

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
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EEH Business Unit
c/o Buckinghamshire Council
Walton Street
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Date: 17 December 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

On behalf of the Strategic Transport Leadership Board, the group of leaders and members who form the EEH partnership, we write to you to confirm our total commitment and stress the significance of East West Rail to the region and the United Kingdom as a whole.

A National Priority

The delivery of East West Rail was recognised by the National Infrastructure Commission in 2017 as a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to secure the area's future success, crucially expanding the labour markets of key towns and cities across the region and connecting some of the UK's most prominent economic assets and clusters.

The NIC also recognised the vital role East West Rail has in developing a strategic transport corridor connecting East Anglia to the west of England and south Wales and beyond that: unlocking many new east west journeys that, until East West Rail is built, are only possible with an interchange through London. It also highlighted the need for an East West Rail connection to Aylesbury, which would enable significant improvements to north-south connectivity by unlocking the strategic opportunity for journeys between Northamptonshire, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, the new Old Oak Common HS2 hub and London.

The 'Union Connectivity Review', published by government in November 2021, further reinforced the role both of East West Rail as a piece of infrastructure of national significance, and the 'fast growth' towns and cities in our region that it will serve, which 'disproportionately' contribute to the Treasury.

A Regional Priority

Delivery of East West Rail in full remains the single biggest connectivity priority for the region. The Heartland has some of the highest growth areas in the country – both economic and housing. The region is a net contributor to the UK economy, leveraging funds that benefit communities and businesses across the country. EEH leaders remain committed to supporting and enabling our region's growth capabilities.

In the last few years, the government's Oxford-Cambridge Arc initiative has reiterated the importance of East West Rail. However, the need for an east west rail connection has been a priority, driven by local leaders, since 1995 with the creation of the East West Rail Consortium. It is a vital scheme in its own right.

In November 2017, the government announced that it would deliver East West Rail between Oxford and Cambridge, including the link to Aylesbury, in full during this decade. This commitment, along with the inclusion of East West Rail in the 2020 National Infrastructure Strategy, has allowed the region to set out ambitious economic and housing growth plans with confidence.

Many locally-led partnerships across the region, driven by both the private and public sectors, are also planning how they fully lever the opportunities that the scheme will unlock. The region's businesses, science and technology clusters, and universities are investing in the region on the basis of East West Rail's delivery. The plans and strategies of our local authorities have been produced with East West Rail at their centre.

In February 2021, England's Economic Heartland published its regional transport strategy. The strategy sets out in more detail why East West Rail is fundamental to the long-term success of our region and demonstrated how it will form the basis of our transport system in the future.

In this regard we are delighted that construction work is well underway on the section between Bicester and Bletchley, which is due to be operational by 2025 under the direction of the East West Railway Company. We must also see the remainder of the scheme from Bletchley to Cambridge, as well as connections to Aylesbury, delivered as soon as possible. It is only with this firm commitment to delivery that we will be able to fully realise East West Rail's transformational potential and maximise the government's return on investment.

East West Rail is enabling our local planning authorities to identify new sites that are capable of delivering sustainable, transit-led housing and economic development. A number of our local planning authorities are or will soon begin to consider the next iterations of their local plans. For example, 'Bedford's Local Plan 2040, Strategy Options and Draft Policies Consultation' document, includes a substantial increase to the numbers of houses to be delivered each year compared to the current local plan. However, it makes clear that it is delivery of East West Rail that is enabling these higher numbers to be achieved.

By investing in East West Rail, we reduce the pressure on our already constrained road network: a network that could not sustain the level of housing and economic growth planned within the region. EEH's evidence base demonstrates the high levels of congestion which our residents and businesses already suffer on our roads – congestion which is a recognised barrier to growth as well as often leading to unacceptably poor air quality levels.

At a time when Britain is leading the world with its commitment to decarbonisation, East West Rail has an important role in cutting emissions in accordance with the government's plans for net zero. The Heartland accounts for 10% of the UK's carbon emissions from surface transport. Between 2005-2020, carbon emissions in the region were 30% higher than the UK average. Car ownership and modal share is higher in our region than the UK average. In many of our places there is little alternative to the private car. The move to electric vehicles, while important, will not on its own enable the region's transport system to reach net zero. A shift to public transport is required, with East West Rail acting as the catalyst for this.

East West Rail is not just for new communities, it is about maximising the potential of our existing communities. East West Rail will bring the region's existing housing and employment markets closer together, increasing the pool of skilled labour accessible to our world-leading science and technology companies while improving productivity.

It will link the business clusters and universities in the region. In so doing, East West Rail will help the region further contribute to the UK Treasury and Britain's place on the global stage.



Without delivery of East West Rail the ambitions of our region will not be able to be delivered. Economic and housing growth will be constrained. We will miss the opportunity to transform public transport with consequent impacts on emissions, productivity, inward investment and the region's international competitiveness.

Supporting government's investment

We are committed to ensuring that government's investment in East West Rail is maximised.

As an example, England's Economic Heartland has worked with the East West Railway Company to better understand opportunities to improve local connectivity by sustainable transport to stations, maximising the number of people who can access and use East West Rail services. We have secured funding for the Bicester-Bletchley section to include digital infrastructure which will provide enhanced digital connectivity to both passengers and the rural communities near the line.

In addition, through the East West Main Line Partnership (formerly the East West Rail Consortium), member authorities have committed funds totalling up to £50 million in 'work in kind' that is enabling delivery of the scheme – a ground-breaking arrangement which again signals the level of commitment the region has to East West Rail.

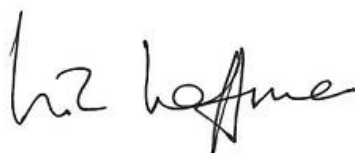
We will continue to work with the East West Railway Company, and government, to ensure the full benefits of East West Rail can be realised. To do so, we are accelerating delivery of a piece of work that – four years on from the NIC report and government's commitment to East West Rail – will refresh the evidence base for the scheme. This will more clearly define how local areas are responding, and will continue to respond, to enable the maximum benefits of the investment to be realised.

Once completed, we will write to you again with a presentation of the report's key findings.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Richard Wenham
Chair, England's Economic Heartland



Cllr Liz Leffman
Vice Chair, England's Economic Heartland