

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

The preferred corridor





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Foreword

The Oxford to Cambridge growth arc contains some of the most productive places in the UK. For decades the region has been a hub of learning, economic growth and innovation. Home to 3.3 million people, the area is a national asset attracting talent and investment into the UK and powering Britain's economy.

The project to develop a new fast, high quality link road signifies the government's commitment to invest in the area. This project will deliver faster and more reliable journeys between the major cities of Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, increasing opportunities for economic growth and new homes for the benefit of communities in and around the area for decades to come.

We have collected a huge amount of data and information which has been used for corridor selection. Building on this evidence base, further detailed studies will inform the development of routes within the selected corridor. We do not underestimate the impacts of a scheme of this size and our investigations have ensured that environmental and heritage designations have been fully considered in corridor selection.

The huge potential of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway is matched by the scale of the work that is yet to come and our project milestones cannot be realised without the input of our partners, stakeholders and the public. Highways England, along with our delivery partners, appreciate the contribution by our stakeholders, working with us in the project's development. Indeed, their input has been extremely valuable to the development of the project so far.

This brochure explains our best performing corridors and the evidence on which this has been based. The next step in the programme is to continue work with our partners and stakeholders as we work towards a shortlist of route proposals to be presented to the public in 2019 for feedback.



Matt Stafford
Project Director, Highways England

Introduction

Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge are growing fast in a region renowned for innovation and where there are plans for a substantial increase in jobs and housing. Yet, the east-west transport connections between these areas are notoriously poor with issues such as congestion, slow speeds, poor journey time reliability and no single route to travel from end to end. It is easier to travel into London from the three cities than go from one to the other. This creates a huge barrier and risk to future growth, while a housing shortfall is stifling further investment and is a major concern for the region.

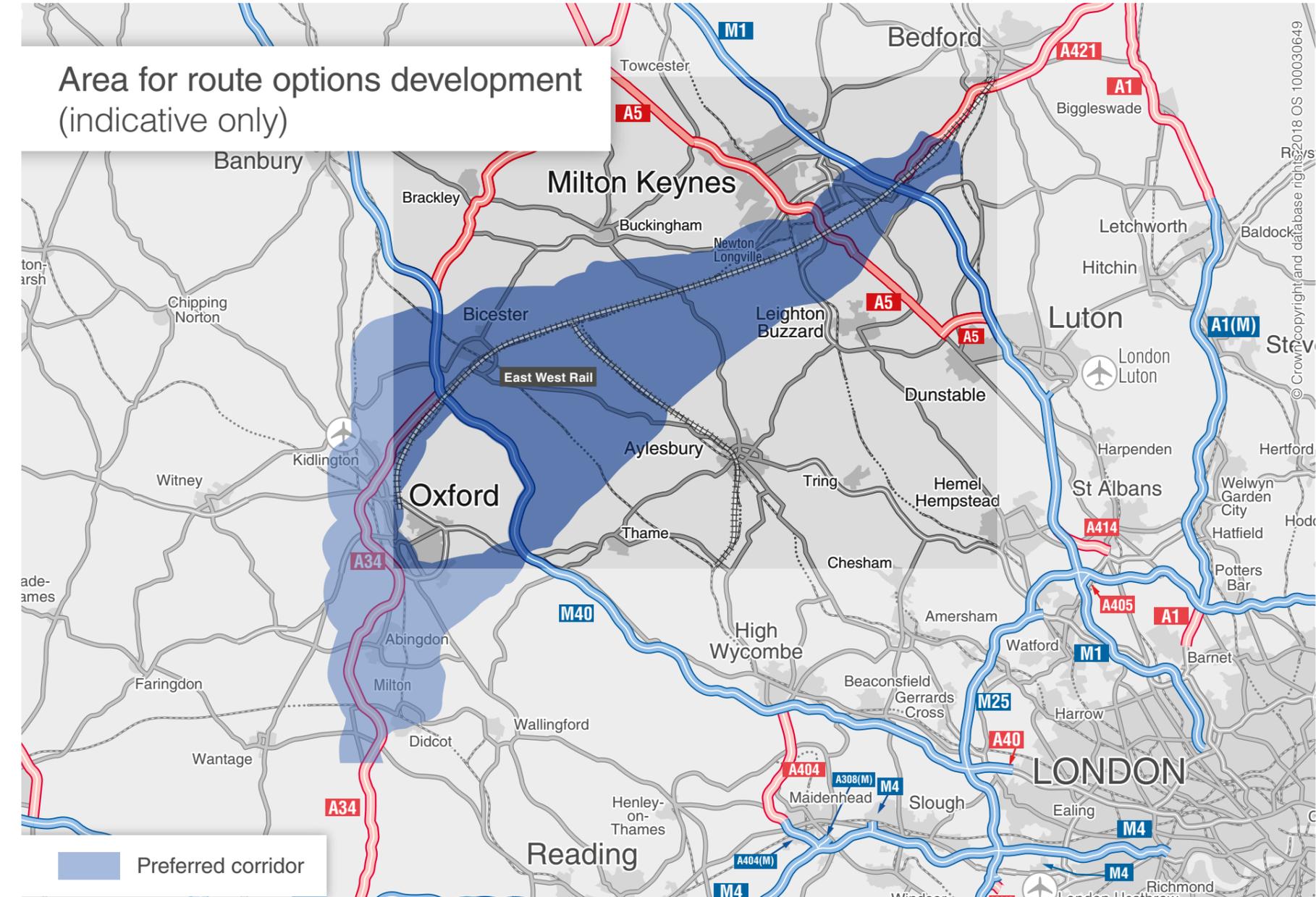
Before developing detailed routes, the government has announced the broad area – or corridor – for the location of a new fast high quality link road to help improve connectivity across the region.

This is a central corridor that stretches between Abingdon and Milton Keynes, and is broadly aligned with the proposed East West Rail route. The map shows its boundaries and the road will pass either to the southeast or west of Oxford.

Highways England has undertaken an evidenced based assessment to recommend the most suitable of 7 potential corridors in the region.

Inside this booklet, you can discover more about our findings and the next steps for the project.

This is just the first step in the process; we will work with stakeholders and communities to investigate a number of potential routes. Put simply, these will show in more detail the site and setting of the new road and improvements – and we will share these with the public for feedback in Autumn 2019.



Corridor decision

The preferred corridor identifies the area where we will begin detailed work to find potential routes for the fast, high quality, road link. Over the next year, we will look within this area to find the most likely route that the road could take. The leading routes will in turn be subject to a full public consultation.

After examining the evidence, we have identified that between the M1 and the M40 a corridor running near to the proposed East West Railway will provide the greatest benefits. According to our analysis, this route is able to support existing transport needs, as well as transformational growth, regeneration and redevelopment across the wider corridor. It will provide significantly shorter journey times for getting between the M40 and M1, providing the area with better access to opportunities for jobs, services, leisure and education. This corridor also provides a southern bypass to Milton Keynes, reducing congestion and helping to support the continued growth of the town.

The benefits of building the road in the same area as the new railway line have been clear. While there is still discussion about how best to develop new housing in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, by placing road and rail in close alignment we can make it easier for people to choose between different modes of transport. Any communities built or expanded near to the fast, high quality, road link would be able to use the railway, and vice versa – thereby reducing the risk of car-dependency.

West of the M40, the evidence does not provide as decisive a case in favour of one corridor over another. The existing A34 is heavily congested, and our discussions with stakeholders have shown that improvements here are an important part of any plan for the wider Oxford-Cambridge corridor. Oxford is growing fast, but they have argued that without some improvement around Oxford it will be difficult for employers to access a wider labour market, or for people living across the corridor to get to work in the city. Our analysis supports this claim.

The existing A34 runs to the west of Oxford, where it is near a number of protected sites, and runs through the suburb of Botley. Alternatively routes to the east and south of Oxford would affect other parts of the city's Green Belt. We want to examine the options in this area further, considering what kinds of environmental mitigation can be applied to reduce or avoid environmental effects and taking more evidence from local people, before identifying the best way forward.

However our work to date does allow us to rule out one of the southern corridors around Oxford – B2. The benefits of this corridor are no greater than other options, but the environmental impacts on the area around the Otmoor nature reserve would be worse. Therefore, we will not consider routes through this area in the next stage.

Overall, this combined corridor should be able to bring up to 470,000 more people within commuting distance of the Oxford Science Park, and add tens of billions to the area's economy. It could reduce journey times for Abingdon to Milton Keynes by up to 40 minutes and improve safety for all. We therefore intend to proceed with further design on this basis.



The case for intervention

The story so far

As part of the government's first Road Investment Strategy (RIS 1), Highways England was asked to explore the case for a fast, high-quality road link to better connect Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. This included filling the 'missing link', a 30 mile gap in the network between the M1 at Milton Keynes and the M40 at Oxford, including new capacity at Oxford to relieve pressure on the A34.

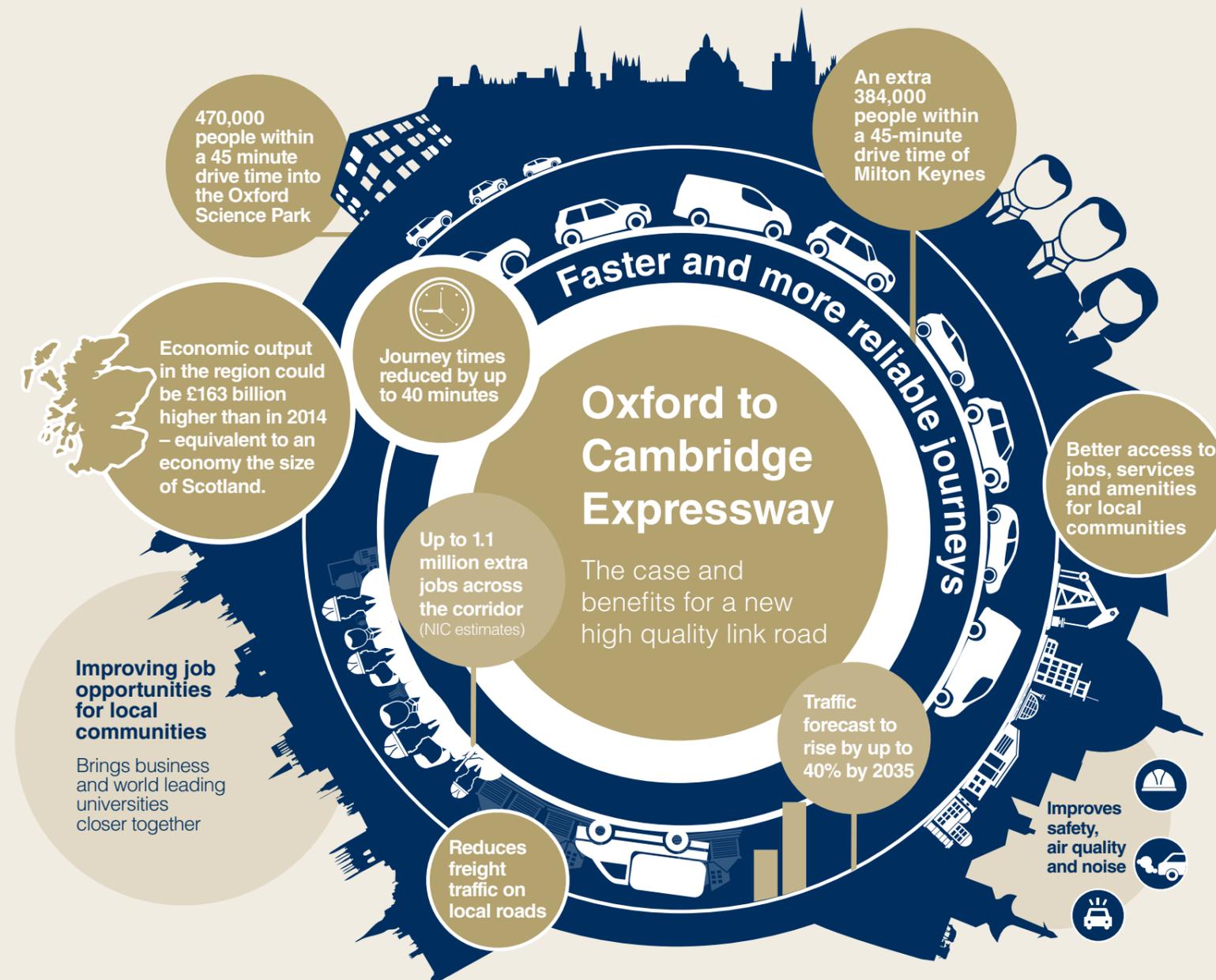
Stakeholders have been integral to the development of the project since its inception in 2015 when a Stakeholder Reference Group was set up to ensure that stakeholders views are understood and properly considered during the study process. We have since been working with stakeholders and partners on the first phase of the project, using analytical and evidence-based reviews to understand which of the proposed corridors should be taken forward for further development.

A high level case for the project was published in November 2016, when the government committed £27 million to its further development. At Autumn Budget 2017, the Chancellor committed to delivering a missing link in the strategic road network between Oxford and Cambridge by 2030. This includes the gap between the M1 and the M40, and potential enhancements around Oxford either on the existing road network or by creating new capacity.

This will complement our commitment to dual the last remaining stretch of single carriageway on the A428 linking Bedfordshire with Cambridgeshire - an integral part of plans to improve connections across the region.



Traffic near Abingdon



The case for a fast, high quality link

The most direct route linking Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge from the M4 to the M11 is of variable standard and quality which affects journey times, reliability and safety. Traffic is forecast to increase between 32% to 40% by 2035 and in the absence of transport improvements, congestion is expected to become worse.

Delivering better connections between important growth areas will help unlock transformational growth. The problem is particularly acute in cities such as Oxford, where limited housing stock means that for many people houses prices are unaffordable which constrains economic growth and job creation. A high quality link road will complement East West Rail and form part of an integrated strategic transport solution, bringing jobs, skills, housing, business and world leading universities closer together.

The government also asked the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) which provides expert, impartial advice on infrastructure, to consider the growth potential of the Oxford to Cambridge arc. In its Partnering for Prosperity report, the NIC estimates that the region could support 1.1 million new jobs and economic output would increase up to £163 billion per year.

The National Infrastructure Commission concluded:

- The knowledge-driven economy of this collection of cities is impressive, but its future economic health is threatened by a lack of suitable and affordable housing, and the appropriate connecting infrastructure to support 'good growth'.
- Without a joined-up plan for housing, jobs and infrastructure across the corridor, it will be left behind by its international competitors... new east-west transport links present a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure the area's future success.
- A more connected corridor would establish a stronger sense of unity, but it is essential that this is achieved in a way that reinforces the diversity and different contributions of the places along the way.
- The proposed East West Rail and Oxford-Cambridge Expressway projects would provide a step change in connectivity across the arc, linking its major economic centres in a way not seen for over half a century.
- As well as providing connectivity between the M4, M40, M1, A1(M) and M11, the link road offers an attractive and efficient route for freight and long-distance trips as well as enhanced connectivity between key local and regional growth areas in the arc.

Benefits

Faster and more reliable journeys

A reduction in journey times by up to 40 minutes and improved safety and resilience.

More jobs and better opportunities

Improved connections are predicted to bring an additional 384,000 people into a 45-minute drive time of Milton Keynes and 470,000 more into the Oxford Science Park.

A new link road would support the National Infrastructure Commission estimate that up to 1.1 million extra jobs could be generated across the corridor.

Regional economic growth

Annual output along the Cambridge Milton Keynes and Oxford corridor could be £163 billion higher than in 2014 – equivalent to an economy the size of Scotland.

Better access to services and facilities

Improved access to jobs, services and amenities for local communities and to tourist destinations for leisure travelers.

Putting the right traffic on the right roads

Reduces need for freight on local roads and will reduce long distance traffic on the local roads in Milton Keynes.

Improving safety

For all users – not just motorists. Reducing congestion will improve air quality and noise.

Encourages sustainable travel

Reducing congestion will encourage sustainable travel modes that can be accessed by all. We will deliver an asset that links with other modes of travel such as East West Rail to give travellers more choice.

Better connections

Better connects people and places. The government has commissioned England's Economic Heartland to consider how communities close but not on the route can benefit.

Supports the region's future growth

Providing certainty as early as possible to facilitate development of regional growth plans, regeneration and development

Options considered

The Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study Stage 3 Report published in November 2016 assessed corridor options between the M40 and M1 and corridor sub-options around Oxford. These were sifted against the scheme's strategic objectives. Broad corridors were identified to allow for the assessment and comparison of multiple routes in future stages.

The study considered possible corridors in the study area shown below leading to a shortlist of:

- Corridor A: via Aylesbury
- Corridor B: the East-West Rail corridor
- Corridor C: the existing A421 corridor and
- A number of sub options around Oxford

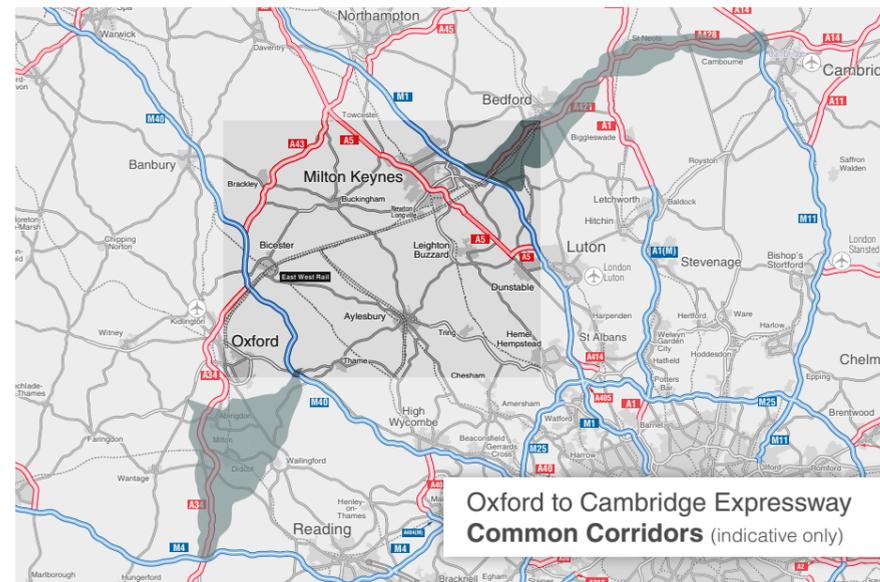
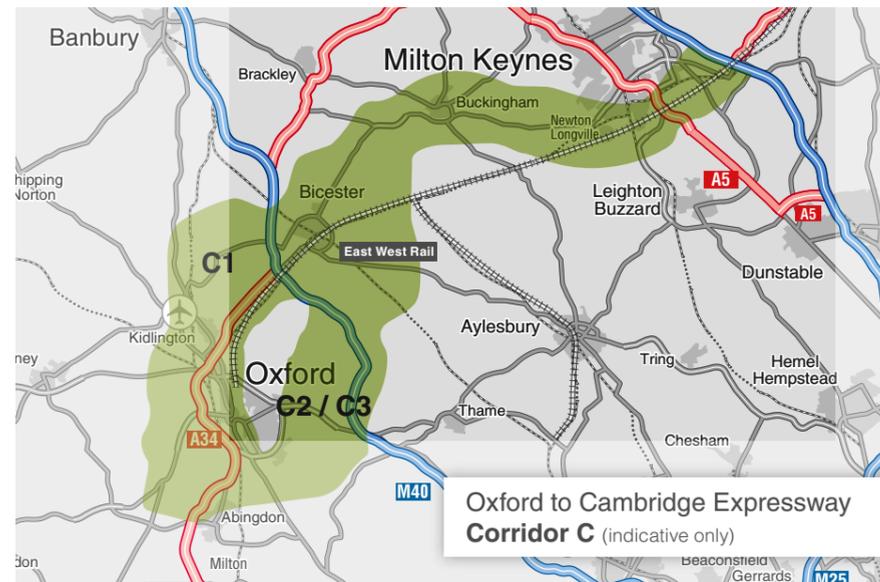
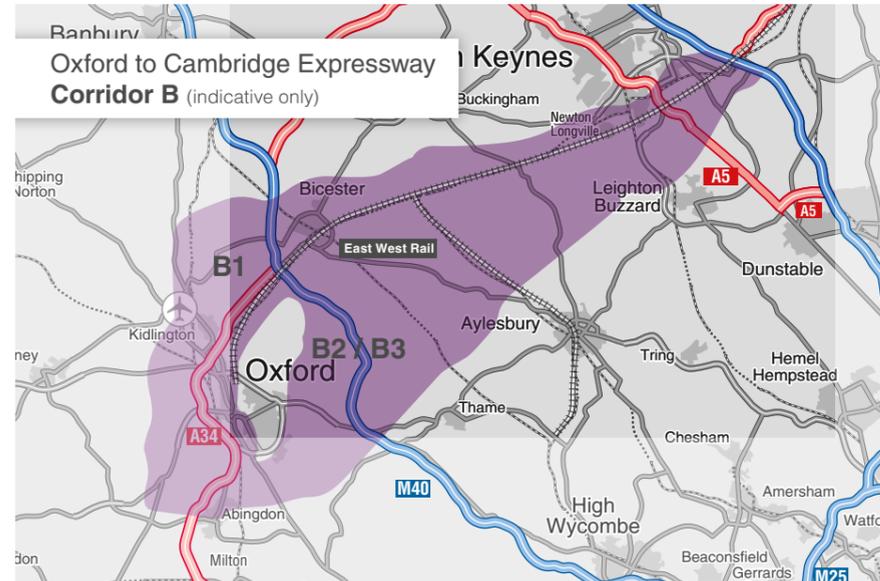
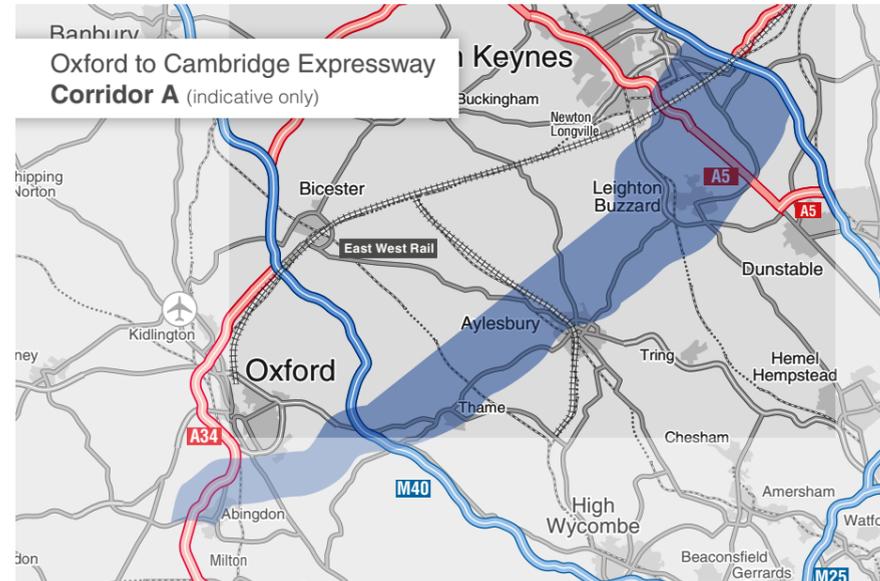
In June 2017, these options were taken forward for further analysis by Highways England. Together with the sub options these were refined into seven corridor sub-options which have been independently assessed. The work over the last year has focussed on the ability of each corridor option to deliver the government's strategic objectives for the project.



M1 junction 13 Milton Keynes



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How we assessed the corridor options

Objective	Description
Connectivity	Provide an east-west road link between Milton Keynes and Oxford that delivers enhanced connectivity through faster, safer and more reliable connections across the corridor.
Strategic transformation	Support the creation of an integrated corridor between Oxford and Cambridge, reflecting and advancing plans for infrastructure, housing, business investment and development.
Economic growth	Unlock the economic potential in the corridor by facilitating growth to the benefit of the UK economy. Maximise synergies with East West Rail.
Skills and Accessibility	Promote accessibility and wider socio-economic benefits by improving access to job opportunities at key employment centres, developments, and at education, leisure, health, and retail facilities.
Environment	To provide a healthy, natural environment by reducing congestion, supporting sustainable travel modes and promoting equality and opportunity.
Innovation	Apply innovative technology wherever possible to support the sustainable planning, construction and operation of transport measures.
Planning for the future	Reduce the impact of new housing on local roads for communities and contribute to better safety, security and health whilst promoting sustainable transport modes.

The corridor options were assessed against the strategic objectives set by the Department for Transport (see table).

We also considered:

- The Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) performance in particular relation to the government's Five Case Model. This evaluates five factors: the case for change, the public value, the commercial considerations, costs and the ability to deliver.

- A strategic delivery assessment covering the issues associated with building the project.

- Technical data on traffic, economics, environment, growth and stakeholder engagement.

For more information on our assessment method and findings, please read the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Corridor Assessment Report on our website.

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway The preferred corridor

The preferred corridor

The corridor defines the broad area where the route could be located. The corridors are large areas and further work is required to develop detailed route options in the next stages.

Overall, Corridor B delivers better benefits for the region and outperforms both Corridor A and C in supporting strategic transformation and economic growth, as well as providing wider benefits such as better access to jobs, education, leisure and health services. Corridor B will also help the region plan for the future, reducing the effects of new housing on local roads for communities and contribute to better safety whilst promoting sustainable transport modes. Therefore corridors A and C are rejected.

Main advantages of B1 and B3

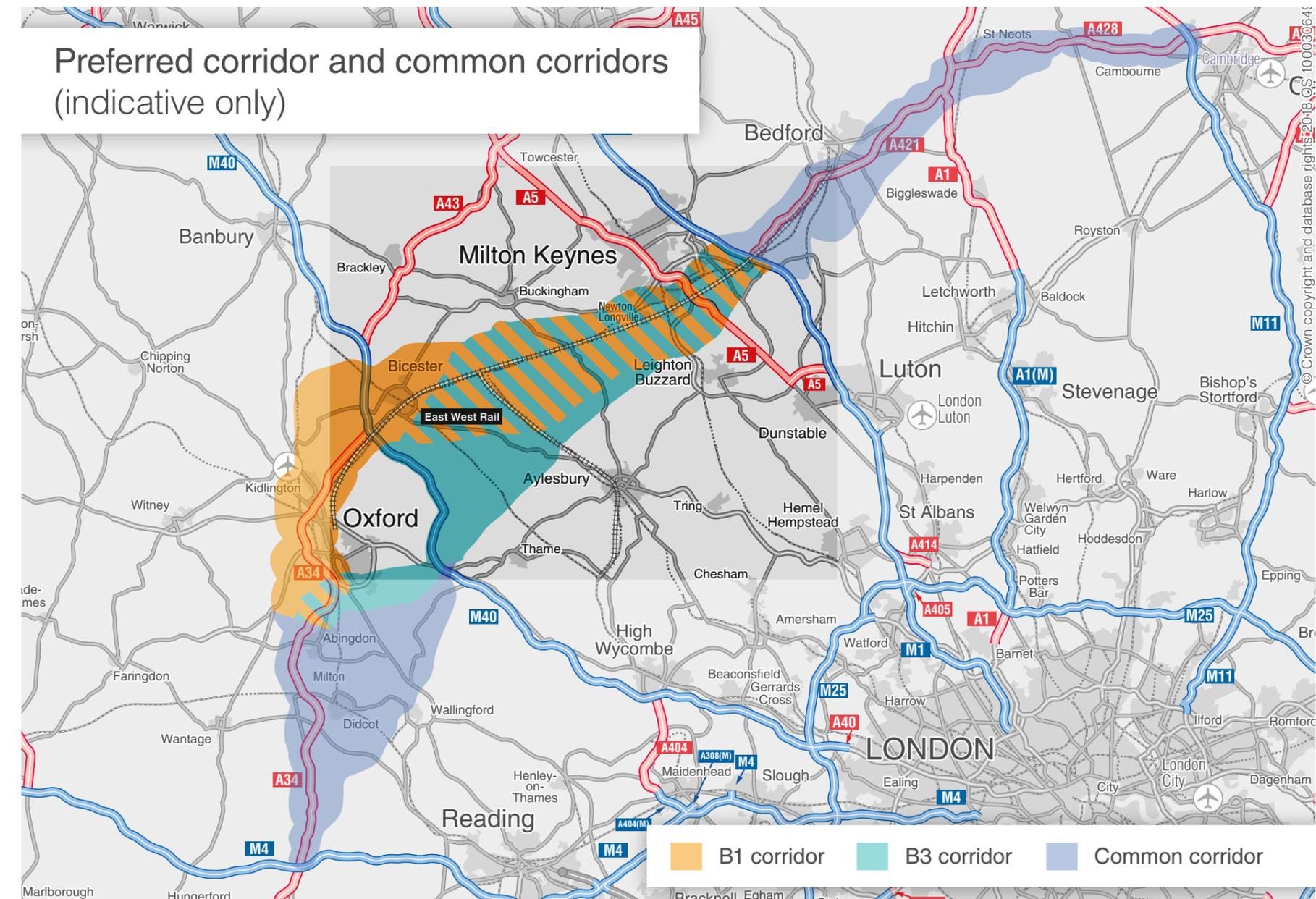
Corridor	Advantages
Corridor B1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers the potential to use the existing highway infrastructure in a route to the west of Oxford Potential to minimise division of communities by a new or improved road Lowest predicted cost at this stage Broad alignment with East West Rail thus enabling multi-modal transport corridor
Corridor B3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fewer sites with environmental designations Broad area to identify a suitable route to the east of Oxford Potential to move traffic away from existing settlements Broad alignment with East West Rail thus enabling multi-modal transport corridor

Together with the sub options, 7 corridors have been further refined and independently assessed. These are defined as C1,C2 and C3, B1,B2 and B3 and Corridor A.

Corridor B2 is rejected because, while it offers similar benefits, at a similar predicted cost to B3, the environmental impacts around the Horspath and Wheatley areas are substantially more difficult to overcome. There are also a number of significant constraints as the corridor heads north towards Bicester, including Otmoor Nature Reserve.

We have chosen two corridors for further development. This provides the opportunity to validate their performance against the objectives in more detail and gives the public the chance to influence decision making, particularly on the routes around Oxford at public consultation

We have therefore recommended Corridors B1 and B3 are taken forward.





Our approach to the environment

Protecting the environment and the places we love is central to how we develop and build a major new road such as this.

We recognise that creating any new road infrastructure carries environmental challenges.

We are committed to finding solutions that have the least impact and avoid, minimise or mitigate the impact on the natural environment. More widely, the government's 25 Year Plan for the Environment sets out our comprehensive approach to improving landscapes and habitats, and the aspiration to move to a policy of net environmental gain. We expect the policy for the wider Oxford-Cambridge corridor to embody this approach.

The road corridor decision is a key part of this. Based on the feedback we have received so far, we are able to rule out construction at Otmoor Nature Reserve. We expect to give similar certainty to more environmental sites in the year ahead.

As the detailed routes are developed, we will look to continue this work. We intend to consider innovative and meaningful environmental enhancements and will continue to work closely with Natural England, Historic England, the Environment Agency, The Wildlife Trust and local nature partnerships to integrate any route as far as possible into the area's distinctive landscape.

We also want to work together with other key stakeholders including, but not limited to, local highway and planning authorities, community and residents' groups, and environmental bodies, to develop the mitigation strategy as the scheme develops over time.

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Working with stakeholders

We have been working with stakeholders to develop the project since inception. Early on in the project, we set up a framework to guide how we would engage with the stakeholder community. Engagement was undertaken in the following phases:

- From 2015 - we worked with stakeholders throughout the study process to understand their views and ensure consideration.
- October 2017 to January 2018 - we met with stakeholders to introduce the project and gather views on the engagement framework plans.
- January to April 2018 – we listened to the views and opinions of stakeholders and gathered technical information to support corridor sifting. We formally asked stakeholders to submit their views on the corridors and held workshops to stimulate discussion on the options.
- April to summer 2018 – we analysed the feedback and technical information as part of the corridor selection process.
- After summer 2018 - will communicate the rationale behind the preferred corridors.

Who we have engaged with

The purpose of this engagement was to access the unique knowledge of the region and its communities to help inform our technical assessment. Because of the size of the study area and the early stage of development, the focus of engagement has been on key stakeholders who have a strategic overview of the project and represent communities, businesses and related projects in the area including MPs, local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, and the Strategic Stakeholder Group. Key stakeholders include local authority leaders and technical officers, regional business groups, road user groups, utilities and infrastructure, environmental groups, MPs and related projects such as East West Rail.

This is just the start of the engagement process and it will continue to evolve to support the project following corridor announcement and beyond. We recognise that many people will want to have their voices heard as part of this process, particularly where they may be affected by potential routes. There will be opportunities for people to get involved and help shape our plans through consultations, the first of which is expected in autumn 2019.

Your views will help shape the project



What happens next?

England's Economic Heartland will start work on a connectivity study to understand how communities not on the route itself can still benefit from it.

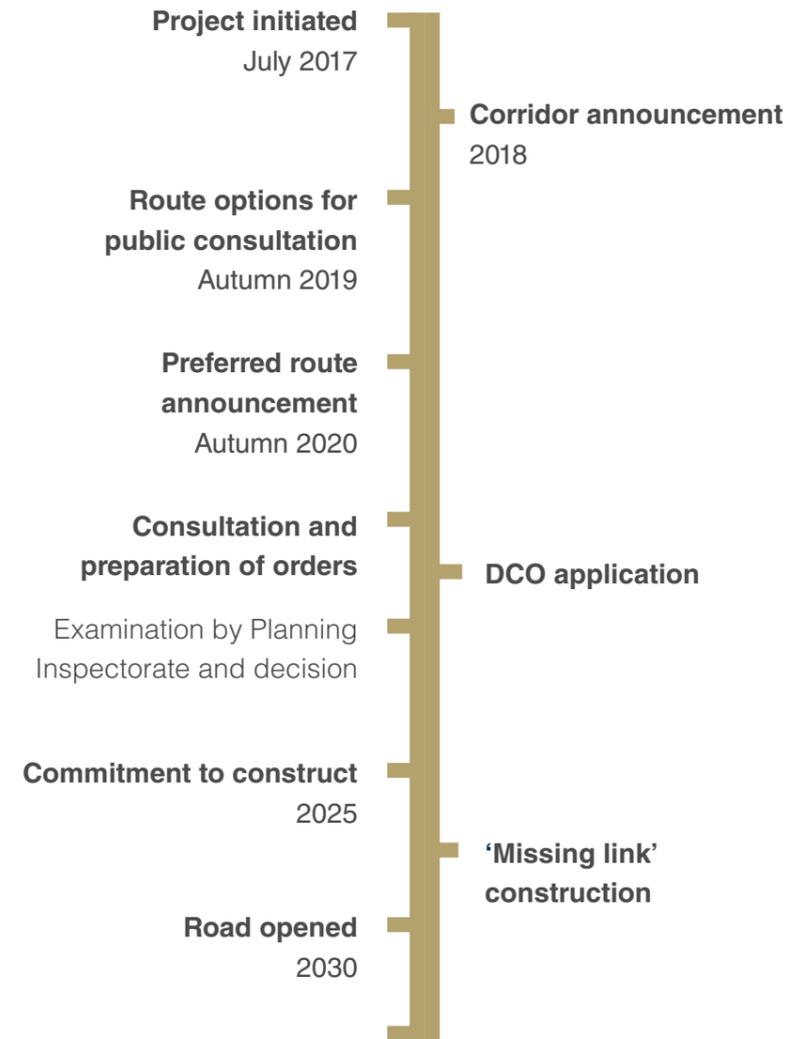
Prior to consultation, our next step is to look at possible routes in each preferred corridor. We will continue to work with our stakeholders, while we investigate in more detail the economic, environmental, traffic and cost impact of the possible options. There will be a public consultation on the viable route options in autumn 2019. There will be a further consultation before we submit our planning application.

The diagram shows the process for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway including the timeframes for public consultation.

We are required to make an application for a Development Consent Order in order to gain permission to construct the road. The Planning Inspectorate will examine the application in public hearings and then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Transport who will decide on whether the project will go ahead.

If you would like any further information on the Development Consent Order process, please visit the Planning Inspectorate's website: <http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk>

The development process and key milestones for the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway



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How to find out more

The Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Corridor Assessment Report which sets out the detailed analysis to support the corridor decision is available on our website.

For the latest information and to register for updates, visit

www.highwaysengland.co.uk/projects/oxford-to-cambridge-expressway

Further reading

The Oxford to Cambridge Expressway strategic study stage 3 report, November 2016

www.gov.uk/government/publications/oxford-to-cambridge-expressway-strategic-study-stage-3-report

Partnering for Prosperity: A new deal for the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge arc, November 2017

www.nic.org.uk/publications/partnering-prosperity-new-deal-cambridge-milton-keynes-oxford-arc/

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