Transport East State of Rail Report

Executive Summary

February 2023

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Transport East is the Sub-national Transport Body for Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. The partnership provides a single voice for our councils, business leaders and partners on our region's transport strategy and strategic transport investment priorities, working in close collaboration with the government and the rest of the UK.

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Foreword

The rail network in the East provides essential sustainable connections between many of our biggest economic centres. Hundreds of thousands of journeys are undertaken every day, with branch lines linking coastal and rural communities with services and education opportunities as well business and commuter trips.

Rail connections in the East are also essential for the movement of goods both nationally and internationally, connecting our ports with distribution centres in the Midlands, North and around London. Freight trains carry goods that build homes and infrastructure, fuel vehicles, stock supermarket shelves, deliver your online order and even empty your bins.

Increasing the number of journeys and the amount of goods moved by rail is also crucial to meeting net zero targets, as rail journeys have much lower carbon emissions than road equivalents, even if undertaken by a diesel fuelled train.

Rail improvements are an important area of focus for our partnership. By their nature, they are strategic, cross-boundary and need a regional view to be effective. Investment needs to be considered along full routes, both in the Transport East region and beyond to see safe, reliable and efficient end-to-end journeys. There are several key projects already identified outside our boundary that are essential to delivering better transport within our region.

We are working with Network Rail, the Great British Railway Transition Team, Department for Transport, local authorities, political and industry stakeholders to enhance the evidence for and help effectively prioritise future rail investments to benefit the region. This report is the first phase in this work, setting out the current picture for rail across the East, identifying areas of weakness and where future improvements could be focused. It will inform the next phase of work – a comprehensive plan for future rail investment benefitting the East.

Economic strength of the East

The East is brimming with energy, enterprise and exports. It is a model of rapid regional growth: with an economy worth over £73bn to UK Plc, and 320,000 new homes and 165,000 new jobs planned in the next 15 years. The region is a crucial gateway between businesses in the Midlands, London and the North, and our international trading partners.

Our diverse and productive economy has proved resilient through recent challenges. We are future-focused, hosting world class life-sciences, clean energy and agri-tech sectors, with further strength in ports, logistics and transport, digital and creative industries, financial services and tourism. Our established partnerships between public bodies, private industry and academia are powering innovation across multiple sectors.

The region has huge potential, and with the right support, is perfectly positioned to lead the UK's accelerated green growth for both our own communities and supporting those across the UK. Our forecasts indicate that with the right investment, regional Gross Value Added could increase to £119bn by 2050, and productivity could increase by over 50%. Transport links, including rail connections, are a core constraint to delivering this.

The Transport East partnership's vision is a thriving economy with modern, efficient, safe and low-carbon transport networks, transforming how people travel and how goods are transported to drive forward a future of inclusive and sustainable growth for decades to come.

We are focused on four core priorities as set out in our Transport Strategy:

- Decarbonisation – transport creates 42% of carbon emissions in the East, the largest contributor and a much greater percentage than the national average of 28%. We are leading the way to decarbonise our networks as quickly as possible, in line with Government ambitions.

- Connecting our growing towns and cities - enabling the region to function as a coherent economy and boosting productivity. With 75 towns and cities, and strong links beyond our boundaries, the East's diverse economy relies on a web of connections. Our networks are essential to national and regional prosperity, supporting long-term sustainable growth, increasing people's prosperity and quality of life.

- Unlocking our international gateways - the East has more international gateways than any other region; 13 ports (including 2 Freeports) and 3 airports. Over 50% of the UK's containerised goods are moved through our region, to and from businesses across the Union. The East's global and national connections are more important than ever. Quick, reliable journeys add value throughout the supply chain.

- Energising coastal and rural communities – with 500 miles of coastline and 15% of the UK's farmland, our coastal and rural areas are national assets. Our expanding offshore wind farms power 1.8m homes and our tourism economy is worth £8.8bn pa. Improved connections to education, training, high-skilled jobs and new markets would unleash further green growth.

Rail improvements are essential to delivering all these priorities. While investment in new rolling stock brought into service by Greater Anglia has much improved the customer experience and improved reliability across the parts of the region they serve, infrastructure investment to increase the frequency and speed of journeys has not kept pace.

We seek to maximise the use of the existing network for both people and goods movement. Speeding up journey times, improving east-west connections in the region and north-south links in the south. Focused investment in a few key pinch points on the network could transform both passenger service frequencies, opening up access to high-skilled jobs, and dramatically increase freight movements from the Port of Felixstowe and Thames ports to distribution centres in the Midlands, North and around London.

Ultimately, we want rail in the East to be a reliable, frequent, affordable and low-carbon mode for moving both people and goods over longer distances. This report is the first step in understanding how we achieve that.

1 Introduction

Introduction

1.1 Following development of the Transport East Transport Strategy further work was identified to establish the role for rail in the region, and to develop a rail plan. Phase one of this work is to understand the current condition of rail services and infrastructure for the region. This 'State of Rail' report reviews existing evidence of the needs and plans for rail in the region. This will inform the scoping and development of a comprehensive Rail Plan. The Transport East Rail Plan will set out the future role for rail in the East and measures needed to achieve this.

1.2 There is an underlying concern amongst partners in the East of a historic lack of investment in the region. In response Transport East recognise the need to present a strong and consistent case for investment. A fundamental part of this is to ensure a collective understanding of where the region is currently and what the next steps are for rail. Alongside this there is a need to continue its partnership working with Network Rail and align Transport East with the emerging Great British Railways team. To address this need, this 'State of Rail' report has considered the following evidence:

- The proposals, ambitions and evidence for addressing constraints on the network serving the East, from both within and outside of the region
- Work by Network Rail, Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT), Department for Transport, neighbouring regions (in particular England's Economic Heartland, Transport for London and Midlands Connect) and rail related organisations
- Engagement with Network Rail and the passenger and freight rail operators, ports and airports,
- A 'lessons learnt' session with other Subnational Transport Bodies (STBs) to gather best practise on developing a rail plan

1.3 This evidence has been reviewed and used to identify constraints and opportunities on the rail network in the region, and to identify gaps in the evidence that will inform future work streams.

Process and Report Structure

1.4 To develop this 'State of Rail' report we have reviewed and consolidated a range of evidence on national, regional and local economic, development and transport objectives. Alongside this existing rail industry plans and strategies have also been considered. The full range of informing evidence is listed in an accompanying technical appendix. The key documents reviewed include:

- Transport East Transport Strategy (2022) & Regional Evidence Base (2019)
- Local authority Transport Plans and rail-specific documents, noting that these documents are in the process of being updated
- Anglia Route Study (2016), Great Eastern Main Line (GEML) Study (2019), West Anglia Main Line (WAML) Study (2021) and Essex Thameside Study (2020)
- Network Rail's East West Mainline Strategic Statement (2022)

- The East West Rail (EWR) Consortium's Eastern Section - Interim Strategic Outline Business Case(2021)

1.5 The full report is structured as follows:

- A summary of national and regional strategic objectives
- A section for each of Transport East's strategic corridors, setting out:
- The specific objectives for each across stakeholders
- The existing infrastructure and service pattern
- Industry plans for enhancements
- The gaps in outputs that would need to be addressed to deliver those objectives
- The overall conclusions and next steps

This executive summary version contains a summary of the overall conclusions and the specific analysis carried out for each corridor. It then sets out the next steps to be taken forward in developing the rail plan.

Rail Baseline and Emerging Gaps

1.6 Service frequencies in the region vary considerably. Main line corridors have high frequency services into London, particularly on the more suburban services which are heavily used for commuting. Other lines in the region - some of which serve large population and economic centres - tend to have a much less frequent service, with many stations only seeing 1 train an hour, or in some cases fewer.

1.7 Station to station rail journey times into London are often faster than road. Other routes between towns and cities are less competitive – for example Norwich to Cambridge is roughly the same journey time by rail or road. However, it should be noted that given the flexibility of using a car for the entire end to end journey and being able to travel exactly when you want, station to station journey times need to be quicker than the car to fully compete. A comparison of car and rail journey times is provided in the accompanying appendix and summarised in this report.

1.8 Rail journey times are much less competitive where there are lower frequency all-stations stopping services, and where interchange is required. Travelling from Colchester to Stansted, for example, is more than a 2-hour journey which requires an interchange at London Liverpool Street, whereas by road the travel time is under an hour.

1.9 Following the introduction of new rolling stock by Greater Anglia from 2019, passengers' perception of journey quality is, anecdotally, generally good. The new stock has greater seating capacity, air conditioning, and improved passenger information compared to the previous service, as well as better accessibility and accessible toilets.

1.10 Some corridors across the region are not well served by rail, as infrastructure is focused on journeys to and from London. This is particularly apparent in travel across Essex, and between Norwich and Kings Lynn. Some of the region's towns, such as Haverhill, are not connected to the rail network at all.

1.11 Despite much of the region's rail network comprising two track infrastructure, capacity and reliability of services within the region are limited by a high number of flat 'at grade' junctions[1]. Capacity and reliability are further affected on key east-west inter-regional passenger and freight routes, and many branch lines due to large single-track sections, which limits service frequency to hourly trains.

1.12 Line speeds are mixed; the Great Eastern Main Line has a general line speed of 100mph, matching the capability of the rolling stock, whereas other routes are slower. The West Anglia Main Line has some sections with a 90mph limit but much of the route is below that. Cross-country routes to Cambridge from Ipswich and Norwich are slower, at around 60-75 mph.

1.13 Mainline services are electrified – key gaps are the routes to Cambridge from Ipswich and Norwich, as well as the line from Ipswich to Felixstowe including the Bacon Factory Curve which enables freight to bypass Ipswich station. The latter has been identified by Network Rail as a priority to enable more use of electric freight.

1.14 Branch services in the region have been proposed for hydrogen operation in the Network Rail Traction Decarbonisation Strategy. Using these as a 'testbed' for the introduction of hydrogen transport systems could be an economic opportunity for the region, especially with Sizewell's potential capability for green hydrogen generation, but this is an emerging and unproven technology at present. The Harwich branch line was used for a battery train trial in 2015, but this was not permanently implemented.

1.15 Station capacity is a common issue across several routes in the region, both in terms of the number of available platforms and in safely moving passengers through the station. This is particularly acute at London terminals and interchange stations such as Fenchurch Street and Stratford, but capacity at Cambridge and Ipswich is also a limiting factor on the expansion of services.

1.16 There are a large number of level crossings in the region: these have implications for line speeds and for safety, depending on time. They can also be a constraint on service frequency, and upgrades or closures could be required to enable additional services. They can also act as a constraint on road connectivity where they introduce delays or create community severance.

1.17 Freight capacity has been expanded, particularly from Felixstowe to Ipswich, where there is now capacity for around 48 trains per day. However, due to capacity constraints elsewhere on the network, capacity from Felixstowe is limited to 38 trains a day[2]. Further capacity is therefore needed elsewhere on the network to allow rail freight to grow, particularly at Ely and Haughley Junctions which are well-known constraints on capacity for additional freight services; doubling the line at Soham would also optimise the capacity for freight through Ely.

[1] 'At-grade' junctions are those where crossing traffic uses the same infrastructure, requiring larger gaps between services for logistical and safety reasons. 'Grade separated' junctions use bridges or underpasses to separate traffic and reduce this problem.

[2] https://www.portoffelixstowe.co.uk/press/news-archive/38th-daily-rail-service-from-the-port-of-felixstowe/

1.18 Electrification of key gaps in the freight network would support the further decarbonisation of freight, along with further benefits such as reduced operating costs, the ability to handle heavier trains and possible journey time savings.

This gap analysis will inform the strategic evidence base for the development of an integrated rail network, meeting our Transport Strategy goals for sustainable end-to-end journeys on our key corridors and across the region.

Industry Plans

1.19 There are existing planned and committed works on routes in and serving the region, which will enhance services and capacity:

- A new station at Beaulieu Park near Chelmsford
- Overhead line renewal on the Great Eastern Main Line has been largely completed, with works on the Essex Thameside route between Fenchurch Street and Pitsea currently underway.
- Network Rail are progressing their planned level crossing closures in Essex and Suffolk, to reduce safety concerns and improve capacity.
- Short term station capacity measures are being developed for Stratford and Liverpool Street Stations.

1.20 There are also schemes which have been proposed but are not yet fully developed or funded.

1.21 The Eastern Section of East West Rail would connect the East to the planned new line between Oxford and Cambridge, providing greater connectivity to the Midlands and the South West. Network Rail's 2022 Strategic Statement on East West Rail, along with the EWR Consortium's Eastern Leg Strategic Outline Business case, set out the benefits of this onward connectivity, but detailed plans have not yet been developed.

1.22 Bow Junction, just west of Stratford, is highly complex and limits the use of train paths into London Liverpool Street. A scheme to improve this by remodelling the junction has been developed but not funded. The cost of delivery was estimated at up to £100m in 2015; it does not currently appear to be being taken forward, likely as a result of this high cost.

1.23 Planned works at Ely and Haughley Junctions have been developed but do not have confirmed funding. Without these schemes there is limited capacity to grow rail freight traffic or provide additional or faster passenger services. The longer decisions are delayed the longer it will be before enhancements can be delivered, with work at Ely already not currently scheduled to be complete until 2028/2029 Further schemes to provide additional capacity on the Great Eastern Main Line, including at Bow Junction, have not yet been confirmed, but are central to delivering hourly journey times from London Liverpool Street to Norwich of 90 minutes and 60 minutes to Ipswich.

Some of our immediate priorities for the region have been identified within the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline. If these schemes are delayed or cancelled there will be limited ability to make substantial service or capacity improvements on the main routes.

However, further improvements are needed to deliver all the region's frequency and journey time objectives.

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2 Summary and Conclusions

2.1 The report identifies gaps on the rail network in the East, both in terms of direct connectivity and the speed and quality of journeys.

2.2 In the broadest terms, rail enhancements are needed to deliver Transport East's strategic priorities:

- Service frequency to provide connectivity and passenger capacity
- Journey time and/or direct services to provide connectivity
- Addressing gaps in the network
- Service quality and performance to attract people to rail from road
- New stations to connect underserved locations and support new development
- Capacity and capability to handle freight
- Improvements to reduce carbon emission of rail

A key gap in the strategic evidence base is the specific outputs rail needs to deliver, at a regional and corridor level, to address these wider strategic objectives. For example, while improved frequency or reduced journey times are clearly desired outputs, it is not clear what the specific frequency or journey time should be on any given route to maximise benefits.

2.3 Establishing these specific outputs is critical to definitively establish the gap in what the rail service needs to deliver, and to identify the specific operational and/or infrastructure changes which would be needed to address this. Given likely financial constraints in the short to medium term, it would also enable the identification of routes where enhancements are a priority.

2.4 We have identified where the existing rail network constrains enhancing services across the region, as an initial stage to developing this work.

2.5 Across the network, bottlenecks on the key Felixstowe to Nuneaton freight route are restricting the use of capacity which was delivered by previous infrastructure schemes. The delivery of proposed schemes, and identification of where there may be further issues, is crucial to maximise the value of earlier investment.

2.6 The key findings on each corridor are summarised below, reflecting both challenges with the level of service provided and key infrastructure constraints.

Corridor Summaries

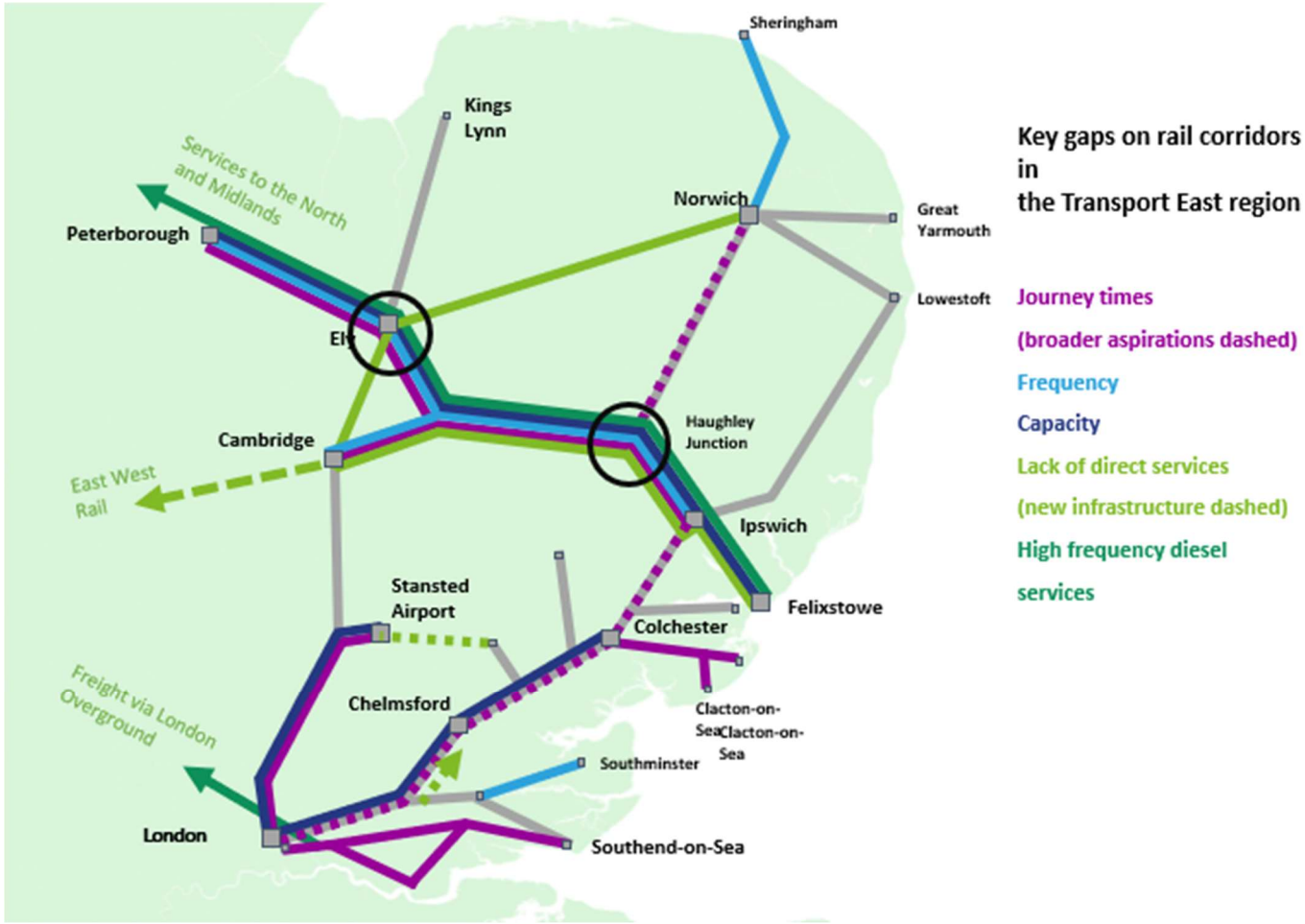

Fig 2.1 Key gaps on rail corridors in the Transport East region

London – Chelmsford - Colchester - Ipswich - Norwich - Suffolk Coast

Challenges

- Branch line services are often infrequent.
- Norwich in 90 and Ipswich in 60 minutes schemes have not been delivered.
- There is limited capacity to expand significant existing freight movements from Felixstowe and the Thames ports

Infrastructure

2.7 The double-track main line route is a key capacity constraint, preventing faster services overtaking slower services. Given the mix of fast passenger, semi-fast passenger and freight services using the route, the double-track route restricts the ability to run either faster and/or more frequent services.

2.8 The single-track nature of branch lines on the route, together with at-grade junctions, restrict the ability to operate more frequent services on these routes. Haughley Junction is a single line at-grade junction, placing significant constraints on capacity and the flexibility of paths.

2.9 Bow Junction near Stratford is highly complex, and is a critical constraint, with no ability to accommodate growth in the number of peak time services coming into Liverpool Street without remodelling.

Norfolk and Suffolk to Cambridge - Midlands – the North and South

Challenges

- Hourly services on routes connecting Ipswich/Norwich to Cambridge and 2-hourly services from Ipswich to Peterborough.
- Rail journey times are similar to car, making rail a less attractive option for end-to-end journeys
- New stations could be considered to serve developments to the east of Cambridge
- There is limited capacity to expand the significant existing freight movements from Felixstowe

Infrastructure

2.10 All trains (both passenger and freight) on this route are being operated by diesel traction, limiting capacity and rail's contribution to overall decarbonisation targets.

2.11 The single-track route between Chippenham Junction and Cambridge mean that it is not possible to enhance the frequency on this corridor. Further, Haughley Junction is a single line at-grade junction, placing significant constraints on capacity and the flexibility of paths on both this and the GEML routes. The single-track section between Soham and Ely route provides a further constraint on capacity and timetable flexibility for the enhancement of freight and passenger services in the corridor.

2.12 The ability to operate additional freight services from Felixstowe to Nuneaton and the Midlands via Ely is limited by the at-grade junctions connecting the Great Eastern Main Line and the

Felixstowe branch at Ipswich, and the single-track sections of the route. These remaining restrictions limit the full use of recent infrastructure improvements, and limit passenger services between Felixstowe Town and Ipswich, and Ipswich to Peterborough.

King's Lynn – Cambridge - Harlow – London

Challenges

- Hourly off-peak service to and from Kings Lynn
- Stansted Express services are operating at 2 tph, half their pre-Covid frequency
- Rail journey times are similar to car. Faster journeys on Stansted Express should be considered.

Infrastructure

2.13 The two-track section south of Broxbourne, where a busy timetable of stopping and non-stopping services shares the same infrastructure, is a severe constraint on capacity for the whole route.

2.14 The Northern section of Crossrail 2 was designed to alleviate this through providing additional tracks between Tottenham Hale and Broxbourne.

2.15 Delivery or further development of Crossrail 2 now appears extremely unlikely. Identifying and developing standalone options which would enable higher frequency, such as those suggested in the WAML Route Study, is crucial to delivering strategic ambitions for the route.

South Essex -London – Thurrock – Basildon – Southend

Challenges

- c2c routes to/from London Fenchurch Street have 2 tph off peak, compared with 3 tph from Greater Anglia between London Liverpool Street and Southend Victoria.
- The Southminster route has a train every 40 minutes
- Rail journey times are similar to car, making rail a less attractive option for end-to-end journeys.
- There is a proposed new station at Beam Park (in London) to serve new developments.
- There is limited capacity to expand the significant existing freight movements from the Thames ports

Infrastructure

2.16 The line speed along the corridor is 75mph, below the 100mph capability of the rolling stock, though given the stopping nature of many services on the route the maximum speed may not always be a constraint.

2.17 Freight services run from Tilbury and London Gateway ports on to the Midlands and North via the Gospel Oak to Barking line, which is shared with passenger services which acts as a constraint on capacity.

Stansted - Braintree - Colchester - Harwich and Clacton

Challenges

- The fundamental gap in this corridor is the lack of existing rail infrastructure to provide east west connectivity between from Colchester to Stansted
- Rail access to Stansted from the east is via London – this is an unattractive and high-cost option compared to road services by car or coach, taking at least twice as long

Infrastructure

2.18 The fundamental gaps the lack of existing rail services or infrastructure. Work will be needed to determine the best modal solution, before developing potential rail solutions.

Midlands - King's Lynn - Norwich – Great Yarmouth/Lowestoft

Challenges

- Hourly services on routes connecting Norwich to Peterborough, Sheringham and Great Yarmouth.
- There is no rail infrastructure to support direct east-west services to Kings Lynn
- Rail journey times are similar to car, though there are opportunities to improve journey times to be quicker than car and support economic growth

Infrastructure

2.19 There is very little rail infrastructure on this corridor; King's Lynn, Sheringham, Norwich and Great Yarmouth are connected to the rail network (on the WAML, GEML and Wherry Lines respectively) but these connections largely run North-South rather than East-West.

Conclusions

2.20 The rail plan will develop a strategic evidence base for the development of an integrated rail network, meeting our Transport Strategy goals for sustainable end-to-end journeys on our key corridors and across the region. It will identify a priority programme of strategic investment and make the case for addressing constraints that impact on the region's rail network. Delivering existing planned infrastructure remains the East region's short-term priority.

2.21 Thereare only two funded schemes currently being delivered on routes in and serving the East region, shown in green on Figure 2.2 and Table 2.1. Four schemes have been developed and could be delivered reasonably quickly with committed funding, shown in orange. However, delivery of these improvements would still leave substantial gaps where schemes need to be developed, shown in yellow.

2.22 Gaps highlighted in the State of Rail report and the proposed infrastructure improvements needed reflect existing priorities in the Transport East Strategy and other local and regional plans. These will be assessed in the development of the Rail Plan.

2.23 The WAML and GEML task forces have undertaken detailed assessments of their routes, these provide a key source of evidence to inform the Rail Plan.

Figure 2-2 Existing and Planned Infrastructure Projects

Table 2.1: schemes shown on map

Committed and funded	Developed Scheme – not funded	Identified gaps – scheme to be developed	Further regional aspirations
1. Beaulieu Park Station	1. Stratford Station capacity upgrade	1. Bow Junction remodelling	GEML Taskforce aspirations
2. Cambridge South Station	2. Haughley junction remodelling	2. Journey time improvement to Stansted Airport	WAML Taskforce aspirations
	3. Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Programme	3. Passing loops on GEML to support Norwich in 90	Transport East Rail Plan outcomes
	4. Trowse Bridge junction improvement	4. Double tracking Wickford to Southminster	
		5. Double tracking Braintree branch	
		6. EWR Eastern Leg	
		7. Double tracking or passing loop Newmarket - Cambridge	
		8. Double tracking Soham Branch	

Evidence gaps

2.24 As the full rail plan is developed it would be beneficial to seek further information on areas including:

(a) Network Rail's renewals and maintenance plans for the next control period (CP7, 2024-2029).

(b) Performance data for the Transport East routes.

(c) Identification areas of infrastructure which are frequently causing delays

(d) End-to-end journey data to understand issues such as 'rail heading' and latent demand

Short term priorities for Transport East

2.25 The key constraints to delivering major rail upgrades in the short term: funding sources are uncertain, the availability of funding is likely to be highly constrained, and the lead time between an initial plan and delivery is substantial. Some of these conditions may change in future, but the development of major projects is inevitably a substantial and long term exercise.

2.26 However, in parallel to major programmes such as East West Rail, there are other areas where improvements to the network could potentially be delivered in the shorter term. These fall into the following broad categories:

2.27 **Continuing to make the case for the delivery of planned and developed schemes which are ready for delivery,** with accepted business cases: these could be delivered reasonably quickly once funding is confirmed. Transport East should work with Network Rail to ensure these schemes, such as Ely, remain 'shovel ready' and can be delivered with minimal delay once funding is confirmed.

2.28 **Identifying opportunities to deliver network enhancements which could be delivered quickly.** This is likely to be schemes which are smaller (and therefore easier to fund) and more self-contained (and therefore less affected by uncertainty of major projects), such as the line speed improvements to Stansted suggested in the West Anglia Route Study and options proposed in the Suffolk Corridor Study. This could also include customer experience improvements such as investment in station facilities.

2.29 There are potential opportunities for minor enhancements to be delivered alongside planned maintenance and renewals: Network Rail should be encouraged to do this where possible, and to identify opportunities that third parties could fund, to deliver additional benefits for passengers and freight while minimising disruption.

2.30 **Beginning to develop the strategic case evidence for upgrading key routes and other potential schemes**. There are few projects in the Transport East region which are ready for substantive business case development at this point. However, much strategic and economic evidence is 'scheme agnostic': a strong and well evidenced narrative of the benefits which rail delivers to the region, and the potential gains from further improvements, could then be applied to a number of different schemes within the region. This can also

be used more reactively, to make the case for the region's needs to national projects and organisations such as Great British Railways.

2.31 The Rail Plan will ultimately set out what rail needs to deliver to achieve the East's wider objectives. It will provide the strategy for delivering rail infrastructure and services that will deliver the four strategic priorities for Transport East, as set out in the Transport Strategy.

2.32 Focusing on these initial areas will ensure Transport East can make the best case for investment that will deliver benefits for passengers and freight, while also setting out a broader plan for the future of rail in the region.

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