



Press Release

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East West Rail gets a stage nearer

The East West Rail Consortium today releases the latest report demonstrating there is a strong case for upgrading the railway between Oxford and Milton Keynes.

A rail service between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes could also be possible, and trains could be running on both routes as early as 2012.

These routes form part of the western section of the overall East West Rail scheme, which envisages an orbital rail route linking Swindon, Oxford and the Thames Valley with Cambridge and East Anglia, serving Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and Bedford.

The report shows it is a credible, deliverable and affordable scheme, and is the culmination of a years work, costing £300,000.

The report was funded jointly by the Consortium, four local authorities (Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes), South East England Regional Assembly (the Assembly), South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), Milton Keynes Partnership, Aylesbury Vale Advantage and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Today's report builds on an earlier planning and transport study published in April 2006, and has taken the project to the second stage in the development process used for rail projects.

This study looked at the engineering and operational needs, funding and delivery. The key findings are:

- Two trains each hour between Oxford and Milton Keynes, and between Aylesbury and Milton Keynes could be achieved;
- The cost of building the railway between Oxford and Milton Keynes is between £100 and £135 million;
- There is a strong business and operating case for an Oxford to Milton Keynes service, and a case also exists for an Aylesbury to Milton Keynes service;

- The scheme is fundable, with developer funding of around £100 million thought to be available through a supplementary tariff or planning gain supplement;
- East West Rail can support the housing and economic aspirations of local and regional authorities along the western corridor; improving connectivity between the growth points in the region.
- The upgraded railway can be built easily and quickly outside the normal railway environment at a much lower cost than normal;
- East West Rail creates a strategic piece of rail infrastructure that could be used by long distance passenger and freight services.

The work was managed by Steer Davies Gleave with specialist input from John Laing Rail, Llewelyn Davies Yeang and Knight Frank.

The western section of East West Rail is shown as a priority in the draft South East Plan, and is supported in regional, sub regional and local planning and economic policies.

The Consortium's Chairman, Neil Gibson said: "The release of this report shows for the first time that there is a credible and achievable scheme for the western section of East West Rail. We will continue to work with our partners in local, regional and national government, and the rail industry to further develop the scheme. The next stage of development work will define the scheme and establish a clear delivery and funding framework."

The report has already been well-received by the Regional Transport Board and the South East Plan Examination in Public. Commenting on this, Councillor Nick Skellett, Chairman of the Transport Board and member of the Assembly, said "The Board supports the restoration of the East West Rail link as an essential part of the infrastructure required to support delivery of growth in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. It will also improve connectivity with other regions. The Board will continue to support the proposal and will work with the Consortium to ensure that this vital link is delivered at the earliest opportunity."

The results of the study will now be assessed. The Consortium will be putting plans together that take the project through the next development stages, and ultimately this will define what is finally built and operated.

The full Western Section Study Report and more details of the project can be found on the Consortium's website at www.eastwestrail.org.uk

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For more information please contact one of our Communications Team (Richard Ward, Senior Transport Planner, Buckinghamshire County Council on 01296 382964 or Adrian Saunders, Rail Development Officer, Oxfordshire County Council on 01865 815080).