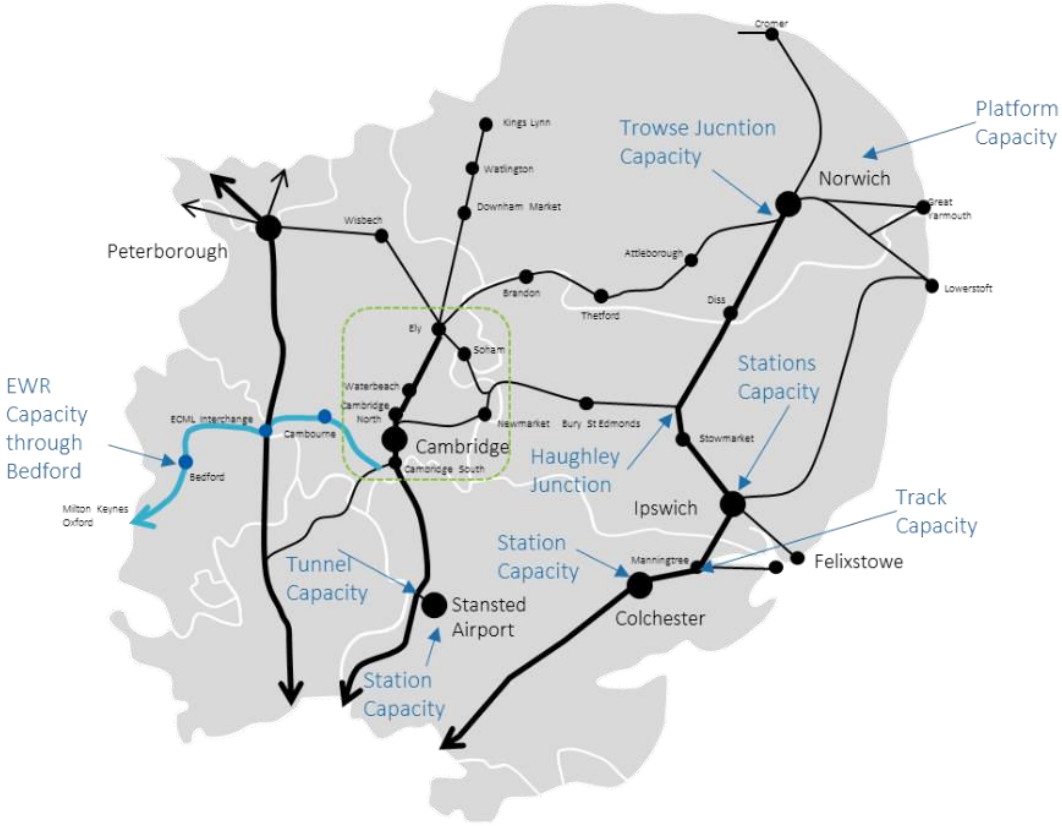
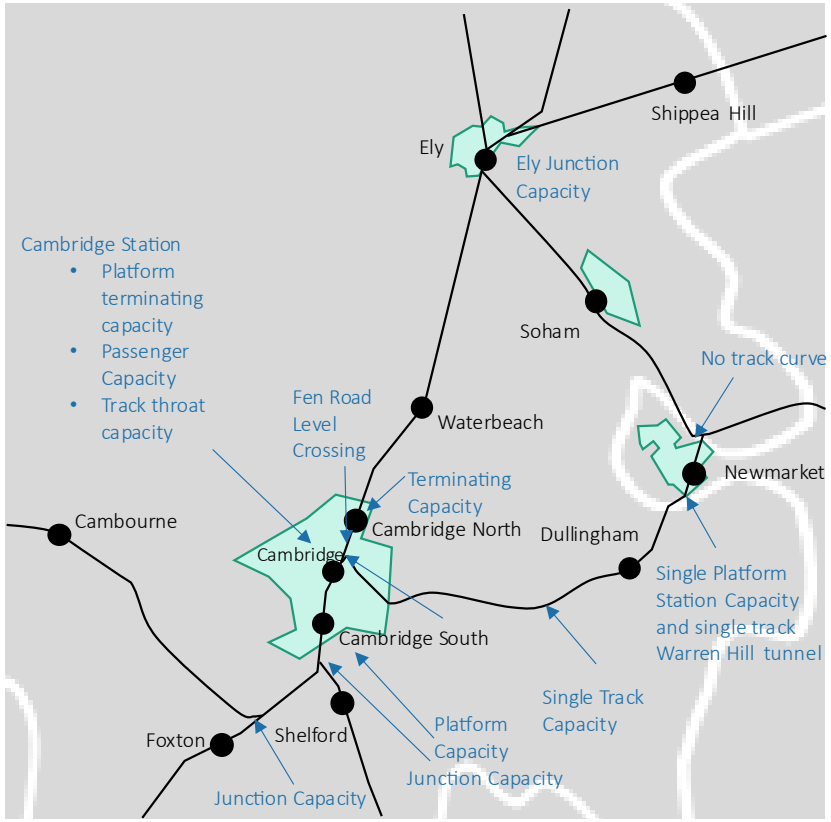


Figure 10: Cambridge area constraints



5.0 Key Constraints

5.2 Key Planning Constraints

Traditional approach to appraisal

Traditional rail forecasting, which focuses on elasticities and modelling, may not fully capture the benefits of improved rail frequency—particularly enhanced station access that strengthens onward connectivity. It also may not account for high-demand scenarios and emerging government policy, where new developments are designed to maximise public transport use, alongside significant job growth in Cambridge.

Assessment using a wider catchment, analysis of new station opportunities using approaches such as the Agent-Based Modelling developed for the region (BERTIE) may help capture some of these elements and the wider benefits, including a better understanding on transport inequality in the region.

Linking development and transport

There has been an ongoing challenge in the UK context of linking plans for development, which are delivered by local authorities, and the planning of the rail network, which is primarily undertaken at the national level. There is an opportunity to integrate these more effectively with the announcement of new Mayoral Authorities for Norfolk & Suffolk, and Greater Essex.

Funding challenges and opportunities

Outside London, there are limited examples of rail infrastructure being funded outside the traditional model of central government investment in Network Rail. This has largely been due to the smaller incremental land value for proximity to transport outside London. However, Cambridge is increasingly seeing high land values for developable land in the proximity of existing growth hubs where planning can be approved. Taking a line or corridor approach to uplift may also allow for further opportunities.

22: Estimates of station usage, ORR, https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage

5.0 Key Constraints

5.3 Case studies

Chiltern Evergreen

Project Evergreen was a phased infrastructure programme designed to enhance rail connectivity between London, Oxford, the Chilterns, and the Midlands. Delivered through a public-private partnership, the scheme has materially improved sustainable transport options for Oxford and the surrounding region.

Key outcomes include increased rail frequencies, faster journey times, and the introduction of new connections at strategic stations such as Bicester North and Oxford Parkway.

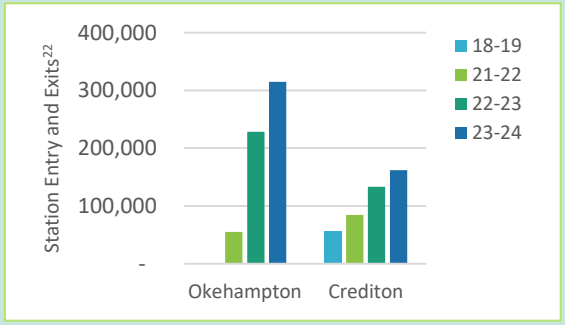
These improvements have contributed to a significant uplift in rail passenger demand, with Oxford Station recording nearly 9 million annual entries and exits prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The strengthened Chiltern services to the east have supported modal shift, reducing dependency on central subsidies and improving the financial sustainability of operations. Additionally, the new rail links have facilitated Bicester's emergence as a retail destination, with direct connections to London Marylebone and Oxford supporting growth in domestic tourism and regional economic development.

Dartmoor Line Reopening

The re-opening of the Dartmoor Line means Okehampton was re-connected to the National Rail network. Okehampton itself has seen increased demand, and there has been significant growth in demand from Crediton, where the service levels have doubled. Demand from Crediton to Exeter has increased significantly in response to new connections and higher frequency.

The development of the business case used bespoke analysis to produce a BCR based on local geography and station catchments. The line has also supported wider rail demand growth in the region, where most routes in Exeter operate a 2tph frequency, providing significant connectivity and capacity for commuting.



22: Estimates of station usage, ORR, https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage

6.0 Outputs and Potential Interventions

6.1 Desired Outputs

We have worked closely with stakeholders across the region to understand their aspirations and priorities, and to translate these into the outputs they wish to see a future railway deliver.

This is not expressed in terms of infrastructure "asks" – it aims instead to articulate the services a future railway can operate, regardless of the interventions that underpin these future operations.

An overview of the outputs we would like to see a future railway deliver is summarised to the right and are structured to align with the four key objectives discussed in the previous section.


Greater Anglia train (credit GA)

1. Enhance regional and local connectivity

- Extend East West Rail services beyond Cambridge, increase rail frequencies on local routes between Colchester, Ipswich, Cambridge and Norwich, and improve integration with other modes.
- Improve journey times and reduce waiting times between key regional towns and cities to drive further rail demand and grow the railway's mode share of trips across the region.

2. Strengthen cross-Cambridge connectivity

- Increase local rail service frequencies and invest in new stations in growing areas of Cambridge to significantly enhance direct rail connectivity within Cambridge, Cambridgeshire and nearby towns in Suffolk and Norfolk.
- Increase rail access to key employment hubs—such as the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, Cambridge Business Park, central Cambridge, and the proposed Cambridge Airport site—to reduce commuter reliance on cars.

3. Maximise freight capacity

- Deliver the planned Ely and Haughley freight capacity schemes and improve connections between the East West Rail Main Line, the West Coast Main Line, and key freight interchanges, to maximise freight capacity across the region.
- Improve rail freight infrastructure to support Freeport East and the region's wider logistics industry, support economic growth, and promote more sustainable freight movements.

4. Improve access to Stansted Airport

- Improve the frequency of services to Stansted Airport, especially to towns and cities in the East of England.

6.0 Outputs and Potential Interventions

6.2 Future Service Aspirations

We have provided further details about the types of services we believe a future railway could realistically deliver to achieve our desired outputs. These represent additional services beyond those that a future East West Railway is expected to deliver when it reaches Cambridge.

Rail freight train through Ipswich

1. Enhance regional and local connectivity

- Provide a minimum 2tph (direct) between Cambridge and Ipswich/Colchester
- Provide minimum 2tph (direct) between Cambridge and Norwich
- Provide a minimum 2tph (direct) between Cambridge and Milton Keynes.

2. Strengthen cross-Cambridge connectivity

- Increase rail access to East Cambridge through developing new stations between Cambridge and Newmarket.
- Provide direct services between Norwich/Ipswich and East West Rail, enabling a direct through service connecting to at least Beford and Bletchley/Milton Keynes.
- Provide 2-4tph between each Cambridge station and nearby commuter towns (including future Cambridge East station(s), Ely, Waterbeach, Royston, Newmarket, Stansted , Cambourne)

3. Maximise freight capacity

- Enable freight services from Felixstowe to access the East West Rail Main Line and on to the West Coast Main Line.
- Enable electrified freight services between Felixstowe, the East West Rail Main Line, and the West Coast Main Line.

4. Improve access to Stansted Airport

- Provide 3tph (direct) between Cambridge – Stansted with improved connections to Norwich.

6.0 Outputs and Potential Interventions

6.3 Potential Interventions

We have also worked with industry experts to understand which interventions would likely be needed to deliver the outputs specified above, assuming the delivery of East West Rail and the Ely and Haughley project. These are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Potential Interventions

Intervention	Summary	Benefits
Double Track the Cambridge – Newmarket Railway (including level crossing removal and improvements to Newmarket station, as required).	A short section of track near Cambridge is proposed for re-doubling to enable a 4tph East West Rail service. Extending this upgrade to Six Mile Bottom (around 6 miles) and potentially further to Newmarket (an additional 6 miles) would enhance connectivity.	Supports increased rail service frequencies for both passengers and potentially freight paths via Newmarket.
Develop Cambridge East Station(s).	There are no stations on the Cambridge to Newmarket line, potential for a single new station or multiple stations on the 10-mile section between Dullingham and Cambridge.	Unlocks significant rail passenger catchment on the route and potential development opportunities linked to Cambridge by direct public transport.
Reinstate the Soham Chord (and enhance Soham Station).	Reinstating a west to north curve east of Newmarket near Snailwell Road.	Enables direct passenger services between Cambridge and Soham via Newmarket.
Add capacity at Trowse Junction and Crossing on the approach to Norwich.	A solution to the challenge of capacity through the Trowse bridge section of track, which could include a new bridge or track changes.	Enables an increase in services into Norwich, supporting increased frequency between Cambridge and Norwich, and potentially Norwich and London along the Great Eastern Main Line.

6.0 Outputs and Potential Interventions

Table 1: Potential Interventions (continued)

Intervention	Summary	Benefits
Build a new chord at Bletchley (enabling Milton Keynes – East West Rail – Cambridge).	An east–north track curve between the Marston Vale Line and West Coast Mainline at Milton Keynes.	Directly links freight between the port of Felixstowe and key West Coast Main Line freight interchanges such as Daventry. Enables EWR services to serve Milton Keynes directly from the East.
Enhance Felixstowe Route Capacity.	The freight route between Felixstowe and the port is capacity-constrained due to single track sections.	Enables a further uplift in freight paths via either East West Rail route or via Peterborough.
Enhance capacity at Stansted Airport.	Stansted is currently constrained by a single-track section, and platform limitations preventing additional services.	Enables an additional Stansted service from the north, potentially increasing services to Norwich.
Electrify various sections of the railway.	The East West Rail network is proposed to be partially electrified, but additional non-electrified sections of track would impact operation, so additional electrification will be required.	Enables a net zero railway on East West Rail.

Note that these are potential interventions, they are not presented in a priority order and not all may form part of a future project.

7.0 Next Steps

7.1 Further Work

The East West Rail Eastern Board, Transport East and our stakeholders are **seeking investment to develop a comprehensive package of measures, and a viable, deliverable business case for the scheme**. This goes beyond traditional transport user benefits to demonstrate how rail will support delivery of sustainable development and economic growth in the East and Cambridge, exploring a wide range of options to support scheme funding. This work will likely include the following activities.

Land use strategy

- Assessing existing land use proposals.
- Identifying development opportunities that could be unlocked by rail enhancements, in line with the government's strategic place-based approach and aspirations for new towns.

Rail capacity and phasing

- Conducting a detailed rail capacity assessment.
- Evaluating capacity requirements and phasing options to ensure a logical, staged approach.
- Exploring opportunities to deliver early benefits ahead of East West Rail to Cambridge, helping to build rail demand.

Funding and financing options

- Developing funding proposals, including potential links to development and local revenue sources.

Business case development

- Develop a formal Strategic Outline Business Case.
- Using Transport East's Agent-Based Modelling approach to assess impacts on wider transport use, local transport co-benefits, and broader economic benefits.
- Evaluating phased development, third-party funding opportunities, and links to job growth, housing, and other developments.

Options assessment and appraisal

- Using capacity assessments and business case findings to optimise passenger and freight proposals.
- Developing a phasing plan, identifying ownership and sponsorship of interventions, and considering future service operations.

Stakeholder engagement

- Engaging with regional stakeholders and newly formed bodies as devolution opportunities progress.
- Collaborating with Strategic Authorities and the Combined Authority in Cambridge to align funding, delivery, and long-term planning.

Transport East will work with partners to assemble a funding package to develop a formal Strategic Outline Business Case for the EWR-Eastern section, to make the case for entry into the Government's investment programme

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