

East West Rail: An Update



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Introduction

In November 2025, safeguarding directions for the East West Rail ('EWR') project – which proposes to link the cities of Oxford and Cambridge – were updated following project design changes and feedback received in the non-statutory consultation between late 2024 and January 2025.

It is important that landowners with properties near to the proposed EWR project are aware of the implications of safeguarding as it can affect the ability of the owner to develop land. It can also reduce the liquidity of property. Newmark has seen this first-hand as one of our clients – a substantial business occupying a six-acre site – was unable to sell its business due to the safeguarding of a significant part of its land. However, we are delighted to report that the November 2025 update has seen the lifting of safeguarding directions affecting much of the land. The safeguarding has also been amended elsewhere along the EWR route.

What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding is a statutory process under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and can be implemented via directions from the relevant Secretary of State. It ensures that the promoter of an infrastructure project – in the case of EWR, East West Rail Company – is consulted on planning applications affecting land required for the project.

The intention of safeguarding is to ensure that the proposed project is not compromised by earlier development of land. This is important for several reasons: firstly, the land acquisition / design budget for the project can be impacted if permission is granted for other development without regard to the delivery of the project. Secondly, it is important that development does not take place if it is in direct conflict with the project.

An example of a direct conflict is the Shimmer estate, South Yorkshire: this was a new-build residential scheme constructed approximately five years before safeguarding directions for Phase 2B Eastern Leg (West Midlands to Leeds) of the High Speed Two (HS2) project were revised – ‘taking’ 16 dwellings and impacting approximately 200 homes on the remainder of the estate. The lack of safeguarding prior to construction of the estate led to uncertainty for new homeowners who faced either the almost immediate prospect of their homes being compulsorily purchased or the undesirable effects of the scheme’s construction on their doorstep.

Because safeguarding can often have a substantial adverse effect on a landowner’s ability to sell their property or even to plan for the future, it allows some affected owners – such as owner-occupiers of residential property or commercial property with a rateable value (outside London) of up to £36,000 – to serve a blight notice. This notice can require the early acquisition of a property if it can be evidenced that it cannot be sold by the landowner in the open market, except at a reduced price because of ‘blight,’ after a six-month period of marketing. Property owners who meet the criteria can seek the unblighted market value of the property plus compensation and statutory loss payment(s) that they would be entitled to in the circumstances that the powers were exercised. However, the blight notice provisions are of no help to those who do not meet the quite narrow criteria.

Safeguarding changes revised: key areas identified for EWR

The overall land area safeguarded for the EWR project has “increased slightly” compared to the 2024 directions.

The largest increases in safeguarded land are in Cambridge – for potential station re-design and ancillary infrastructure – and Bedford where there is a proposal to relocate Bedford St Johns station, realign the A6, and construct a new multi-storey car park to serve the station and Bedford Hospital. The land requirements have increased by over 50% at these stations to include larger construction compounds.

Other key changes include new stations at Cambridge East (near Cambridge Airport) and Tempsford, which are proposed to support housing growth – including the much-anticipated new town proposed by Homes England.

By contrast, rural areas have seen an overall reduction in land safeguarded for the project due to refined route alignments and the “Consolidated Stations Option” involving the replacement / expansion of four stations (Woburn Sands, Ridgmont, Lidlington, Stewartby) alongside the decision to remove several low use stations on the Marston Vale line.

Next Steps

The final proposals for the EWR project should be presented as part of the statutory consultation process in 2026 and responses will be invited to inform the Development Consent Order (DCO) application, which is likely to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in 2027 for examination.

The engagement period prior to the statutory consultation offers a further chance for landowners to familiarise themselves with the proposals, with the aim of influencing the project's design and delivery.

Newmark's specialist Compulsory Purchase and Compensation team works for landowners affected by the EWR project and can provide guidance and assistance on submitting representations, negotiating advance agreements and protecting your position. We can secure undertakings from East West Rail Company to enable early discussions to take place with reasonable costs covered by the company.

Please contact the team if you wish to discuss any aspect of the scheme and how we can assist you.

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