

**Debate Pack**

9 June 2023

Number 2023/0127

By Dr Roger Tyers,  
Siobhan Wilson

---

# East West Rail, Bedford to Cambridge

<b>1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Parliamentary Material</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Press Articles</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Press Releases</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Further reading</b>	<b>15</b>

# 1 Background

A Westminster Hall debate has been scheduled for Tuesday 13 June on the East-West Rail, Bedford to Cambridge route. The debate will be opened by Richard Fuller MP.

## 1.1 Aims of East West Rail

The East West Rail programme aims to re-establish a direct rail link between Oxford and Cambridge. The [original 'Varsity Line' link between Oxford and Cambridge via Bicester and Bedford was closed](#) to passengers in 1968, and only the Bedford to Bletchley section remains as a branch line.<sup>1</sup>

The original plans for East West Rail were drawn up by the Department for Transport (DfT), Network Rail and the East West Rail Alliance. In 2017 the DfT launched the East West Rail company (EWR) to oversee the project.<sup>2</sup> Their [role is to plan the section of East West Rail](#) between Bletchley and Cambridge. They also oversee delivery of the section between Bicester and Bletchley – which is being delivered by the [East West Rail Alliance](#), a consortium of Network Rail, Atkins, Laing O'Rourke and VolkerRail.<sup>3</sup>

[EWR claim that East West Rail is](#) a “once in a generation opportunity to connect communities between Oxford and Cambridge with jobs, education and opportunities.”<sup>4</sup>

The [Chancellor confirmed funding for the project](#) when delivering his Autumn Statement on 17 November 2022:

I am happy to confirm that, as a result of the difficult decisions that we have taken today in the round, [East West Rail] will proceed. It will make an enormous difference to our country, because of the connectivity that it will provide between two of the greatest universities in the world. It is a very important step forward for the country.<sup>5</sup>

Following a non-statutory consultation in 2021, in May 2023 EWR made a major [route update announcement](#), as displayed in the map below.

---

<sup>1</sup> Railway News, [Some Potential Winners of 'Reversing Beeching'](#), 12 July 2022

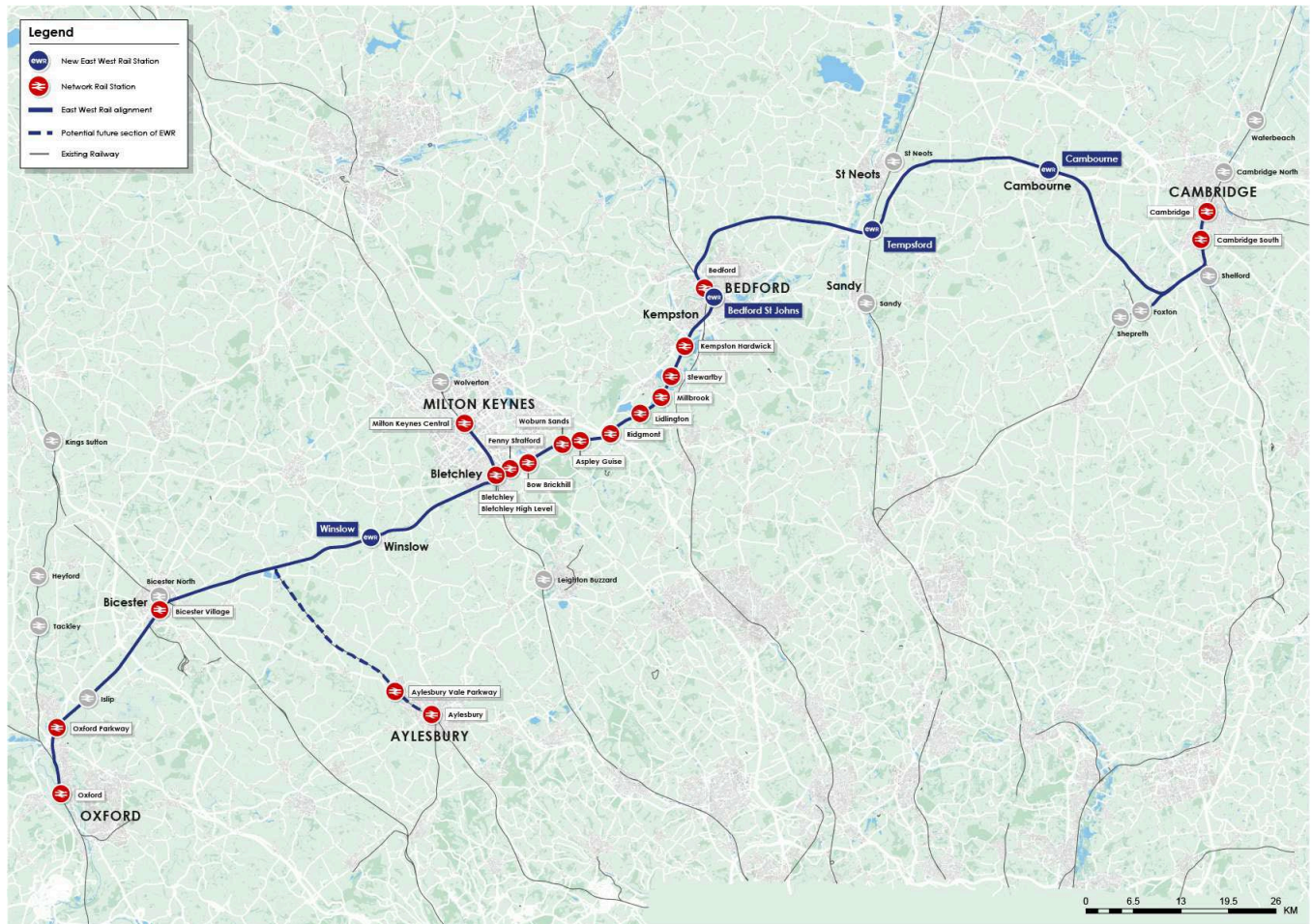
<sup>2</sup> East West Rail Partnership, [Transport Secretary officially launches East West Railway Company at Bletchley Park](#), 14 December 2017

<sup>3</sup> East West Rail, [Our Company](#) [Accessed 9 June 2023]

<sup>4</sup> East West Rail, [Benefits of East West Rail](#)[Accessed 9 June 2023]

<sup>5</sup> [HC Deb 17 November 2022 c 875](#)

### East West Rail proposed route, May 2023



East West Rail Company, Route Update [Accessed 9 June 2023]

On 5 June 2023 the Secretary of State for Transport, Mark Harper, made a written statement to Parliament regarding the EWR route announcement, and said the following proposals would be taken forward for further development:

- confirming a preferred route alignment between Bedford and Cambridge, including new stations which would serve Tempsford and Camboorne, and a southern approach to Cambridge
- revised service frequencies along the line of route to best meet demand
- six-tracking of the Midland Mainline at Bedford to boost capacity and improve resilience
- relocation of Bedford St. John's station to better serve Bedford Hospital
- potential level crossing changes and closures which account for increased EWR traffic but preserve public access

- the launch of a ‘[need to sell](#)’ property support scheme to help affected homeowners.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2

### Progress and next steps

Services on East West Rail will be introduced over [three connection stages](#):

- Connection Stage 1: East West Rail services will run from Oxford to Bletchley/Milton Keynes.
- Connection Stage 2: Services will then extend from Oxford to Bedford.
- Connection Stage 3: This stage completes the full East West Rail connection, and will see services run from Oxford to Cambridge via Bedford and Bletchley.<sup>7</sup>

Connection Stage 1 is under construction. Entry into service for CS1 is [planned](#) for December 2024 to September 2025. In response to a written PQ about whether the commitment to build East-West Rail includes building connection stages 2 and 3, the Rail Minister [responded](#) on 22 November:

Connection Stage 2 (Bletchley to Bedford) and Connection Stage 3 (Bedford to Cambridge) of East West Rail are at development stage, and options for the sections were consulted on as part of a wide-ranging non-statutory consultation from March-June 2021. An update on the project will be provided in due course. As a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), EWR Co. is planning to submit a Development Consent Order (DCO) to secure the relevant planning and permitted development powers.<sup>8</sup>

In his written statement of June 2023, Transport Secretary said that a statutory consultation would take place in 2024, ahead of an application for a development consent order (DCO).<sup>9</sup> The Library briefing on [Planning for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects](#) has more information on DCOs.

## 1.3

### Route concerns and electrification

EWR’s proposed route from Bedford to Cambridge, as announced in May 2023, has been controversial because of the environmental impact it may have on parts of rural North Bedfordshire. The [Mayor of Bedford Brough](#)

---

<sup>6</sup> DfT, [Written statement to Parliament - East West Rail: Oxford and Cambridge route update](#), 5 June 2023

<sup>7</sup> East West Rail Company, [Project Overview](#) [Accessed 9 June 2023]

<sup>8</sup> PQ 89865 [[On East West Rail Line](#)], Answered 9 June 2023

<sup>9</sup> DfT, [Written statement to Parliament - East West Rail: Oxford and Cambridge route update](#), 5 June 2023

[Council](#), the local MP for North East Bedfordshire [Richard Fuller](#), and local [campaign groups](#) have all called for the route to be reconsidered.<sup>10</sup>

EWR have addressed some of these concerns and provided justifications for some of the specific route decisions on their route – including through a video Q+A with their Chief Executive Beth West, on their [Route Update page](#).<sup>11</sup>

There has also been concern that the East West rail line will not initially be electrified.<sup>12</sup> EWR has said that this decision has been made to speed up the initial delivery of the line, and they aim for the line to be fully electrified by the time the whole route to Cambridge is completed. In [March 2020, Simon Blanchflower, Chief Executive at EWR said](#):

Local communities have told us they would like us to get on and give them the connectivity they so desperately need, and they also want us to deliver a railway that cares for the environment.

This is why it was important for us to opt for an interim solution that will help us to accelerate delivery of this section of East West Rail while allowing us to explore in detail a wider range of green sustainable technologies.

Our aim is to be a net zero carbon railway by the time passenger services run all the way along the East West Rail line from Oxford to Cambridge, and a short-term approach at this stage in the project is the best way to help achieve this aim.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Bedford Brough Council Press Release, [Proposed East West Railway](#), 26 May 2023; Richard Fuller MP, [East West Rail](#), 26 May 2023; Bedford For a Re Consultation (BFARe) Press Release, [Route E is the Worst Choice to Serve Our Community](#), May 26, 2023

<sup>11</sup> East West Rail Company, [Route Update](#) [Accessed 9 June 2023]

<sup>12</sup> EDM 1695 of 2019-21 [Electrification of East West Rail](#), tabled on 24 March 2021

<sup>13</sup> East West Rail Company, [East West Railway Company invites bids for short-term rolling stock contract as it goes shopping for trains](#), 9 March 2020

## 2 Parliamentary Material

### 2.1 Written Statements

#### East West Rail: Route Announcement Update

5 June 2023 | UIN HCWS816

Secretary of State for Transport, Mark Harper MP

East West Rail offers a huge opportunity to unlock productivity in the Oxford-Cambridge region, boosting economic growth both locally and nationally through improved connectivity and access to jobs, education and training, housing, and leisure. In particular, the region plays host to research and development hubs across a variety of highly skilled and highly productive sectors such as life sciences research at the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. East West Rail will allow us to connect these vital sites with a much greater talent pool and allow the region to retain and grow its reputation globally. The first stage of the railway is currently in delivery and services will begin to run from 2025.

The Autumn Statement in November 2022 recommitted to the Government's transformative growth plans for our railways, including the intention to deliver the remainder of the East West Rail project between Bletchley and Cambridge. The Budget delivered by this government in March 2023 further underlined the Government's commitment to the project, setting out plans for a route update announcement and the next steps for the project in May 2023.

This announcement has been made and confirms the proposals which will be taken forward for further development. These include:

- Confirming a preferred route alignment between Bedford and Cambridge, including new stations which would serve Tempsford and Cambourne, and a southern approach to Cambridge.
- Revised service frequencies along the line of route to best meet demand.
- Six-tracking of the Midland Mainline at Bedford to boost capacity and improve resilience.
- Relocation of Bedford St. John's station to better serve Bedford Hospital.
- Potential level crossing changes and closures which account for increased EWR traffic but preserve public access.
- The launch of a 'Need to Sell' property support scheme to help affected homeowners.

The East West Rail Company will consult further on its proposals as part of a statutory consultation ahead of an application for a Development Consent Order. This consultation is due to take place in 2024.

Taking forward these next steps for the East West Rail scheme exemplifies this Government's commitment to long-term economic growth supported by improved connectivity, and the access to the skills, education and jobs needed to deliver national growth and individual prosperity.

## 2.2

## PQs

### Engagements

7 June 2023 | 733 c732

**Asked by: Mohammad Yasin**

The East West Rail announcement proposes a six-track route that will impact at least 66 properties in Bedford, including the demolition of 37 homes. Will the Deputy Prime Minister tell me why residents' concerns have been ignored? Will he give me a commitment today that, if the majority of residents are against the plan in the statutory consultation, his Government will not approve the proposal?

**Answered by: Oliver Dowden | Department: Cabinet Office**

Of course, we will engage with local communities, but I find it rather odd that the Labour party has been saying for the past few months that it wants to build more housing and more infrastructure and, as soon as there is a proposal to do so, which will enormously enrich the area, it is being opposed.

### Topical Questions

9 May 2023 | 732 c199

**Asked by: Richard Fuller**

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury knows that the long hidden business case for East West Rail represents a bad deal for taxpayers, and that MPs from across Parliament have written about greener, better alternatives for growth in the Ox-Cam arc. He will know that on Thursday the Conservatives won the mayoralty in Bedford for the first time because the Conservative candidate, Tom Wootton, called for a review of Bedford Council's working and its support for East West Rail. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss that further urgently?

**Answered by: John Glen | Department: Treasury**

I would be happy to meet my hon. Friend, and congratulate the Mayor of his home town of Bedford for the success he had last week.

### Business of the House

30 Mar 2023 | 730 c1167

**Asked by: Mohammad Yasin**

In Transport questions on 2 March, I raised a question with the Rail Minister about an issue of great importance to my constituents, who are trapped in homes they urgently need to sell but cannot because they are on or near the current line of route for East West Rail. In response to my question, the Minister offered a meeting. Unfortunately, I have had no response to a request I made the same day by email. As the recess is about to start, I am unlikely to be granted a meeting before mid-April, if I am lucky, which is a month and a half after making my request. Will the Leader of the House advise me how long I am expected to wait to hear back from the Minister, who is ignoring my desperate constituents?

**Answered by: Penny Mordaunt | Department: Office of the Leader of the House of Commons**

I am sorry to hear that and I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue. I would be happy to talk to the Department and, unless he needs a physical meeting, I am sure a telephone call or a Teams meeting with the Minister could be arranged in a much shorter space of time. I will certainly make those representations to the Minister.

**Engagements**

**29 Mar 2023 | 730 cc1016-1128**

**Asked by: Richard Fuller**

Will the Government require that East West Rail publishes a full business case before the allocation of any more taxpayers' money to the project?

**Answered by: Dominic Raab**

**Department: Cabinet Office**

This is a hugely important project with all sorts of opportunities, such as jobs and education, and with a projected increase in economic output of over £100 billion by 2050. My hon. Friend is right that the project needs transparency and scrutiny, and the first stage is already under construction on time and under budget. I am told that the subsequent stages will go through full and transparent scrutiny as part of the planning process.

**Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Growth Arc: National Infrastructure Commission Report**

**27 Mar 2023 | 730 c636**

**Asked by Richard Fuller**

Over the past decade, housing growth in Bedfordshire has been two and a half times the national average, with acute pressures on our GPs, dentists and other local services. Today's progress review by the National Infrastructure Commission confirmed what many of us have always known—namely, that East West Rail is an excuse for even greater housing development in Bedfordshire and the region. Will my hon. Friend please meet me and ensure that we do not progress housing growth in the Ox-Cam arc before the shortages in services are settled?



**Answering member: Rachel Maclean | Department: Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**

I thank my hon. Friend for raising the concerns of his constituents, which are shared by many communities. We know how important it is that infrastructure is delivered alongside housing growth. That is why, through the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, we will require local authorities to produce an infrastructure strategy as part of the infrastructure levy. I would be delighted to meet my hon. Friend to discuss it further.

### East West Rail Line

**10 October 2022 | UIN HL2374**

**Asked by: Baroness Randerson**

To ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority awarding the Connection Stages 2 and 3 project of East West Rail an "appears to be unachievable" rating in its Annual Report on Major Projects 2021–22, published in July.

**Answered by: Baroness Vere of Norbiton | Department: Transport**

The DfT notes the red assessment provided by the IPA. The project is in the concept and design phase. Work continues to refine delivery strategies and the scope, which is normal for a large and complex project.

### East West Rail Consultation

**24 June 2021 | 697 cc996-7**

**Asked by: Mohammad Yasin**

The 2019 East West Rail consultation and the 2020 route announcement made no mention that six tracks would be needed at Bedford Midland station or of the consequential demolition in the Poets area of my constituency. I urge the Minister to please consider the many representations on this matter from members of the public, rail groups and local councillors, and Bedford Borough Council's SLC Rail report showing a credible four-track option that would avoid the loss of homes.

**Answered by: Chris Heaton-Harris | Department: Transport**

I assure the hon. Gentleman that this is a non-statutory consultation. It is a consultation where we really do want to listen to the opinions of people affected across the route of East West Rail, and we will most certainly take into account his representations here today.

**Asked by: Richard Fuller**

Many of my constituents are appalled at the environmental damage that the East West Rail route will cause across Bedfordshire, and baffled that this 21st-century project will use a 19th-century fuel. Will my hon. Friend please look

again at the environmental considerations that East West Rail has undertaken and bring them up to scratch?

**Answered by: Chris Heaton-Harris | Department: Transport**

I thank my hon. Friend for the pragmatic and dedicated campaign that he is running on behalf of his constituents and others on this issue. I know that he has encouraged his constituents to have their say in the recent consultation, and I thank him for that too. We are committed to decarbonising our railways, and East West Rail will continue to assess the potential environmental effects as part of the route alignment development work. An environmental impact assessment will be undertaken and an environmental statement submitted when the development consent order application is made to the Planning Inspectorate.

**[Railway Industry Association Report](#)**

**18 May 2021 | 812 c437**

**Asked by: Lord Snape**

The Minister will be familiar with the east-west railway line connecting our two main varsity towns. She will also be familiar with the fact that the design was for a fully electrified line, since when the Government have changed that to a non-electrified line, with electrical specification left for the future and the line being built by a private sector company. Are we really going to decarbonise our transport system by adopting this temporary and, in the view of many of us, expensive alternative, rather than going ahead with building the line as it was originally designed?

**Answering member: Baroness Vere of Norbiton | Department: Transport**

I reassure the noble Lord that it is our aim to deliver a net-zero carbon railway. East West Rail is a very important part of the development of the Ox-Cam Arc, which will support housing and jobs. Any decision to grant development consent for the project will need to demonstrate that it would not have a material impact on the ability of the Government to meet their carbon reduction targets. However, EWR Co, the company responsible for it, continues to examine decarbonisation options, including full electrification along the whole route, as well as various options for partial electrification using battery or electric hybrid rolling stock and other sustainable rolling stock options.

## 2.3

## Debates

**[East West Rail Route Consultation: North East Bedfordshire](#)**

28 June 2021 | House of Commons | 698 cc91-100

## House Building Targets: North East Bedfordshire

9 June 2021 | Westminster Hall | 696 cc387-395WH

## 2.4

## Early Day Motions

### ELECTRIFICATION OF EAST-WEST RAIL

**EDM 1695 (session 2019-21)**

**24 March 2021**

**Layla Moran MP**

That this House notes that East-West Rail will link Oxford, Milton Keynes, Bedford and Cambridge by rail; acknowledges the completion of the first phase between Oxford and Bicester and announced funding for phase 2 from Bicester to Bletchley; is concerned that the Government does not plan for the route to be electrified and that other benefits of the scheme, including important rail links such as the Aylesbury Spur, have been put on hold; urges the Government to use the money that was allocated to the now-cancelled Oxford-Cambridge Expressway to enhance plans for East-West rail; calls on the Government to continue with the whole of the East-West Rail project and to design it to be as environmentally sustainable as possible from the start; further calls on the Government to fully fund and electrify East-West Rail.

## 3

## Press Articles

[East-West Rail will damage wildlife says Comberton farmer](#)

BBC News

7 June 2023

[Cambridge Approaches: 'East West Rail Company is flogging a dead horse'](#)

Cambridge Independent

2 June 2023

[East West Rail route will cause Bedford a "lifetime of pollution, noise and increased traffic," says campaign group](#)

Bedford Today

30 May 2023

[East West Rail: Updated southern approach into Cambridge with new Cambourne station unveiled](#)

Cambridge Independent

26 May 2023

[£5M allocation for East West Rail ground investigation points to project progress](#)

New Civil Engineer

19 May 2023

[East West Rail asked Cambridgeshire about its new rail line plans and residents told them straight](#)

Cambridgeshire Live

18 May 2023

[East-West Rail route into Cambridge slammed as 'unsuitable' as decision yet to be made on new railway line](#)

Cambridgeshire Live

14 March 2023

[East West Rail railway line between Cambridge and Bedford has to 'fully stack up' - Mark Harper says](#)

Cambridgeshire Live

6 March 2023

[East-West Rail: Campaigners need decision from new government](#)

BBC News

6 September 2022

[East-West Rail: A simple guide to the Cambridge-Oxford project](#)

BBC News

17 May 2021

## 4

## Press Releases

### [Work begins on Cambridge's new rail station](#)

Department for Transport

5 June 2023

### [East West Rail: new proposals bring Oxford-Cambridge rail service one step closer](#)

EWR Co

26 May 2023

### [Proposed East West Railway](#)

Bedford Borough Council

26 May 2023

Today (Friday) the government has announced an update on the proposed East West Railway. This is the first time that Bedford Borough Council has seen this update and we will now need to review the details of the proposals to better understand the implications for the people of Bedford Borough.

The East West Rail Company (EWR) undertook a consultation on its proposals for the route its railway will take through Bedford Borough in 2021. In its response to the 2021 consultation, the Council looked for an outcome that would capitalise upon the opportunities presented by EWR, whilst minimising potential environmental and community disruption dis-benefits.

Bedford Borough Council will now undertake a detailed review of the updated proposals to see how the potential benefits and dis-benefits have been affected by the chosen route. However, the Council has stated its disappointment that EWR was unable to provide a map that clearly details the selected route and the true extent of its impact.

Letters will be sent today (Friday) by EWR to local residents in the Poets area of Bedford, updating them on the details of this decision. The EWR engagement team will also be hosting a 'drop-in' on 13th June at Bedford Heights. More details on how to book a slot at the event or a video call with the EWR land team are expected to be shared shortly.

The Council understands that the next stage of the project will be a statutory consultation on this announcement, which will not start until 2024. The intervening period will be used to understand the updated proposals and their impacts, test the evidence presented by EWR, and confirm the approach to be taken by the Council.

Mayor Tom Wootton said, "I'm appalled at the decision taken by East West Rail and the impact that it's going to have on residents in Bedford town and the northern villages. Following the announcement, I will be working tirelessly to urge EWR to reconsider their decision and take into account the people

that they are affecting. With a public consultation on the way, I pledge to use my voice to make sure that the people of our great borough are heard and accounted for.

**BFARe Response to EWR Route Alignment Announcement**

Bedford for A Reconsultation (BFARe)

26 May 2023

**Richard meets with Chief Secretary to the Treasury to discuss East West Rail alternatives to deliver growth**

Richard Fuller MP

12 May 2023

**Opposition to East West Rail Northern Route**

Lucy Frazer MP

8 March 2023

Whilst public transport links are vital for the prosperity of our local area, the proposed northern route into Cambridge for the final phase of East West Rail is unsuitable for our area.

I support a southern route and the benefits that it would bring -

- Direct connectivity to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus
- The ability for any extension eastwards in the future
- Connectivity for any potential Cambridge East site in the future

It is clear that it would support our booming science sector and open the door to potential rail expansion in the future, enabling Cambridgeshire and the UK to benefit from the economic benefits it could bring.

I have made my position clear to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Transport and I look forward to hearing from them.

## 5

# Further reading

## Websites

[East West Rail](#)

## Blog Posts

[East-West Rail](#)

Antony Browne MP

(Accessed 8 June 2023)

## Reports

[East West Rail Route Update Report](#) [PDF]

EWRCo

May 2023

## Factsheets

[Benefits of East West Rail](#) [PDF]

EWRCo

(Accessed 9 June 2023)

## Committee correspondence

[Correspondence from the Secretary of State for Transport, relating to update on East-West route, dated 26 May 2023](#)

Transport Committee

26 May 2023

## 5.1

# Examples of local campaign groups

[Bedford for A Reconsultation \(BFARe\)](#)

(Accessed 9 June 2023)

[The Stop the Arc Group](#)

(Accessed 9 June 2023)

[Cambridge Approaches](#)

(Accessed 9 June 2023)

[Protect Poets - Save Our Homes!](#)

(Accessed 9 June 2023)

### Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

### Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact [hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk](mailto:hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk) or visit [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources) for more information.

### Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk). If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk).

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe) or scan the code below:



 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)