

West Northamptonshire Council Rail Action Plan

Draft for consultation

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NB: Draft versions 0.1 - final published versions 1.0

Consultees

Internal	External

Distribution List

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Links to other documents

Document	Link
Local Transport Plan	https://www.westnorthants.gov.uk/highways-policies/highways-plans-and-strategies

Additional Comments to note

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Executive summary

The West Northamptonshire Council's Draft Rail Action Plan sets out a strategic framework for the development and enhancement of rail infrastructure and services across our region. This plan will focus on delivering achievable interventions in the next 5 years and is designed to support the Council's broader transport objectives, as outlined in the Local Transport Plan, with a particular focus on improving connectivity, accessibility, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.

This plan aims to position rail as a central component of West Northamptonshire's transport network and encouraging a shift from the private car to using more sustainable modes of transport. It outlines a vision for a rail service that meets the needs of West Northamptonshire residents and visitors, across commuting, business and leisure purposes, and making the railway stations into welcoming gateways to West Northamptonshire. The plan seeks to improve integration between rail and other transport modes, notably the bus network and active travel infrastructure, whilst also enhancing the public realm around the railway stations.

Currently, West Northamptonshire is served by three railway stations, Northampton, Long Buckby, and Kings Sutton, each with varying levels of service provision and infrastructure quality. While passenger numbers have generally increased over the previous decades, challenges persist in terms of accessibility, service frequency, the affordability of rail fares, and cross-regional connectivity. The Council recognises the strategic importance of nearby rail freight interchanges of DIRFT and Northampton Gateway, which present opportunities to capitalise on West Northamptonshire's position in the centre of the UK logistics network.

The action plan identifies several key challenges which includes the Council's limited stake over rail infrastructure, the high cost of rail interventions, and the complexity of co-ordinating with a complex rail industry, and the geographic limitations of the rail network in West Northamptonshire. However, despite the challenges, this plan highlights numerous opportunities to work with the railway industry to improve rail services, deliver new infrastructure, enhance station accessibility, integrate the public transport network and increase the involvement in rail governance through devolution.

To realise these opportunities, West Northamptonshire Council has set out a series of actions to be delivered over the next five years. These include the development of a dedicated Freight Action Plan, the support for formation of rail user groups, and targeting accessibility improvements at all of the stations. The Council will collaborate closely with neighbouring local authorities, national transport bodies, and railway industry stakeholders to ensure that rail developments are aligned with national and regional needs and priorities. These actions align with the priorities of West Northamptonshire Council as set out in the One West Northamptonshire Plan.

The Council will monitor progress through the mechanism established in the Local Transport Plan and will continue to engage with stakeholders to refine and deliver the proposed interventions.

1. Introduction

What does this action plan hope to achieve

The aim of this action plan is to provide a policy platform for West Northamptonshire Council to proceed with engagement with operators, Network Rail, and the future Great British Railways organisation on railway interventions. Over the coming 25 years, the Council hopes to achieve many of the objectives set out in this action plan to improve services and reliability for passenger and freight services in West Northamptonshire.

Consultation on the rail action plan

West Northamptonshire Council will conduct multi-stage stakeholder engagement exercises to gather insight from Council officers, Members, key stakeholders, and the general public.

We will conduct multi-stage stakeholder engagement exercises to gather insights from Council officers, Members, and the public. Engagement with Members will include a general briefing on the action plan to seek direction and priorities. The vision and objectives were presented in summer 2025 to gather initial feedback, which have been incorporated into this draft. The final action plan has been presented in autumn 2025 to key internal and external stakeholders, then will be published for full public consultation in winter 2025.

Internal engagement during summer 2025 involved collecting feedback from Council teams on implementation challenges. This feedback has been included in the final action plan, which will be presented to Members for approval in autumn 2025. Prior to full external consultation, West Northamptonshire Council will engage with members of the railway industry, including Network Rail, train operating companies, and West Midlands Rail Executive. Their feedback on deliverability and operational challenges will be incorporated into the action plan for wider consultation.

How to have your say

We now want to hear the views of local businesses, residents as well as other interested parties and stakeholders.

You can have your say on the draft Rail Action Plan by completing the [online survey](#). If you need assistance to complete the online questionnaire, would like a copy of it in another format, or respond via an alternative method, our contact details are as follows:

Email address: LocalTransportPlan@westnorthants.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 126 7000

Postal address:

Transport Planning Team
West Northamptonshire Council
One Angel Square
(Service Yard)
Angel Street
Northampton
NN1 1ED

The consultation closes at 23:59 Tuesday 27 January 2026.

Feedback will be analysed and changes will be made to the draft strategy. Further details will be available in a consultation report. The final strategy will be taken for approval at Cabinet in Spring 2026.

Alignment with the One West Northamptonshire Plan

This action plan for the development of the railway network in West Northamptonshire aligns with the One West Northamptonshire Plan's Priority 1 to support a productive, including and enterprising West Northamptonshire and also Priority 2 to create accessible and connected communities.

2. Links to the Local Transport Plan

Over the next twenty years, West Northamptonshire Council will focus on developing the railway infrastructure for passenger and freight services through engagement with the rail industry.

The Local Transport Plan Themes and Objectives guide the policies and interventions within the plan, and these are set out below:

Rail investment is a key part of the Local Transport Plan's themes "Connecting People Better, Shaping Healthier Places, and Mobility Enabling Prosperity".

CONNECTING PEOPLE BETTER

Objective 1: Improve accessibility of public transport, walking and cycling to promote a system that is fair and provides attractive travel alternatives to key destinations

This plan will increase the use of rail for travel between key centres, connect communities to their railway network, and encourage further development and regeneration around the existing stations

SHAPING HEALTHIER PLACES

Objective 4: Enhance local environments and further reduce carbon emissions from transport by investing in low carbon and electric modes, mindful of local heritage

This plan will help to reduce transport related emissions by supporting increased rail freight and advocate for decarbonisation of the rail freight network

MOBILITY ENABLING PROSPERITY

Objective 5: Reduce inequalities through better transport connections to key employment and education opportunities, to support local socio-economic growth

This plan will re-establish community-led engagement with the railway industry

Investment in the railway infrastructure of West Northamptonshire will support the region's transition to being more environmentally friendly by enabling people to take more trips by rail instead of private car. It will also encourage the further development of a decarbonised freight network with greater use of the railway network for the movement of goods into West Northamptonshire, which is a powerhouse for UK logistics.

The opportunities for West Northamptonshire Council to increase rail patronage come from supporting strategies, public transport interventions, and transport policy. Policy 5 of the Local Transport Plan sets out our ambitions for railway services, stations, and routes that benefit West Northamptonshire. There are nine policy measures which the Council will focus on in the next five years. Not all will be delivered in the time period, but progress toward their completion during the lifetime of the Local Transport Plan, will be made.

These policies are:

- **P05A:** Work with Network Rail and operators, as well as Great British Railways Transition Team¹, East West Rail Company, England's Economic Heartland, and other local authorities to improve the accessibility of, to and from existing railway stations, with step-free access, improved wayfinding, service information, customer support, better connectivity with other modes to encourage first and last mile access
- **P05B:** Advocate for more West Coast Main Line train services to serve Northampton and Long Buckby to encourage more people to consider rail as an alternative to the car where appropriate.
- **P05C:** Advocate and safeguard for the development of existing rail infrastructure, stations and services to better connect the region and reduce car dependency.
- **P05D:** Work with operators to consider how to lower rail fares, tackle the complexity of different fare structures, and consider multi-modal ticketing, to remove these barriers and make travel by rail and between modes smoother
- **P05E:** Work closely with Network Rail and other local authorities to reinforce the role of gateway railway stations outside West Northamptonshire but which support the movement and people and goods in the area (such as Banbury, Milton Keynes, Rugby, Wellingborough and Wolverton)
- **P05F:** Actively promote and support the completion of the Aylesbury Link of East West Rail to provide connectivity between Northampton and Old Oak Common, and work with East West Rail Company and Network Rail to extend East West Rail services to Northampton
- **P05G:** Promote and support the provision of a new station at Weedon Bec to serve Daventry and the surrounding area, and work with Network Rail and other relevant bodies to deliver this facility
- **P05H:** Advocate reducing, and at least sustaining commuter journey times between West Northamptonshire and London, Birmingham and Coventry
- **P05I:** Work with Network Rail and operators to support the re-establishment of redundant rail infrastructure where appropriate.

Notwithstanding all the component policies within Policy 5 of the Local Transport Plan, West Northamptonshire Council commit to the following policy measures which could increase rail patronage as a byproduct of their successful implementation:

- **P01A:** Take an integrated approach to planning with transport, land use, utility networks, and digital connectivity all considered together for existing and planned developments
- **P02D:** Collaborate with key stakeholders to promote and incentivise walking/wheeling, cycling, and use of public transport for all or part of more passenger trips
- **P03C:** Work with operators to improve public transport user experience, provision and integration of journey planning and service information across all modes to reduce car dependency and encourage multi-modal journeys
- **P03D:** Consider the potential of integrated ticketing and payment systems for public transport users across the Council area to create seamless transfer and encourage multi-modal journeys
- **P03E:** Work with operators to develop bespoke Travel Plans for railway stations across West Northamptonshire, to support sustainable travel connections

¹ West Northamptonshire Council acknowledges that the Great British Railways Transition Team no longer exists and is now the Shadow Great British Railways organisation

- **P04F:** Work with operators to consider how to lower bus fares and consider multi-modal ticketing, to remove these barriers and make travel by bus and between modes smoother

3. Overview of rail within the context of West Northamptonshire

West Northamptonshire has three railway stations: Northampton and Long Buckby on the West Coast Main Line Northampton Loop, and King's Sutton on the Chiltern Main Line. The West Coast Main Line stations are served by London Northwestern (part of West Midlands Trains), while King's Sutton is served by Chiltern Railways and Great Western Railways. The Council area has extensive rail infrastructure, providing intercity passenger, and long-distance freight connections, between London and Scotland, including the future High Speed Two (HS2) line between London and Birmingham. However, there will be no local HS2 railway station. Figure 1 shows the extend of railways in our region, and the proximity of the Midland Main Line and Chiltern Main Line stations just outside the boundary of West Northamptonshire.

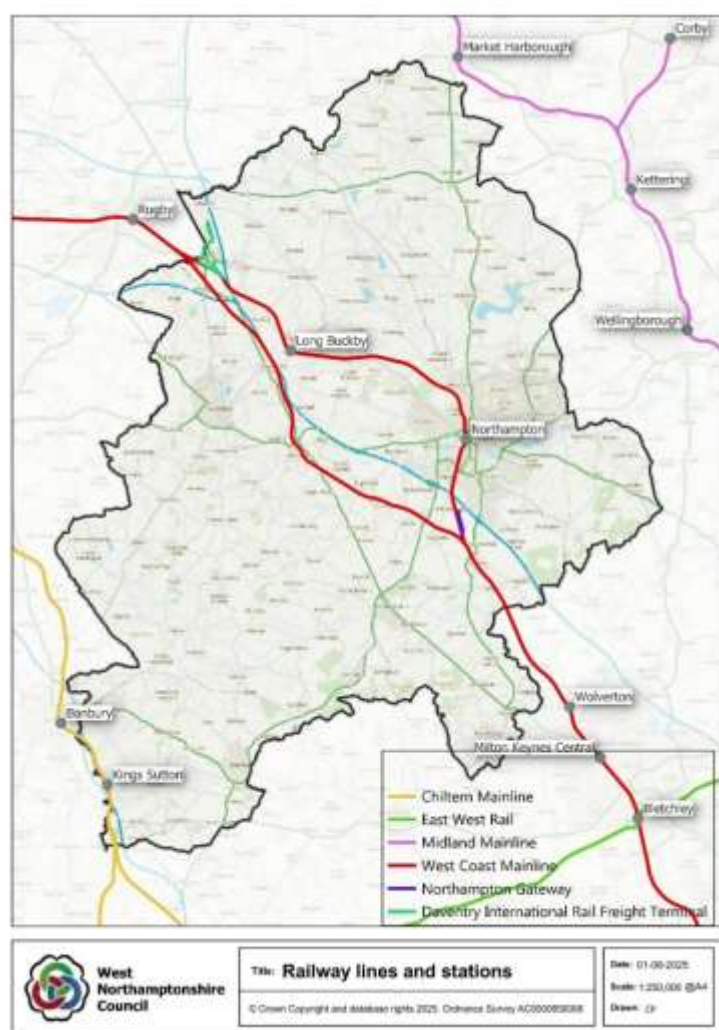


Figure 1: Map of railway lines and stations

The way that we use our railways has changed with the COVID-19 pandemic accelerating the shift to remote working that has continued after the pandemic. Some latest research from the Department for Transport shows that leisure usage of the railway now dominates the reason for travel, with 54% of users, compared to 30% for commuting and 15% for business purposes².

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leisure-travel-tops-charts-for-reasons-people-choose-rail>

Railway stations in West Northamptonshire have seen steady growth, year-on-year, in patronage. As seen in the figure below, particularly since 2010, rail patronage at all three stations has grown significantly against a base value from 2005. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic reduction in patronage with all three stations falling to values around 50% lower than the 2005 patronage. Long Buckby railway station shows the greatest percentage growth in passengers up to the pandemic.

Charts of absolute numbers of passenger entries and exits for Northampton, Long Buckby, and King's Sutton railway station are in the relevant sections below.

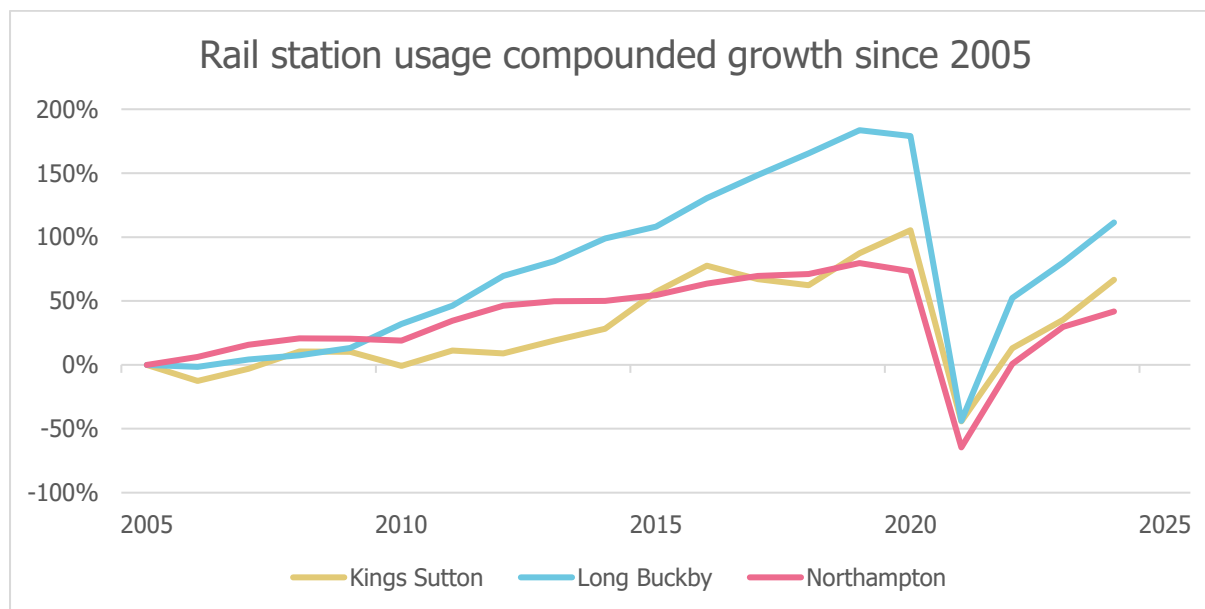


Figure 2: Rail passenger compounded percentage growth at all stations

Northampton railway station and services

Northampton railway station is located on the Northampton Loop of the West Coast Main Line with the majority of services being Birmingham to London intercity commuter trains. The station benefits from good onward connections with a large number of bus services calling outside the railway station, bicycle storage, hireable micromobility, a substantial car park, and plans to build a new multi-storey car park on the station site. The station has a staffed ticket office which operates between 0700 to 1900 on weekdays, and between 0800 to 1600 on weekends and bank holidays. Northampton also benefits from a good accessibility service with lifts between the concourse and platforms, and staff aiding passengers with mobility challenges onto trains.

Railway passengers boarding at Northampton can journey south towards the London Euston terminus with regular station calls at Wolverton, Milton Keynes Central, Bletchley and Leighton Buzzard. There are irregular calling patterns during the early morning and late evening, on both weekdays and weekends, for services to Cheddington, Tring, Berkhamsted, Hemel Hempstead, Apsley, Kings Langley, Watford Junction, Bushey, and Harrow & Wealdstone. Watford Junction is not served during the morning peak schedule, but has hourly calling patterns during the off-peak. Travellers to Watford Junction during the morning peak must change services at Milton Keynes Central.

Railway ticket prices are high on southbound services, when compared to comparable distance journeys heading northbound.

Destination (regular timetable only)	Anytime day return
Wolverton	£18.00
Milton Keynes Central	£21.40
Bletchley	£25.20
Leighton Buzzard	£25.20
London Euston	£79.30

Table 1: Ticket prices for southbound Northampton services (June 2025)

For northbound boarders at Northampton, the majority of services are to Birmingham New Street with regular station calls at Long Buckby, Rugby, Coventry, Canley, Tile Hill, Berkswell, Hampton-in-Arden, and Birmingham International.

On Sundays, these services currently also call at Marston Green, whilst in the early morning and late evening some services also call at the other local stations between Birmingham International and Birmingham New Street. These stations are Lea Hall, Stechford, and Adderley Park.

Destination (regular timetable only)	Anytime day return
Long Buckby	£7.60
Rugby	£12.00
Coventry	£18.10
Canley	£18.10
Tile Hill	£18.10
Berkswell	£18.10
Hampton-in-Arden	£22.00
Birmingham International	£22.00
Birmingham New Street	£25.80

Table 2: Ticket prices for northbound Northampton services (June 2025)

Additionally, from Northampton, passengers can travel towards Crewe, however there is a very minimal service. On weekdays, there are two direct services towards Crewe in the early morning with only one return service late in the evening. This journey is only feasible for passengers willing to interchange at Rugby.

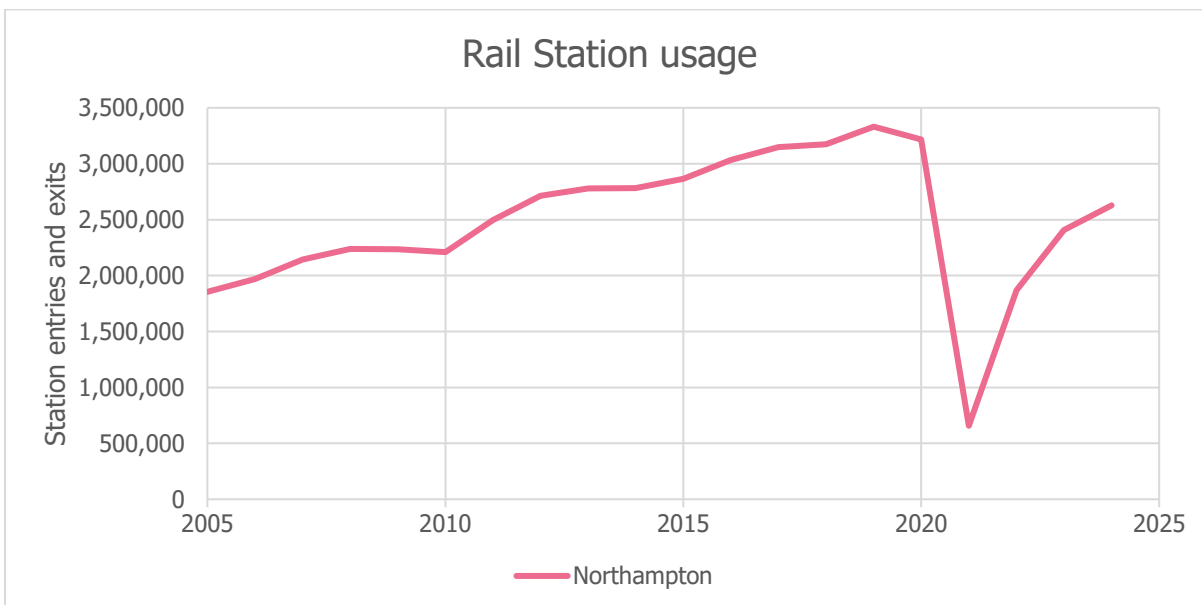


Figure 3: Northampton railway station passenger numbers since 2005

Long Buckby railway station and services

Long Buckby railway station is a small, elevated station located on the Northampton Loop of the West Coast Main Line, between Northampton and Rugby with all of the services being Birmingham to Northampton commuter trains. The station does not benefit from good onward connections as the bus service is infrequent, poorly aligned with the rail timetable, and does not operate into the evening. The station has extensive car parking facilities, with over 600 spaces, but there is only a small bicycle storage facility. The station ticket office is no longer operated full time; it now has an intermittent staffing operation during some peak times. Long Buckby has very poor accessibility facilities with no step-free access to platform or train, no lifts, platforms exposed to poor weather conditions, and a high step between the platform and the train.

Railway passengers boarding at Long Buckby can journey south towards the London Euston terminus via Northampton. Passengers do not usually have to alight, but wait for carriages to join onto other 4 or 8 car services. Further southbound regular station calls are Wolverton, Milton Keynes Central, Bletchley and Leighton Buzzard.

Destination (regular timetable only)	Anytime day return
Northampton	£7.60
Wolverton	£18.10
Milton Keynes Central	£22.00
Bletchley	£25.20
Leighton Buzzard	£25.30
London Euston	£79.30

Table 3: Ticket prices for southbound Long Buckby services (June 2025)

For northbound boarders at Long Buckby, the majority of services are to Birmingham New Street with regular station calls at, Rugby, Coventry, Canley, Tile Hill, Berkswell, Hampton-in-Arden, and Birmingham International.

There are irregular calling patterns for stations between Birmingham International and Birmingham New Street. These stations are Marston Green, Lea Hall, Stechford, and Adderley Park.

Destination (regular timetable only)	Anytime day return
Rugby	£7.60
Coventry	£13.60
Canley	£14.60
Tile Hill	£15.30
Berkswell	£16.40
Hampton-in-Arden	£17.70
Birmingham International	£17.80
Birmingham New Street	£21.40

Table 4: Ticket prices for northbound Long Buckby services (June 2025)

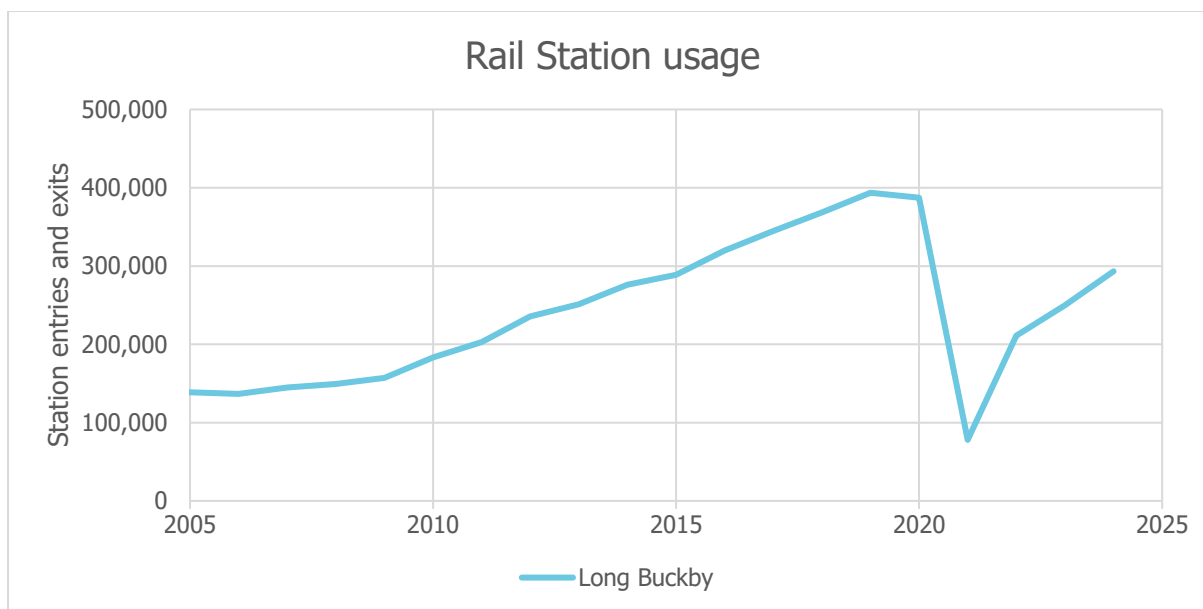


Figure 4: Long Buckby railway station passenger numbers since 2005

Kings Sutton railway station and services

Kings Sutton railway station is a small, isolated station located on the Chiltern Main Line with services consisting of Birmingham to London intercity trains. The calling pattern at Kings Sutton is very infrequent with most services being two to three hours apart. The station does not benefit from good onward travel options as there is no bus service to the station and a very small car park. The isolated nature of the station is one reason why it is underutilised, plus there are more convenient railway connections for passengers willing to travel a short distance by car to Banbury. Kings Sutton has step-free access to one platform, but with no station staff any passengers requiring assistance must use an alternative station.

Whilst southbound services call at Bicester North, Haddenham & Thame Parkway, and High Wycombe there are only return services available on Sundays, so they are not included in the following table.

Destination (regular timetable only)	Anytime day return
London Marylebone	£104.80

Table 5: Ticket prices for southbound Kings Sutton services (June 2025)

In a similar fashion to southbound services, the northbound services will call at stations such as Leamington Spa, Warwick, and Solihull, but the return journeys are so infrequent that direct travel with an anytime day return ticket is not feasible.

Destination (regular timetable only)	Anytime day return
Banbury	£5.10
Birmingham Moor Street	£20.00

Table 6: Ticket prices for northbound Kings Sutton services (June 2025)

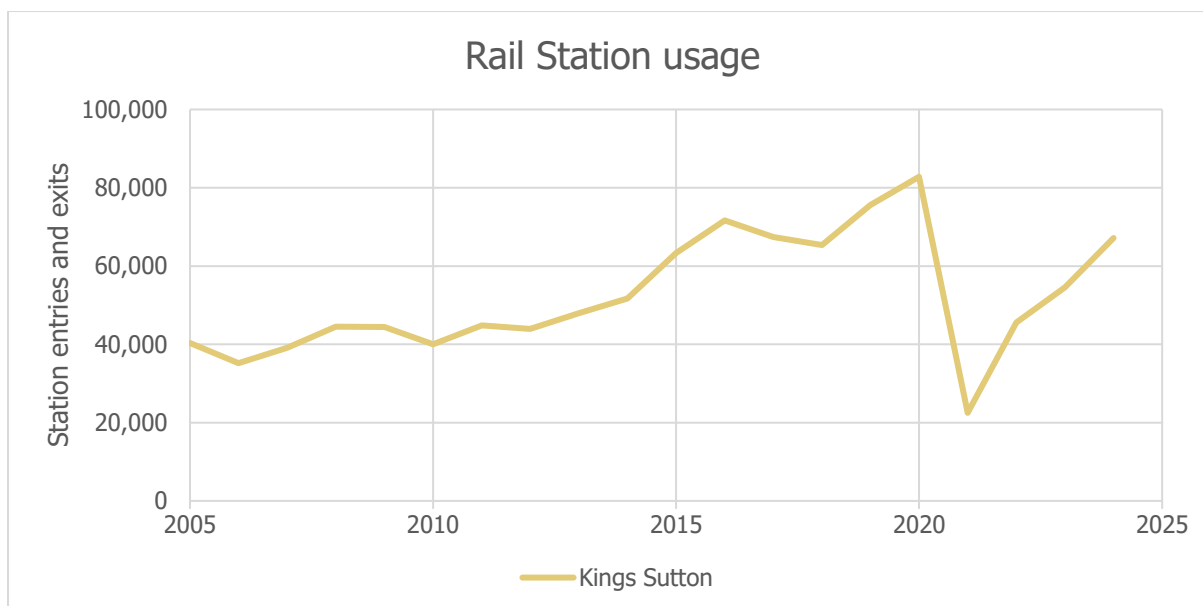


Figure 5: Kings Sutton railway station passenger numbers since 2005

Other rail usage around West Northamptonshire and neighbouring areas

Residents of West Northamptonshire benefit from the proximity of railway stations outside the Council's boundary, including Banbury, Bicester, Rugby, Market Harborough, Milton Keynes Central, Wolverton, Kettering, and Wellingborough. Plans are advancing for a new station at Rugby Parkway on the Northampton Loop that is being developed by Warwickshire County Council with an expected opening date of 2029.

Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) is a major rail freight hub, connected to the Northampton Loop and West Coast Main Line, and centrally located near the M1, A5, and A428 roads. DIRFT handles over 100 train services per week. The Northampton Gateway logistics park, a new strategic rail freight interchange, has been constructed near J15 of the M1, providing up to 46 hectares of new warehousing space³. The freight industry is a key growth sector, and employer, in West Northamptonshire, benefiting from the region's central location and excellent transport connections.

East West Rail, whilst not in West Northamptonshire, will bring some benefits to passengers from Northampton who wish to travel towards Oxford or Cambridge on the new network. Rail users will need to change trains at Bletchley to access East West Rail until further infrastructure work is carried out at Bletchley to allow for trains to change onto the new alignment. The table below shows indicative journey time savings for people travelling between Northampton and Oxford/Cambridge via existing means and by predicted East West Rail times. The East West Rail journey times all account for a 21 minute journey between Northampton and Bletchley.

Northampton to:	By car	By existing rail	By East West Rail	Current ticket price (peak return)
Oxford	90 minutes	94 minutes	65 minutes	£118.40 (via Coventry)
Cambridge	80 minutes	173 minutes	81 minutes	£105.20 (via London)

Table 7: Existing and proposed journey times with East West Rail

³ <https://www.networkrailmediacentre.co.uk/news/major-future-boost-for-rail-freight-as-work-continues-on-west-coast-main-line-hub>

4. Challenges and opportunities

Challenges

West Northamptonshire Council's role within the railway sector – the Council has ambitious goals for our railway sector, but we lack the direct control required over rail infrastructure and operations.

Additionally, West Northamptonshire Council has limited internal rail-related resources, however there is a dedicated Bus and Rail Team and transport planners that have experience in the UK rail sector. Owing to the limited amount of railway within West Northamptonshire, it has not been a priority of this Council or Northamptonshire County Council to develop detailed rail plans, or projects, in partnership with the rail sector. Other local authorities have taken different approaches where they have chosen to invest more resources into rail related activities.

Cost of rail interventions – There are significant challenges throughout the railway sector due to interventions being extremely expensive and the current infrastructure costing billions of pounds to maintain. Network Rail's latest financial figures in 2023/24 showed operating costs of £5.3bn and capital expenditure of £6.8bn⁴. Labour and material costs have risen faster than average inflation rates, especially post-COVID-19.

West Northamptonshire Council may need to contribute to the costs of infrastructure projects agreed with Network Rail, including fully funding smaller interventions like accessibility improvements, or funding business case assessments for larger projects. A comparable example being Rugby Parkway railway station where Warwickshire County Council have borne all of the cost, so far, in the development and promotion of the scheme⁵.

Significant rail investment requires significant new development – To warrant the development of rail, there either needs to be significant, existing, un-tapped demand or an associated major development that will bring about that demand.

For the Council's long term objectives for the development of two new railway stations in West Northamptonshire, West Northamptonshire Council would need to consider the construction of thousands of homes centred around the development of a railway station.

Co-ordination within a complicated industry – The cross-boundary nature, history and set-up of our railway infrastructure has resulted in a very complicated landscape for engagement. The UK Government is currently transitioning train services back into public ownership resulting in further complication, until such time that all train operations are managed by the Department for Transport Operator.

To deliver many of the desired interventions, the Council will work closely with partner organisations in the railway sector, central government, and neighbouring local authorities.

Integration of other transport modes – Railways are fixed assets with no possibility of moving lines or stations to better serve communities, so other more flexible transport modes need to be developed and integrated with rail.

Travel by private car is often cheaper and more convenient – The pricing structure of train tickets leads to high prices particularly for London-bound routes during the morning peak. Where people already own a car, it can be cheaper to drive and park at the destination rather than taking a train.

Choosing to travel by private car is often more convenient with the ability to travel in the early morning, Sundays and Bank Holidays without facing the restrictions on train travel.

⁴ <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Network-Rail-Annual-report-and-accounts-2024.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/major-transport-construction-projects/rugby-parkway-station/3>

Public opposition to new railway – Recent major railway developments in the UK have faced significant local and national opposition to the construction, as seen with the hybrid bill process for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and HS2. Any plans to re-open dismantled railways or construct new rail routes are likely to face significant opposition on the basis of cost, public nuisance, noise, pollution, and the impact of the construction process.

The railway geography of West Northamptonshire – With Northampton and Long Buckby railway stations being situated on the Northampton Loop of the West Coast Main Line, there are several infrastructure related challenges which impede the development of the railway sector in West Northamptonshire. The maximum line speed of 75mph is too slow for high-speed services between London and Birmingham, as the maximum line speed of the West Coast Main Line is 125mph. Increasing line speed would require significant investment in advanced signalling, line straightening, and separating passenger and freight tracks, which may not be cost-effective. Despite these challenges, West Northamptonshire Council advocates for improvements.

Long Buckby and Kings Sutton stations lack essential facilities such as accessibility infrastructure, toilets, welfare facilities, and weather protection, negatively impacting passenger numbers.

The geography of the railway means that Northampton is on the edge of the commuter areas for Birmingham and London, which is good for connectivity, but it is a negative factor when looking at investment and infrastructure changes. An example of this is that Northampton and Long Buckby railway stations are excluded from the Project Oval expansion of contactless ticketing, which extends only up to Bletchley on the West Coast Main Line, and are currently too far from Birmingham to benefit from the West Midlands' Swift PAYG scheme.

The expansion of contactless ticketing poses a challenge for Northampton and Long Buckby rail users as there is likely to be two different methods for paying for tickets. Until such time that Swift PAYG is linked to bank cards, like Oyster is in London, passengers travelling northbound will need to either buy a paper ticket, or use the Swift card. The risk is that rail fares could become more complicated, rather than simplified, just due to our location.

Opportunities

Improving accessibility of our railway stations – There are three railway stations in West Northamptonshire, all with different types of challenges on accessibility. Our opportunity is to lead the development of plans for much improved accessibility infrastructure at Long Buckby and Kings Sutton, whilst also addressing the limited accessibility infrastructure at Northampton.

Boosting our local economy – Railway development is not just about providing better transport opportunities for users based within West Northamptonshire, it is also a method to draw visitors to West Northamptonshire for work, business, and leisure purposes.

Rail development catalyses investment in jobs and housing due to the connectivity to economic centres that good quality rail services provide. By providing better connectivity, we can boost investment and growth at a local level, especially within Northampton.

Providing better links to railway stations – West Northamptonshire Council are developing the Mobility Hub Action Plan, and the Active Travel Strategy, concurrently with this action plan. Both of these bring the opportunity to further increase the travel choice for people wanting to travel by train by offering alternative forms of transport and by improving the active travel offer. Kings Sutton and Long Buckby railway stations have the greatest opportunity for improvement with the development of mobility hubs as they have limited existing public transport and active travel links.

Improving our environment – By increasing the proportion of journeys taken using rail and other sustainable travel modes, there is an opportunity for West Northamptonshire Council to reduce the levels of particulate pollution, poor air quality, and noise pollution along the railway and in built-up areas around the stations.

Additionally, by working closely with the rail freight industry to encourage the increased uptake in battery-powered or electrified rolling stock, this will also drive a reduction in poor air quality markers in communities around the railway network.

Better, and new, connectivity to destinations – Railway stations in West Northamptonshire are already well connected to London and Birmingham, the two economic centres of England. However, the presence of only north-south routes has led to a lack of regional connections.

With the Council's membership of England's Economic Heartland, the Council have been part of the group which is advocating and actively supporting the supplementary development of East West Rail to provide better connectivity across the region and beyond. The Council supports work at Bletchley, which will allow for a West Coast Main Line train to change onto East West Rail, both eastbound and westbound, without passengers needing to change trains at Bletchley. This intervention opens up new rail paths, via interchanges along East West Rail, from Northampton to destinations such as Ipswich, Gatwick Airport, a faster route to Stansted Airport, and Newmarket.

The Council further supports the Aylesbury Link which will allow East West Rail trains to change onto the Aylesbury – Princes Risborough Line for direct services towards Aylesbury, Old Oak Common, and London Marylebone. This intervention will open further connections to destinations such as Heathrow Airport, the Elizabeth Line, and the West Country. Figure 6 below shows the full extent of the potential opportunity should the Bletchley Chord and Aylesbury Link be built.

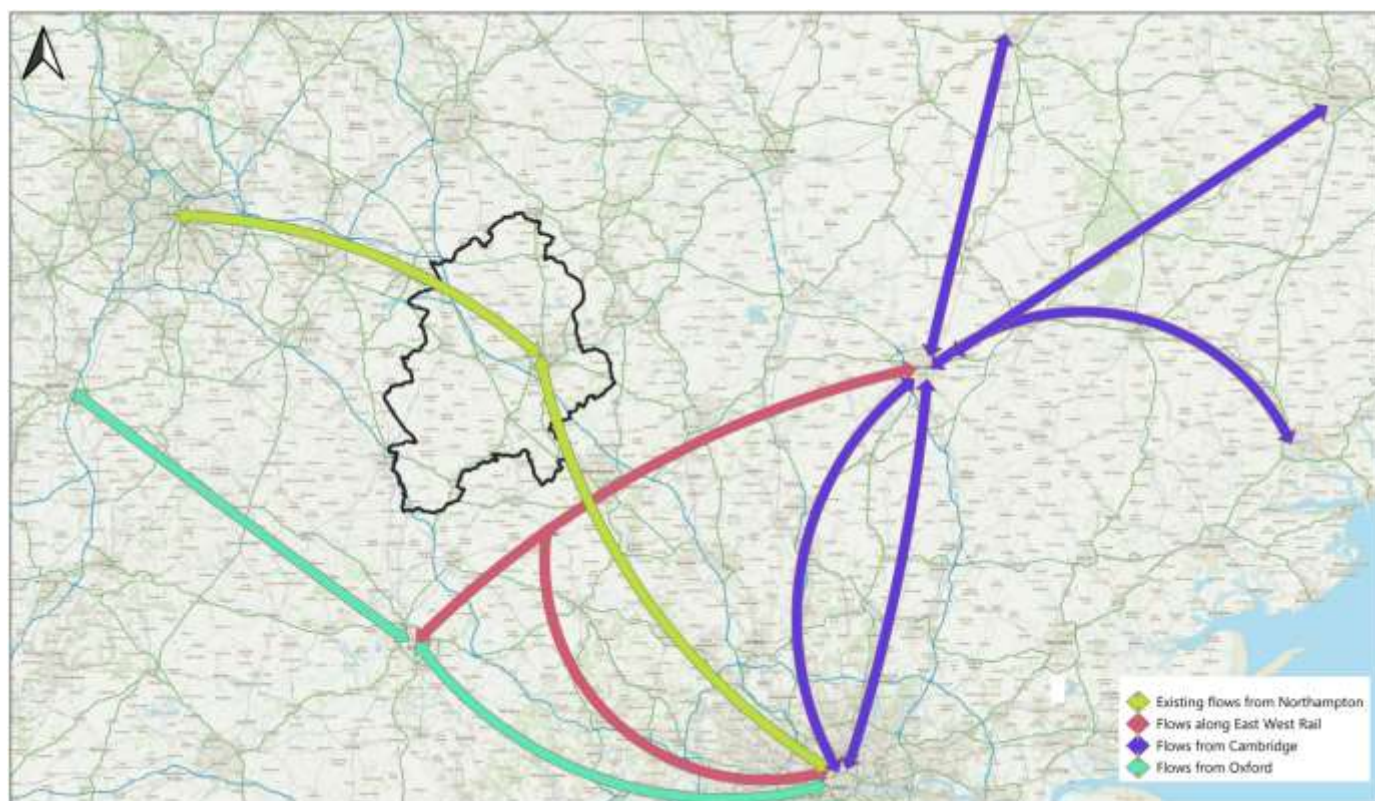


Figure 6: Full potential future flows available.

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These two relatively small improvements will open up the possibility for significant improvements in connectivity for passengers at Northampton and Long Buckby.

The opening of HS2 Phase One⁶ will release capacity on the West Coast Main Line with London to Birmingham high speed services transitioning to the new line. This opens the opportunity for the Council to campaign for additional West Coast Main Line paths to be made available for passenger and freight services. In Northampton, we previously benefited from direct services to destinations such as Stafford, Wolverhampton, and Crewe, with Crewe bringing excellent onward connections for Northampton travellers towards destinations such as North Wales, Liverpool, Manchester, Scotland, and the East Midlands. These vital connections are ones which the Council want to see re-introduced through opportunities driven by the opening of HS2.

Modal shift and associated environmental benefits – The environmental benefits of modal shift to rail are clear. By reducing the use of the private car for inter-town journeys, the cost of congestion, noise levels, airborne pollutants, and greenhouse gas emissions all reduce. By encouraging road users to consider the switch to rail for journeys, space on the road network is freed up for journeys where the purpose cannot be met by rail.

Freight continues to be a growing industry in West Northamptonshire with the area being well served by routes from the major ports in the south, and the existing strategic freight interchanges. Moving more road freight onto rail not only frees up road space, it also boosts our local economy and employment opportunities across West Northamptonshire.

Moving freight from road to rail – By working with industry there is an opportunity for West Northamptonshire Council to work towards more road-based freight to transition to rail. The environmental benefits for the modal shift are clear with rail freight producing significantly less CO₂e per tonne-km than road.

Rail freight trains primarily use diesel due to incomplete electrification between freight terminals. While many main line routes are electrified, infill routes and terminal connections are not. This results in significant carbon emissions in West Northamptonshire, which the Council cannot easily reduce.

Addressing this issue requires nationwide electrification improvements. However, battery-powered freight services could be a solution if terminals like DIRFT and Northampton Gateway support electric locomotive recharging. The cost of electricity remains a challenge for operating electric locomotives.

Greater involvement in the railway sector as a decision maker – West Northamptonshire's membership of the West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) and other potential future devolved structures, may provide more direct control over operations, infrastructure, and finances. However, , any infrastructure, or operational interventions in the Local Transport Plan will require financial and project support from Network Rail, Train Operating Companies and in future Great British Railways, achievable only through collaborative efforts.

The Council can also take the opportunity to lead the engagement of rail users with the railway industry by re-forming the former rail user group and expanding the scope to areas other than Northampton. This is an opportunity for ordinary rail users to advocate to Train Operating Companies, Network Rail and in future Great British Railways for what improvements they want to see.

Rail devolution is the process to transfer power and responsibility for rail services and infrastructure from central government to regional and local authorities, in particular the Mayoral Combined Authorities, with the aim to create a more locally accountable transport network that reflects the needs of the communities it serves. Devolution has already been successfully implemented in the UK with examples being the Scottish and Welsh governments granted powers over infrastructure planning, funding priorities and franchising, and Transport for London with full power over the London Overground. As members of the West Midlands Rail Executive, West Northamptonshire already has some indirect influence over services

⁶ Current opening date is unknown at the time of writing, but the Government has admitted that the project will be delayed further from its planned 2033 opening date

to/from Birmingham, but the future of WMRE's devolved arrangements under Great British Railways is currently unclear.

The strategic control that devolution brings allows local authorities to take on more operational control through setting timetables and fares, managing stations, shaping the network, and directing funding towards their own infrastructure improvement objectives.

Future devolution for West Northamptonshire, either alone or as part of a partnership of authorities, could provide the opportunity to deliver the larger interventions that are referred to in the Local Transport Plan. This includes the development of new stations, integrated ticketing, accessibility improvements, and power to determine our own timetable, fares and journeys.

Modal integration and simplified ticketing – Current and future technology is allowing for integrated public transport ticketing to open up to more areas, rather than being focused on the big conurbations. We will support any opportunity that comes forward to integrate ticketing, which allows passengers to use a single contactless payment option to purchase bus, rail, and other transport tickets, with the best fare being automatically calculated at the end of the day.

Project Coral

Project Coral is a nationwide initiative, formed in 2019, to develop and implement a national contactless ticketing and fare-capping system for buses and trams across England. The aim is to simplify travel by allowing passengers to pay via contactless payment options and the system will automatically calculate the best fare across different operators and transport modes.

Payments for services in Project Coral would not include rail services, but it would allow passengers who use bus and rail as part of their journey to only need to use a single payment method, with the back-office systems automatically calculating the best fare for each leg, and mode, of their journey.

West Northamptonshire Council has already expressed an interest in being part of this work.

Project Oval

Project Oval is a Department for Transport project to expand London-style contactless pay-as-you-go ticketing to national railway stations across the south-east of England and to simplify the ticketing options that people can purchase. The best fare for travellers is automatically calculated at the end of the day depending on the destinations and times of travel. This releases the pressure on the traveller to know the differences between peak and off-peak services, which railcards can be used, and reduce the chance of rail users purchasing an incorrect ticket.

West Northamptonshire is not yet part of the phased roll-out of this option, with Bletchley being the closest railway station on the West Coast Main Line which benefits from this. Should the opportunity arise to join future phases for contactless ticketing at Northampton and Long Buckby, the Council will support this.

Transport for West Midlands – Swift PAYG

By being a member of the West Midlands Rail Executive, Northampton and Long Buckby railway passengers will ultimately benefit from being able to use the Swift pay-as-you-go cards which currently operate across the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

Future infrastructure – Through our current involvement with England’s Economic Heartland, the Partnership Board of East West Rail, membership of the West Midlands Rail Executive, and any future devolvement of transport authority, West Northamptonshire stands in an excellent position to benefit from opportunities to invest in new infrastructure.

As discussed above, the Bletchley Chord and Aylesbury Link provide opportunities for significant improvement in destination choice to the south of our region. Through collaboration with partners in the industry we have the opportunity to influence future infrastructure improvements in the long term, including line speed improvements on the Northampton Loop, improved station infrastructure, new railway stations, and extra freight capacity.

5. Vision

We want to see more people choosing to take rail as the means of travelling between towns and cities and for our stations to become the welcoming point for visitors to our region.

Our vision is:

To support the delivery of a rail service that meets the needs of West Northamptonshire residents and visitors across commuting, business and leisure use.

This vision aligns with West Northamptonshire Council's One West Northamptonshire Plan through the development of the railway network in West Northamptonshire that creates a resilient transport network which supports a productive, inclusive and enterprising West Northamptonshire.

To achieve this overall vision, we have the following sub-categories

1	Increase the proportion of West Northamptonshire residents who use the railway network as their first choice mode of travel for commuting, business, and leisure purposes
2	Focus on using rail services and improving connections to our railway stations to boost the local leisure and tourism industry
3	Deliver accessibility improvements at all West Northamptonshire railway stations to make the railway accessible to all users
4	Better integrate the railway network with bus and active travel options
5	Improve the public realm around our railway stations to make them a hub of activity, not just a place to catch a train
6	Encourage rail freight operators to consider the use of battery-powered or electrified rolling stock
7	Ensure that Northampton railway station becomes a destination as part of the town's regeneration plans

Table 8: WNC visions for better rail infrastructure and services

6. Actions

Set out below are the actions that the Council are going to take over the next five years to start to deliver improvements on the railway network within West Northamptonshire. This section explores the actions that the West Northamptonshire Council will take to support rail.

Our actions are:

Freight

We will deliver a separate freight action plan covering the road and rail freight industry in West Northamptonshire.

We will work collaboratively with the freight industry to move more road-based freight onto rail for regional and national journeys.

We will work in partnership with England's Economic Heartland on their freight action plan for the entire region.

We will liaise with Oxfordshire County Council's rail planning team and Network Rail's freight team to fully capitalise on the opening of the Northampton Gateway strategic rail freight interchange and maximise the freight journeys from the Port of Southampton to Northampton via rail.

Supporting rail users

We will support the formation a rail user group for Northampton and Long Buckby railway stations to ensure that local voices are heard and interventions that users want are delivered.

We will also support the formation a rail user group for Kings Sutton railway station in conjunction with the groups already in existence on the Chiltern Main Line.

We will develop a feasible plan to deliver integrated ticketing across bus and rail in West Northamptonshire and to extend the pay-as-you-go ticketing on the West Coast Main Line towards Birmingham and London.

Station accessibility

We will work with train operators and Network Rail to continuously improve accessibility to all the stations in West Northamptonshire and the gateway stations outside West Northamptonshire that our residents rely on. This will include step-free access, better wayfinding, seating and shelters.

We will engage with local residents and rail users of Kings Sutton and Long Buckby railway stations to understand their concerns about accessibility and what improvements they would like to see. We will then lead the development of business cases and feasibility plans to deliver those accessibility improvements.

We will work with Network Rail and West Midlands Trains to address accessibility concerns at Northampton railway station. Whilst there is a lift to the concourse, if this is out-of-order, then there is no alternative provision for people with accessibility requirements to access the concourse.

We will liaise with Network Rail so that accessibility funding in the current and future funding envelopes comes to our stations.

Local improvements

We will develop methods and proposals for rail to be used for travel to major sporting events that we host on a regular basis in West Northamptonshire. This will work in conjunction with already established park and ride/stride services which worked well during Silverstone F1 and the RFU Women's Rugby World Cup.

We will regenerate the area around Northampton railway station to make it an inviting gateway to the town and to improve the experience of people living near, and using the station.

Collaboration

We will work closely with neighbouring local authorities so that changes to the railway network in their regions, which directly affect our residents, are fully understood and consulted on.

We will collaborate with the West Midlands Rail Executive so that opportunities around railway devolution are fully understood and capitalised on. We will use our membership of Executive as a means to deliver the major improvements that the Council wants to see in West Northamptonshire.

We will revive the engagement with West Coast Partnership, the shadow operator for HS2 Phase One, to advance our proposals for a post-HS2 West Coast Main Line.

The role of rail freight

West Northamptonshire is a key area for freight movements in the UK and to capitalise further on this, West Northamptonshire Council will establish and/or improve partnership arrangements with SME and large logistics operators to work together in the areas of freight travel planning, digital frameworks, carbon reduction and 'last mile' delivery. We will collaborate on ways to reduce freight carbon miles strategically and locally through freight consolidation facilities within new mobility hubs. We will work in partnership with National Highways and Network Rail, plus with England's Economic Heartland on their Freight Action Plan for the region.

West Northamptonshire Council will also deliver a separate Freight Action Plan which will deliver future interventions for the freight sector, in road and rail. The Council will work collaboratively with industry to move more road-based freight onto rail to take advantage of the strategic freight interchanges in our region.

Re-establishing the Rail User Groups

West Northamptonshire Council will support the re-establishment the Northampton Rail User Group with the objective to gain membership from Network Rail, Train Operating Companies serving Northampton railway station, local MPs, West Northamptonshire Council Councillors, and members of the public. We will use existing contracts within this sector to support the establishment and running of the Rail User Group in the short term before a formal structure, with responsible roles filled, can be established.

The Council will form the rail user group with representation for Northampton and Long Buckby railway stations. Should there be interest from users of Kings Sutton, the Council will sponsor the creation of a specific Rail User Group for Kings Sutton, or the support for Kings Sutton to join another Rail User Group on the Chiltern Main Line. The user group will be used to further understand the needs of actual rail users and for them to propose ideas which will have a material impact on their rail experiences.

Railway station accessibility review and promotion of interventions

Our three railway stations have varying degrees of inaccessibility to rail users with mobility, or other, impairments.

West Northamptonshire Council will work with Network Rail and operators, as well as the future Great British Railways, East West Rail Company, England's Economic Heartland, and other local authorities to improve the accessibility of, to, and from, existing railway stations, with step-free access, improved wayfinding, service information, customer support, and better connectivity with other transport modes to encourage first and last mile access.

The Council will engage with local residents and rail users through survey and consultation at Kings Sutton and Long Buckby to understand concerns relating to accessibility to the railway, including within the stations, connections to stations via public transport, active travel, and driving, and the public realm outside the stations. The outcomes of this will feed into more detailed plans on what accessibility improvements we want to deliver.

The Council will lead and fund (either in partnership, or entirely) the development of business cases and associated analysis for the delivery of accessibility improvements at Long Buckby and Kings Sutton using funding received in the Local Transport Grant. By spearheading the development of these plans, West Northamptonshire Council expects the buy-in from the railway industry to work towards the implementation which will most likely be through a scheme similar to Network Rail's "Access for All" scheme in the next control period. We will liaise with Network Rail, train operators, and the future Great British Railways to ensure that Long Buckby and Kings Sutton railway stations are seriously considered for investment from funds set aside for improving accessibility to develop step-free access to all station platforms in either Control Period 7 or Control Period 8 of Network Rail's funding envelope.

At Northampton railway station, the Council will work with Network Rail and West Midlands Trains to address accessibility concerns with accessing the station from street level. With only one small lift, and no other provision for access to the concourse other than steep steps, any operational issue with the lift will result in passengers with additional accessibility requirements being unable to easily access the station.

We will work with train operators and the future Great British Railways to ensure that where step-free access to trains is impossible, that staff are always on-hand to deploy aids to assist all railway users who need assistance.

Focus on rail improvements to catalyse boosts to the leisure and tourism sector

The leisure and tourism sector in West Northamptonshire is a significant employer and attracts visitors from across both the UK and overseas. We have excellent facilities delivering sporting spectacles such as the Formula 1 Grand Prix at Silverstone, the recent RFU Women's Rugby World Cup and the Northampton Saints at Franklins Gardens, football at Sixfields, and cricket at The County Ground. We also have

The Council will lead work to develop incentives for people to use the railway as their means of getting to these events. This will work in partnership with existing park and ride facilities using buses. We will explore incentives such as including bus travel to events with rail tickets.

The Council will focus development and regeneration around Northampton Railway Station into making this area a destination, not just a place for people to pass through.

Cross border collaboration

The regional connections that rail brings for both passenger and freight travel is something that West Northamptonshire Council will be more involved. The council will collaborate with neighbouring authorities, including Bedfordshire County Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Warwickshire County Council, North Northamptonshire Council, and Buckinghamshire County Council to ensure that rail developments bring joint benefits to communities within, and outside West Northamptonshire. Where our residents rely upon rail services operating in different regions, West Northamptonshire Council will ensure that their voices are heard in any decisions on changing infrastructure or services.

The Council will collaborate with authorities and organisations which transport freight by rail through to the strategic rail freight interchanges in West Northamptonshire. Freight is already being transported on East West Rail, through Oxfordshire, to the Northampton Gateway Rail Freight Interchange from Southampton, so West Northamptonshire Council will work closely with Oxfordshire County Council on plans to shift road based freight onto rail on this route. West Northamptonshire Council will work with Network Rail's freight team to identify new freight paths to and from ports, and new logistic developments in and around our region which will have an impact on our residents, economy and environment.

For passenger services, the Council will work collaboratively as members of West Midlands Rail Executive, should devolved authority be granted by the Department for Transport.

West Northamptonshire Council will seek to use a future devolution opportunities to fund and deliver the priority interventions that we want to see in West Northamptonshire. The Council will decide on whether to commit to any future devolved arrangements once there is a full understanding of the offering, which must include how any revenue and risk are allocated between West Northamptonshire Council, West Midlands Rail Executive in general, and Great British Railways.

The Council have been in discussion historically with the West Coast Partnership, who act as the shadow operator of the West Coast Main Line until HS2 Phase One becomes operational. West Northamptonshire Council will revive this engagement with industry to put forward our proposals for improved rail services upon the opening of HS2.

Integrated ticketing

Integration of public transport ticketing systems is a challenging and technical problem, but when it is done well, the result is transformational. Integrated ticketing allows for a passengers to use a single ticket, pass, or payment method across multiple modes of transport and operators. In essence, it enables passengers to travel easier across all forms of public transport without needing to purchase tickets for each leg of the journey.

In the UK, integrated ticketing is dominated by London and Birmingham with Oyster and Swift, respectively. But with the technological advancements, other areas are investigating how to implement their own systems, and West Northamptonshire wants to do the same.

The Council will develop a feasible implementation plan following studies in how a system could be delivered in West Northamptonshire. Any integrated ticketing system will incorporate the entire of West Northamptonshire, not just Northampton town itself. . The option is likely to be a "top-up" style card that passengers can use on bus and rail services in West Northamptonshire. The establishment of a system like this allows the Council to expand the services which can use it, including future micromobility and taxi services.

As part of more national efforts to simplify ticketing for public transport, West Northamptonshire Council will work with the West Midlands Rail Executive on the extension of the Swift travel card zone to include Long Buckby and Northampton railway stations. Similarly, in the south-east the Project Oval ticket simplification project, led by the Department for Transport, currently extends to Bletchley. We will work

with the Department for Transport to extend this further northwards to include West Northamptonshire in future phases of the roll-out. Both of these systems operate single-leg ticketing, with the best fare being calculated at the end of the journey, so that passengers only purchase the type of ticket that's best for the journey destination and arrival time. It removes complexity of multiple types of ticketing, and allows the passenger peace-of-mind that the correct ticket is purchased at all times.

Action category	Action	Responsibility to deliver	Potential funding sources
Freight	Deliver a freight action plan covering the road and rail freight industry in our area	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	Local Transport Grant
Freight	Work collaboratively with industry to move more road-based freight onto rail	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team West Northamptonshire Council Freight Collaboration Group	Private sector funding
Freight	Work in partnership with England's Economic Heartland on their freight action plan for the entire region	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	Funded through our membership of England's Economic Heartland
Freight	Liaise with Oxfordshire County Council and Network Rail's freight team to fully capitalise on the opening of the Northampton Gateway strategic rail freight interchange	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team West Northamptonshire Council Freight Collaboration Group West Northamptonshire Council Economic Development	No external funding required
Rail users	Form a rail user group for Northampton and Long Buckby	West Northamptonshire Council Sustainable Travel Team	Local Transport Grant Sponsorship from rail operators
Rail users	Form a rail user group for Kings Sutton in conjunction with groups with other Chiltern Line stations	West Northamptonshire Council Sustainable Travel Team	Local Transport Grant Sponsorship from rail operators
Rail users	Develop a feasible plan to deliver integrated ticketing across West Northamptonshire	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	Local Transport Grant
Station accessibility	Work with Network Rail and train operators to continuously improve accessibility to all stations in our area and gateway stations outside West Northamptonshire that our residents rely on	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team West Northamptonshire Council Sustainable Travel Team	Network Rail Access for All Central Government infrastructure funding

Action category	Action	Responsibility to deliver	Potential funding sources
Station accessibility	Engage with local residents and users of Kings Sutton and Long Buckby railway stations to understand their concerns about accessibility at their station	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	No external funding required
Station accessibility	Lead the development of business cases for the delivery of the desired accessibility improvements at Kings Sutton and Long Buckby railway stations	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	Local Transport Grant
Station accessibility	Engage with Network Rail and West Midlands Trains to address accessibility concerns and deliver improvements at Northampton Railway Station	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	Network Rail Access for All Local Transport Grant
Station accessibility	Liaise with Network Rail so that accessibility funding in Control Period 7 and 8 comes to our stations	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	Network Rail Access for All
Local improvements	Develop methods and proposals for how rail can be used for travel to the major sporting events we hold on a regular basis in Northampton and Silverstone	West Northamptonshire Council Sustainable Travel Team	Local Transport Grant
Local improvements	Regenerate the area around Northampton Station to make it an inviting gateway to the town	West Northamptonshire Council Economic Development	West Northamptonshire Council capital funding Town Centre Fund
Collaboration	Work closely with neighbouring authorities so that changes to the rail network in their regions, that affect our residents, are fully understood and consulted on	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	No external funding required
Collaboration	Collaborate with the West Midlands Rail Executive so that opportunities around railway devolvement are fully understood and capitalised on	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	Funded through our membership of West Midlands Rail Executive

Action category	Action	Responsibility to deliver	Potential funding sources
Collaboration	Use our membership of the West Midlands Rail Executive as the means to deliver the major improvements we want to see	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team West Northamptonshire Council Sustainable Travel Team	Funded through our membership of West Midlands Rail Executive
Collaboration	Revive the engagement with West Coast Partnership to advance our proposals for a post-HS2 railway	West Northamptonshire Council Transport Planning Team	No external funding required

Table 9: Our actions, responsibility and funding

7. Funding sources

The nature of the railway means that interventions are very expensive and outside the feasibility of a local authority's capital funding. Network Rail, as the current infrastructure manager, controls the funding of almost all capital funding of rail interventions, and is therefore the organisation that will fund the changes we want to see.

Direct government funding

Infrastructure enhancements are funded by the Department for Transport and managed by Network Rail. Money is allocated to interventions based on value for money assessments and the production of business cases to bid for funding.

Devolved administration funding

The devolved transport authorities such as Transport for London fund rail interventions through their overall transport funding envelope. The future Great British Railways arrangements may provide West Northamptonshire, either independently or as part of the West Midlands Rail Executive, with a greater degree of influence over how, funding for rail enhancements is spent.

Grant funding

West Northamptonshire Council is in receipt of funding through the Local Transport Grant. The Council can use this money to fund rail interventions either through full funding or match funding with another organisation.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

The regular monitoring of our progress is covered through the reporting mechanism covered in the Local Transport Plan.

9. Glossary of terms

Term or abbreviation	Explanation
Aylesbury Link	A planned railway connection between East West Rail to the Risborough Line north of Aylesbury
Chiltern Main Line	The railway route which connects London Marylebone with Birmingham
Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT)	A major rail to road intermodal freight terminal
East-West Rail	A new railway which will connect Oxford to Cambridge
Great British Railways	A future planned state-owned railway company which will combine the railway network infrastructure and passenger services into a single responsible entity
High Speed Two (HS2)	The proposed new, and partially constructed, high-speed rail line connecting London and Birmingham Curzon Street
Local transport plan	A statutory document which sets out the objectives and programme for improving the transport network
Network Rail Limited	The non-departmental public body of the Department for Transport which is the owner and infrastructure manager of most of the railway network in Great Britain
Northampton Loop	The branch line of the West Coast Main Line railway which serves Northampton and Long Buckby railway stations, and Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal
Rail Reform Bill	The governmental Bill which will establish Great British Railways as a new public body with responsibility across the British railway network
Rail User Group	A local organisation of rail travellers, local politicians, and rail operators who advocate for improvements to railway services and infrastructure in their area
SEGRO Logistics Park	A new development in Northamptonshire to deliver a 600-acre development of rail to road logistics infrastructure
Train Operating Company	The company which operates passenger services at a railway station. For West Northamptonshire, these are: Avanti West Coast London Northwestern Chiltern Railways Great Western Railways
West Coast Main Line	The high-speed railway between London Euston to Glasgow, with branches to cities like Birmingham and Manchester
West Midlands Rail Executive	A jointly owned partnership by 14 local authorities plus the West Midlands Combined Authority formed to jointly specify and manage the West Midlands Trains contract with the Department for Transport and manage railway transport policy and strategy across the West Midlands region

Table 10: Glossary of term