

EMBARGO: 00.01 Wednesday 13 December

Business community unites in show of strength for East West Rail

- **Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and route-wide counterparts underline ‘strong support’ for EWR they say will boost jobs and the local economy.**
- **Business network representing 295,000 employees urges Government to accelerate delivery of EWR to unlock constraints on thriving life sciences sector.**
- **Independent businesses in Oxford say EWR will drive footfall into city.**

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) has joined a rallying call by regional Chamber organisations for Government to accelerate full delivery of East West Rail (EWR) which they say is vital to boost local economies and create jobs along the entire route.

The Chamber, which includes Oxfordshire and represents the voice of over 6,000 businesses in the Thames Valley and around 295,000 employees, says EWR is a transformational project that will provide new potential opportunities for the Oxford economy, attract investment, generate jobs, and deliver local and national growth.

The organisation, along with Bedfordshire Chamber, Milton Keynes Chamber and Cambridgeshire Chambers, have united to bolster the existing strong support for EWR from businesses.

TVCC says that the National Audit Office’s (NAO) report, whilst acknowledging the inevitable issues around delivery, recognises the substantial benefits East West Rail will bring both regionally and nationally. The NAO report and the Chancellor’s recommitment to the project in the Autumn Statement, are high-level endorsements for the project which needs to be delivered at pace to ensure that the improved connectivity the railway will bring can generate wider economic growth for the region.

Paul Britton, CEO, TVCC, said: “Oxford is home to world-leading life sciences and technology companies, and excellent academic links and its status would be bolstered greatly by improvements to the regional transport network. Improving connectivity will provide greater access to job opportunities, improve the mobility of our high-quality talent pool and attract new domestic and overseas investment.

“By connecting Oxford to East West Rail this will build on the impressive growth in the Oxford life sciences sector and improve the capacity of available lab and commercial space which recent reports highlight as a limitation on expansion opportunities for business and initial footholds for start-ups”.

East West Rail will provide four trains an hour from Oxford, which will improve connectivity and significantly reduce travel times, making jobs more accessible and widening the future workforce pool. The railway will bring businesses - including those at Begbroke Science Park - closer to their supply chains, research centres, and other sectors, creating a vibrant hub for innovation, while opening up a greater range of effective business locations along the route.

As well as planned upgrades to Oxford station, which will improve capacity, EWR will link Oxford to Cambridge via Bedford and Milton Keynes, connecting more people with high quality jobs, opening up access to labour, and enabling collaboration between two world-class centres of academic excellence."

Local independent businesses believe East West Rail will increase footfall and be good for business.

Phil Marston, co-owner of Sanders Oxford, which sells antique prints and maps from its High Street premises, said: "We are really looking forward to the new East West Rail line opening as it will reinstate part of the old Varsity Line, establishing an important link between the two famous university cities, that will provide a huge boost to retail and tourism footfall as well as linking the surrounding area to Oxford, making it a more commutable city."

Keely Weir, Managing Director of indoor climbing activity centre Clip n Climb, Bicester, said: "We welcome the new rail services that East West Rail will bring to Bicester. We hope that connections with other towns and cities will drive more families to come and visit us here at Clip n Climb Bicester and the town itself. Anything which increases footfall to Bicester is something to be encouraged to support the many independent businesses like ourselves."

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Notes to editors

- The area running from Oxford to Cambridge is a vital economic artery which supports over two million jobs and contributes more than £120 billion in wealth to the UK economy.
- The Economist singled out the region as the top priority for investment in the UK. It has the potential to add £100+ billion extra GVA to the UK economy by 2050.
- East West Rail will create wealth and jobs for an area of nearly four million people.
- In 2018/19 over eight million passengers started or finished their train journey at Oxford station, and a further 500,000 people changed trains.

*A [British Land and Savills report](#) says that the UK's life sciences sector needs more room to innovate and grow to compete with countries like America and that EWR is needed to support the growth of the Golden Triangle. It says that demand

for UK laboratories is soaring, but lab vacancy rates in Oxford are just 7 per cent. The report states that if the life sciences real estate markets of Cambridge, Oxford and London were to match their counterpart markets in the America by 2035, it would mean 66,700 more people in high-skilled, high-wage employment; £4bn a year in additional GVA (Gross Value Added) to the economy and an extra £1.1bn in tax revenue to fund public services – all for the Golden Triangle.

About Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group is the voice of business in the Thames Valley. On behalf of micro to multinational organisations, we aim to drive better economic conditions and new opportunities for members and the wider community.

Through our recognised centre of excellence for global trade and inward investment, we provide services that promote and create opportunities for the Thames Valley business community. We do this whilst protecting trade and the local/national economic environment.

For more information, visit: www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk

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