



East-West Rail and Cambourne Light Rail Cambridge Connect Proposal

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1. Cambridge Connect advocates building a Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system for the greater Cambridge region. Evidence supports light rail as the technology most likely to be suited to deliver MRT in the Cambridge context. Without installation of an MRT network over the medium to long term, aspirations to strengthen Cambridge as a centre of national and international technological innovation and economic growth will be severely constrained. Current approaches to solving the region's traffic congestion are wholly inadequate for this task. There is also an opportunity for a more integrated transport strategy to meet needs across the region using multiple modes.
2. East-West Rail (EWR) between Bedford and Cambridge is currently planned via Cambourne, which requires a route of ~52 km in comparison with a direct east-west route aligned further south, which would be ~37 km (identified as Option A corridor in EWR optioneering, 2019). EWR track costs for **Option A** would have been approximately **£1bn to £1.6bn cheaper** (2026 prices) to deliver than the Cambourne route adopted, not including tunnelling costs.
3. Cambridge Connect suggests that a combination of a light rail MRT scheme together with an amended EWR Bedford – Cambridge corridor would result in major cost savings to the EWR scheme (Table 1). Potential savings between £270m – £770m have been identified, depending on assumptions and the tunnel options included. A further £150-200m could be saved by not building Cambourne Station.
4. Moreover, an integrated EWR / light rail approach would deliver an overall transport network that is not only less expensive, but more effective, efficient, flexible and resilient.
5. Cambridge Connect's light rail MRT scheme would directly link Cambourne to Cambridge city centre and all Cambridge rail stations (Central, North, South), via Eddington, West Campus, Science Park and Addenbrookes. Cambourne would have access to EWR at all existing stations for onward journeys. In time, light rail could later be extended from Cambourne to St Neots.
6. Cambridge Connect's light rail MRT scheme would connect Cambourne with all key employment, commercial, health and educational sites in Cambridge with reasonable journey times. The journey by light rail from Cambourne to the city centre would take ~20 minutes. The service would be fast, frequent, reliable and attractive.

7. EWR via Cambourne is extremely expensive and yet provides limited transport benefits to residents. In comparison, the Eddington to Cambourne section of Cambridge Connect's light rail scheme is estimated to cost only £250m – a fraction of what it will cost to serve Cambourne by EWR.
8. A shorter EWR route avoiding Cambourne will deliver faster east-west journeys and major on-going EWR operational efficiencies long after the scheme is built, better meeting overall EWR objectives.
9. Cambridge Connect proposes an alternative EWR route that is a hybrid between the original EWR Option A, C and E corridors put forward in 2019. Specifically, this would adopt the existing EWR route between Bedford and Tempsford (Option E), then follow the East Coast Mainline to near Sandy (Option C), thence follow a corridor east via Bassingbourn to join the mainline at Meldreth (Options A & C) (Figure 1). A shorter, cheaper, more direct route not yet examined may also be feasible.
10. Cambridge Connect's proposal recognises significant opportunities for new housing at scale in the Bassingbourn corridor, including potential use of land currently occupied by the Ministry of Defence.
11. In developing Cambridge Connect's proposal, objections to the current EWR route by the University of Cambridge were noted. The route proceeds close to the Mullard Radio Astronomy Observatory (MRAO), and quoting from the University EWR consultation submission:
“In relation to the impacts on the MRAO, these are so severe, realignment of the route for the proposed Comberton and Cambridge route (Proposed Project route Sections 7 and 8) is the only fully effective remedy to enable the MRAO to continue operating unaffected; full mitigation at source to fully protect the whole of the MRAO site is next-best. Otherwise, the Proposed Project would have a devastating effect on UK radio astronomy.” [emphasis added]
12. The combined EWR / light rail model proposed for Cambourne by Cambridge Connect would wholly avoid impacts on the MRAO, and not prejudice Cambridge's world leading radio astronomy science.
13. Some of the EWR savings achieved could be directed to pay for the light rail MRT network, achieving the strongest possible integrated transport network, fully leveraging the strengths of light and heavy rail.

Table 1. EWR cost comparisons for two route options (northern and southern) (track and tunnel estimates)

Item	Option E/C – Tempsford - Bassingbourn – Southern	Option E / Current – Tempsford - Cambourne – Northern
Distance	46 km	52 km
Terrain complexity	Lower–moderate	Moderate–high (more viaducts + cuttings)
Unit cost (2026 track-only)	£45m–£70m/km	£45m–£70m/km
Total track cost (low)	£2.07bn	£2.34bn
Total track cost (high)	£3.22bn	£3.64bn
Cost difference (low)	Southern Option £270m cheaper	
Cost difference (high)	Southern Option £420m cheaper	
Tunnels	Not yet identified	~£350 m (Chapel Hill 0.9km, Bourn 1.5km)
Total cost with tunnel (low)	-	£2.69bn
Total cost with tunnel (high)	-	£3.99bn
Cost difference (low)	Southern Option £620m cheaper (~£820m incl. Cambourne Station)	
Cost difference (high)	Southern Option £770m cheaper (~£970m incl. Cambourne Station)	

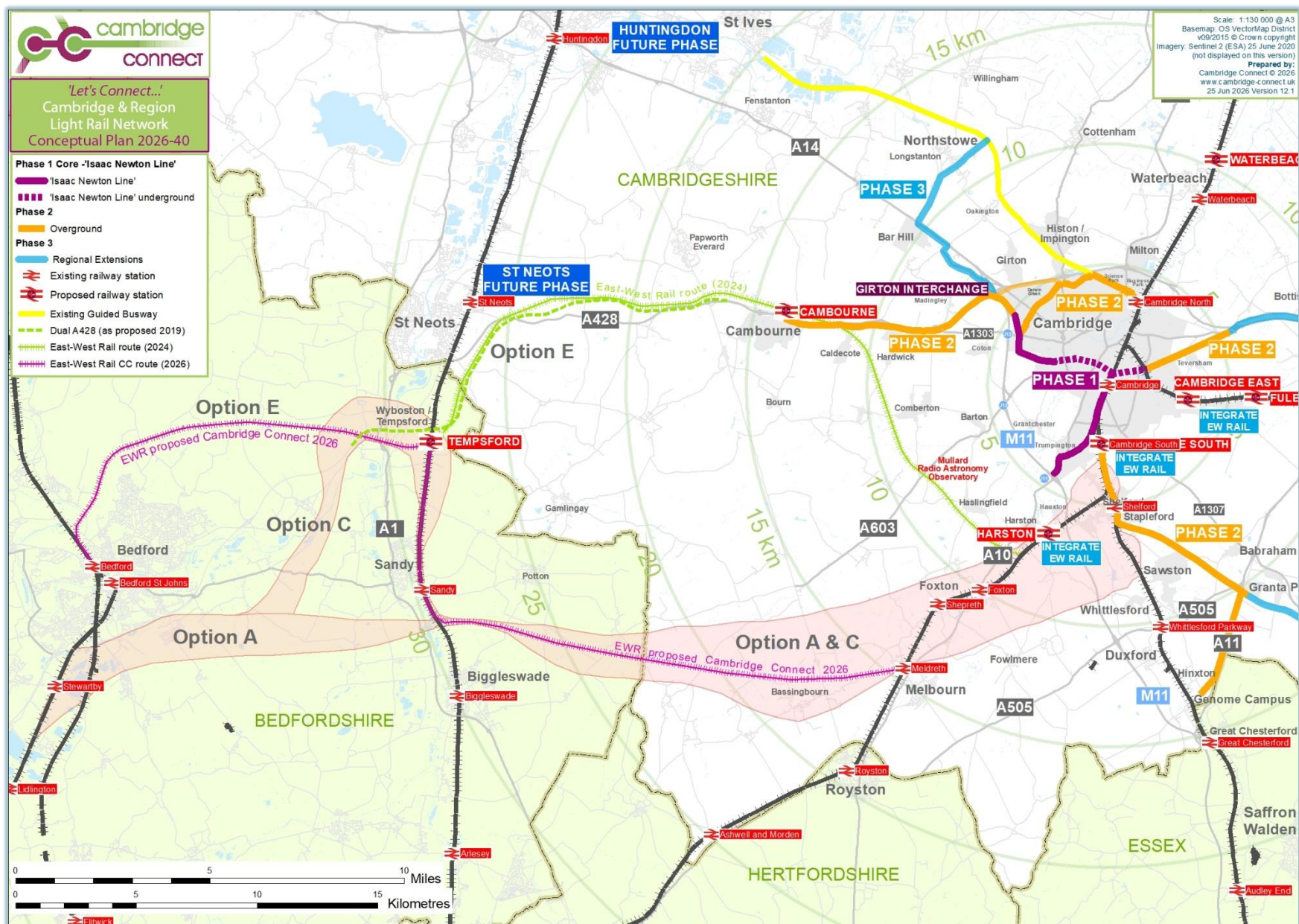


Figure 1. East-West Rail – Cambridge Connect route options between Bedford and Cambridge.