

## **East West Main Line Partnership Strategic Board**

**06 October 2023**

### **Agenda Item 5: Aylesbury link update**

**Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board:**

- a) Notes the progress made on the Aylesbury Link – Economic benefits assessment study and raises any questions on this**
- b) Notes that a full report is due for consideration by the next Board meeting**

#### **1. Context**

- 1.1. The Aylesbury link to Milton Keynes has been a longstanding priority for East West Main Line Partnership, England's Economic Heartland, Buckinghamshire Council and local MPs.
- 1.2. The link will unlock economic opportunities and support sustainable growth in the town, whilst also providing strategic benefits for the wider region, including improved north-south rail connectivity.
- 1.3. The link was originally included in the Transport and Works Act Order for the western section of East West Rail approved by the Secretary of State in February 2020. However, East West Rail capital funding announced in January 2021 only covered parts of the original Western Section Phase Two – the section between Bicester and Bletchley, with funding for Aylesbury link not included.
- 1.4. On 7 June 2023, the Deputy Prime Minister, Oliver Dowden MP provided further clarity on progress with the Aylesbury link stating to Aylesbury MP Rob Butler: "I can assure him that the Department for Transport is working with Network Rail and East West Rail to consider the feasibility of lower-cost railway links on the Aylesbury spur."
- 1.5. An important consideration is how the link can provide for delivery of wider rail accessibility alongside other planned and proposed rail investment, towards Milton Keynes/ Northampton in the north via East West Rail, and South Buckinghamshire/ North-West London in the south via the Aylesbury/ Princess Risborough line.

#### **2. Outline of scope of work**

- 2.1. The Board agreed in March that further work by the Partnership should be focussed on a strategic economic narrative which highlights the opportunities of better rail connectivity to Aylesbury would add the most value at this stage. Up to £30,000 of funding towards work on the Aylesbury link had already been supported by the Partnership in 2022/2023. The scope of work was agreed by the Board in June 2023.
- 2.2. Following the Board, consultants Cambridge Econometrics were engaged to review how the link (and associated wider rail connectivity benefits) could support development of new and improved innovation clusters, and enhanced linkages between and within business sectors and labour markets. This work builds on previous technical work that these consultants have undertaken for central government and others.
- 2.3. Buckinghamshire Council is co-funding the project.

- 2.4. The agreed scope of Cambridge Econometrics work includes a literature review, analysis of relevant economic data, and looks at the synergies associated and between different innovation clusters, business sectors and labour markets. It commenced in July 2023, and is due for completion in November 2023.
- 2.5. The full detail of train services for a potential Aylesbury Link is not yet known, but for the purposes of this study, the review has focused along a wider strategic corridor where train services using the Aylesbury Link could operate. This allows for an analysis of economic opportunities and linkages that could be supported should new services come forward alongside associated infrastructure enhancements.
- 2.6. The full study area is shown in Annex 1. The area in scope has been identified from London in the south to Northampton in the north, encompassing the route of the existing Chiltern Line – High Wycombe- Princess Risborough-Aylesbury, the proposed new link to Milton Keynes via East West Rail, as well as potential links to Old Oak Common from the Chiltern line into London in the longer-term.
- 2.7. The study area has included the Census Middle Super Output Areas (MSOAs) along the route, which are needed for data analysis, as well as the key stations, and their catchments. These catchments are based on the definitions for a 'wider catchment' from stations, as included within the previous East West Rail Strategic Narrative report published in December 2022.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Report Outputs**

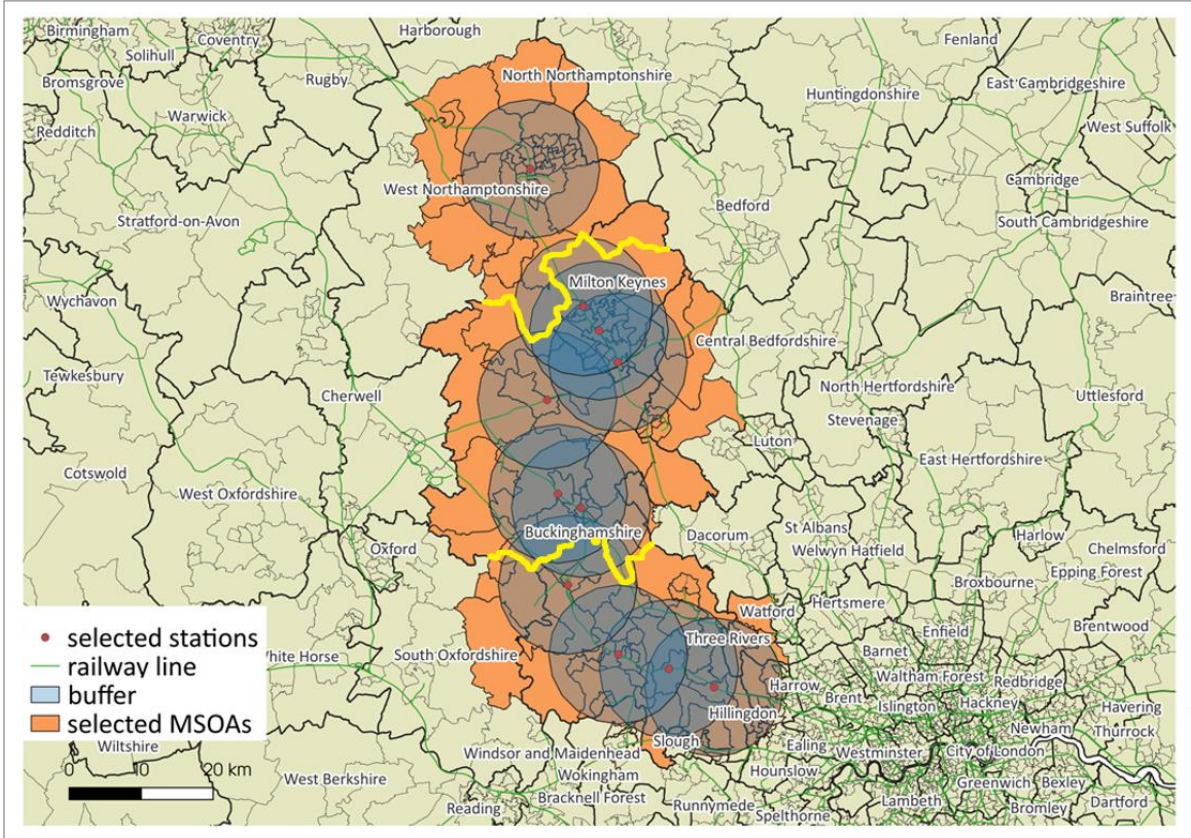
- 3.1. Full outputs of the work are expected to be presented to the board in the new year, but Annex 2 gives an example of the mapping/analysis work undertaken to date for the Aylesbury area (served by Aylesbury and Aylesbury Vale Parkway stations).
- 3.2. The work is identifying key economic linkages between Aylesbury, Milton Keynes and Northampton, demonstrating how a link could expand job and labour markets in related sectors and support business clusters and collaboration.
- 3.3. The first map shows that the Aylesbury area has a particularly strong Agency Market (marketing, advertising and creatives industries) business sector cluster, with other noticeable areas for this sector along the route being Milton Keynes and the Northampton area.
- 3.4. The second map shows other business sector clusters that the Agency Market cluster could best collaborate. This includes digital creative industries, software development and immersive technology industries, with noticeable clusters for these also in the Milton Keynes and Northampton areas.
- 3.5. Other noticeable clusters are also being identified for other places along the study area route, with collaboration opportunities noted. For example, Life Sciences and Photonics (work related to optics) clusters have been identified within both High Wycombe and Milton Keynes.
- 3.6. Overall the analysis being undertaken in this study helps to strengthen the strategic economic case for better connecting settlements on this corridor by new rail services. As such, it supports the strategic case for delivery of the Aylesbury Link. We would welcome board views on the full report in due course.

**James Gagg**  
**Technical lead**  
**June 2023**

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<sup>1</sup> Report available at: <https://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/publications-and-responses/>

**Annex 1 – Study area map**



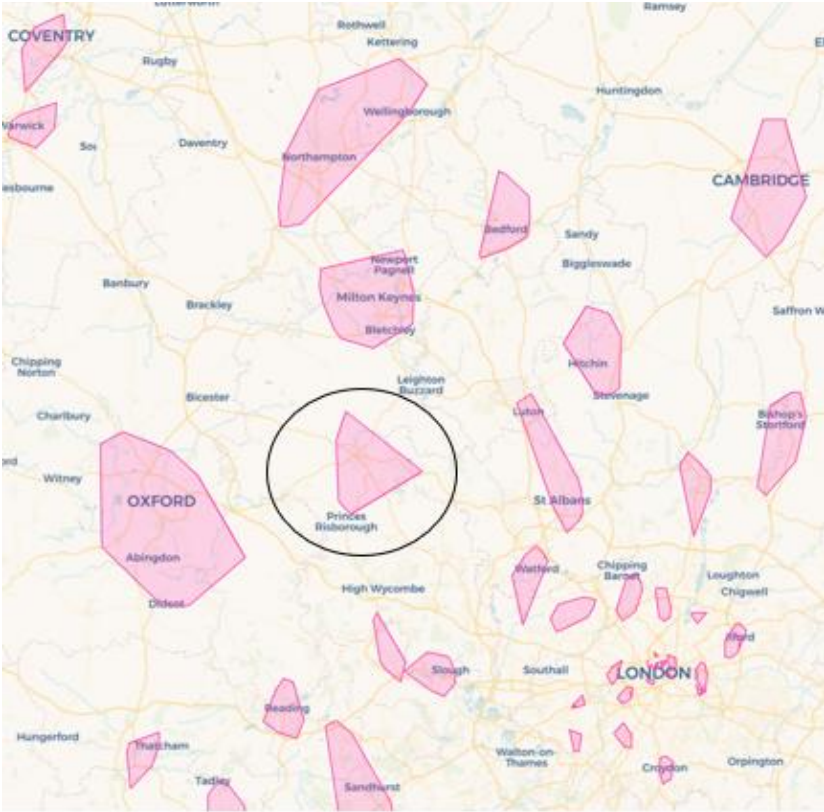
**Notes:**

Buffer areas around stations are 10km in radius, based on a definition of catchment (use of car, bus or shared mobility modes) identified in the East West Rail: Strategic Narrative report, Dec 2022.

The Census Middle Super Output Areas (MSOAs) along the route have been identified as this supports economic data analysis.

**Annex 2 – initial example outputs from study- Aylesbury Example**

**Agency Market Clusters around Aylesbury and other nearby areas**



**Above: Agency Market Cluster collaboration opportunities around Aylesbury (Blue- Digital Creative industries and Immersive Technologies, Purple- Software Development, Orange- Ad Tech)**

