

The Future of Rail in the East



Transport East marked 200 years of rail at a dedicated event on 20 November 2025. The event brought together Network Rail, rail operators and industry, local government, business, community and political representatives to demonstrate why rail is crucial to growth and how renationalisation will play a role in this.

The event encouraged discussion on the strategic direction of rail in the East. As part of this discussion, Transport East hosted a roundtable exercise to gather insights and perspectives from attendees.

The discussion was structured around three core questions:

How can planning, housing, economic development, and other transport modes be better aligned with rail?

What practical steps would improve passenger and freight services in the short to medium term?

What are the top priorities for Transport East to present to government and regional mayors?

How can planning, housing, economic development, and other transport modes be better aligned with rail?



Strategic vision and funding

- Long-term planning frameworks (SDS, LTP)
- 10-year investment pipeline and priority prospectus
- Business cases to reflect wider national priorities



Housing and land use

- Housing developments centred around stations
- Integrate strong transport links into new developments
- Release public sector land for housing
- New developments based around under-used stations



Onward connections and active travel

- Increased provision for bikes on trains
- Improved active travel routes to stations
- Better coordination of trains with buses and park-and-ride services



Planning and governance

- Tighter collaboration between planning, highways authorities, and rail authorities
- Rail stakeholders to be a statutory consultee on planning applications
- Utilise opportunities arising from Local Government Reorganisation as an opportunity for joint officer teams and aligned strategies

What practical steps would improve passenger and freight in the short to medium term?



Passenger experience

- Increase train frequency (eg; Colchester - Clacton, Ipswich - Cambridge)
- Improved evening and Sunday services
- More accessible stations
- Reliable travel information
- Stations to be safe and welcoming hubs with increased staff presence



Freight solutions

- Electrify key freight routes (eg; Felixstowe - Ipswich)
- Passing loops and dual tracks to increase capacity
- Explore adding freight to passenger trains
- Innovative logistics (eg; drones)



Integration across modes

- Link bus and rail timetables.
- Roll out contactless ticketing and capped fares
- Promote PlusBus and similar schemes
- Promote community rail partnerships



Funding and delivery

- Streamline governance and planning
- Pilot innovative finance models such as developer contributions and private finance
- Reduce delivery costs
- Accelerate project timelines

What are your top 3 priorities for Transport East to take to government/mayors?



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- Fare simplification/reduction
- Improve East-West connectivity
- Link rail better with other modes such as bus and airports



- Secure funding for short, medium, and long-term projects
- Create a Regional Centre of Excellence for Railway Skills
- Consistent planning beyond mayoral, general election and local government cycles



Summary of Priorities

- **Unlock Ely/Haughley Junction and Soham curve**, repeatedly cited as the top priority for capacity and reliability, benefiting a wide area
- **Resolve pinch points and capacity constraints** to ease congestion and support growth for both passenger & freight services
- **Increase train frequency** for example half-hourly service to Clacton and more evening/Sunday services
- **Ensure full station accessibility** and provide reliable travel information
- **Create safe, welcoming stations** with increased staff presence
- **Roll out contactless ticketing and integrated capped fares** and promote PlusBus and similar schemes across train and bus
- **Link bus and rail timetables** for seamless journeys
- **Community rail partnerships** to strengthen local connectivity
- **Expand capacity** through passing loops and dual tracks
- **Electrify key freight routes** such as London Gateway corridors and Felixstowe to Ipswich
- **Explore innovative logistics solutions** including drones and shared passenger-freight services
- **Streamline governance and planning** to speed decision making and delivery, and reduce cost
- **Pilot innovative finance models**, including developer contributions, private investment, and land value capture
- **Secure long-term funding** for short, medium, and long-term projects
- **Embed long-term planning frameworks** (SDS, LTP) to ensure consistency beyond political cycles
- **Develop a Regional Centre of Excellence for Railway Skills** covering engineering, planning, and operations