

OUR VIEW ON INFRASTRUCTURE ALL ABOARD THE VARSITY LINE



This week's Autumn Statement sets out a major government commitment of £1.3bn to infrastructure investment, recognising the crucial role of infrastructure in national economic performance.

The statement includes an initial £27m commitment to an Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Expressway. Recent announcements form part of a revolution in UK infrastructure planning, which will have major implications for the Golden Triangle.

Commissioned in March this year, the National Infrastructure Commission report (see [here](#)) on the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor noted that:

“ To succeed in the global economy, Britain must build on its strengths. The corridor connecting Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford could be the UK's Silicon Valley – a world renowned centre for science, technology and innovation. But its future success is not guaranteed. ”

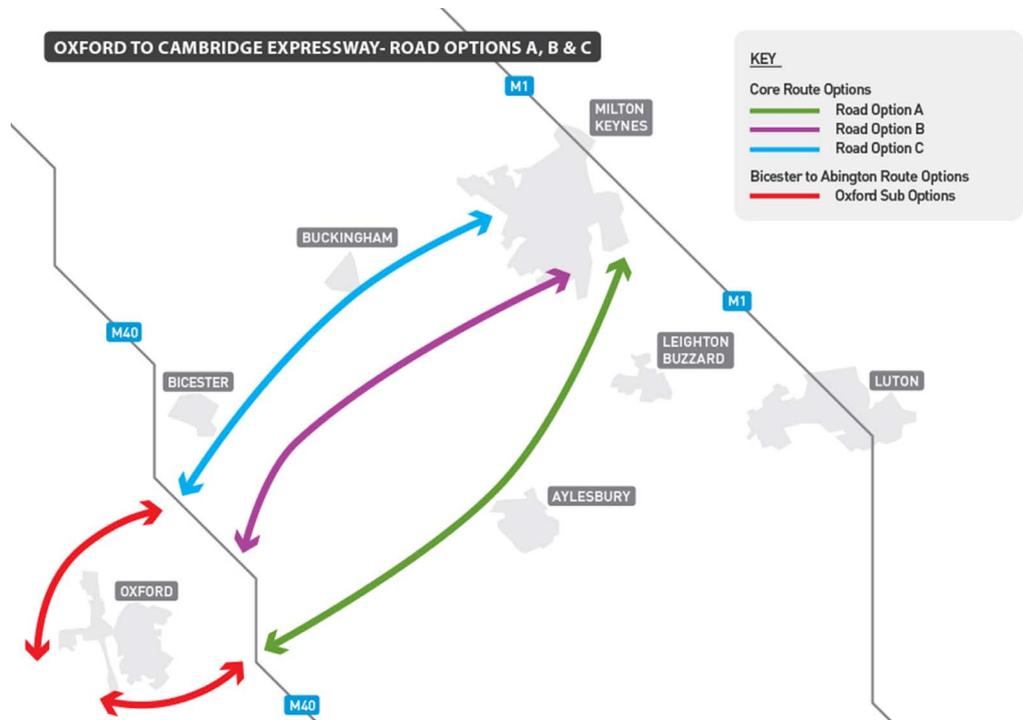
The Corridor, which traverses the north and west of the London-Oxford-Cambridge Golden Triangle, incorporates around 3.3 million people and includes two of the country's most rapidly expanding centres – Cambridge and Milton Keynes. At the same time, Oxford and Cambridge are two of the country's least affordable housing markets. The Commission recognises the crucial importance of linking infrastructure to housing and commercial development in order to further realise the corridor's economic growth potential.

3.3m

people live along the Varsity
Line Corridor

“ The Commission’s central finding is that a lack of sufficient and suitable housing presents a fundamental risk to the success of the area. Without a joined-up plan for housing, jobs and infrastructure across the corridor, it will be left behind by its international competitors - a once in-a-generation opportunity to secure the area’s future success. ”

“ The NNA report proposes that housing developments in excess of 5,000 units should be considered as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). ”



The 2015/16 Oxford to Cambridge Expressway Strategic Study (see [here](#)) identified three potential routes for the east-west link. The £27m announced this week will take the project to 2018/19 in order to further evaluate route options and assess impact.

The NIC report also states: “The Commission’s central finding is that a lack of sufficient and suitable housing presents a fundamental risk to the success of the area. Without a joined-up plan for housing, jobs and infrastructure across the corridor, it will be left behind by its international competitors. By providing the foundations for such a strategy, new east-west transport links present a once in-a-generation opportunity to secure the area’s future success.”

Following the 1967 closure of sections of the original Varsity Line, communication links between Oxford and Cambridge have been convoluted, slow and an impediment to growth.

The east-west corridor initiative is part of a wider, national transformation of UK infrastructure planning. The NIC was first

established in October 2015 to develop a strategic vision for infrastructure across the UK. NIC will be made a permanent, executive agency in January 2017 and be imbued with significant powers and influence. Published in October this year, the National Needs Assessment (NNA) on UK Infrastructure (see [here](#)) provides the blueprint for the operations of the NIC.

The NNA report sets out 19 key recommendations, all of which have an impact on property. Covering all areas of infrastructure from transport through to energy, telecommunications and water management, the report contains a key housing recommendation. It is proposed that housing developments in excess of 5,000 units should be considered as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). NSIPs have fallen within the remit of the Planning Inspectorate since 2012 (see [here](#)).

16.5%

population growth in Milton Keynes (2004-14)

“ In the medium term, recent policy initiatives and pronouncements are likely to lead to a dramatic increase in housing development throughout the Golden Triangle and along the Varsity Line Corridor. ”

As proposed, the planning and development control process for major housing projects will become more centralised and more navigable as the government moves towards facilitating a wholesale increase in new housing provision in key markets like the Golden Triangle and along key key growth areas like the east-west and Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Corridors.

In the medium term, recent policy initiatives and pronouncements are likely to lead to a dramatic increase in housing development throughout the Golden Triangle and along the Varsity Line Corridor, thereby supporting the area's contribution to national productivity.

Law firm Pinsent Masons, were a key member and contributor to the National Needs Assessment report, having provided extensive support to key Golden Triangle infrastructure projects, including the expansion of Northstowe to the north of Cambridge and the upgrade of the A14. Robbie Owen, Partner and Head of Infrastructure Planning & Government Affairs comments: “The NNA report represents a watershed in UK planning, linking economic growth directly to infrastructure planning whilst calling on the government to take a strategic and cross-sectoral approach to a range of nationally important projects.”

The NIC report on the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor sets out the following recommendations:

- The creation of a Strategic Corridor Plan, encompassing all local authorities, enterprise partnerships and government departments;
- Infrastructure design and standards to be formally integrated into all major developments and settlement expansions;
- The creation of joint governance protocols for realising major corridor projects;
- A formal £100m commitment to the western section of the Oxford to Cambridge rail link, to include plans for major housing developments along the route and around stations;
- Further investment in the central section of the Oxford to Cambridge rail link with an emphasis on new residential and commercial development;
- A formal commitment to fund the £27m next phase of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway (as announced this week in the Autumn Statement);
- The generation of coherent city centre transport strategies in all towns and cities along the Oxford to Cambridge Corridor.

Cambridge Biomedical Campus



2%+

GVA growth in Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Oxford in 2015 and 2016, placing all 3 centres in the UK top ten

600+

biotechnology companies in the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Corridor

“ The Autumn Statement also includes a real terms increase of £2bn in government R&D spending for each year of the present administration. ”

“ The Varsity Line has already been renamed the ‘Brain Belt’ by several commentators. ”

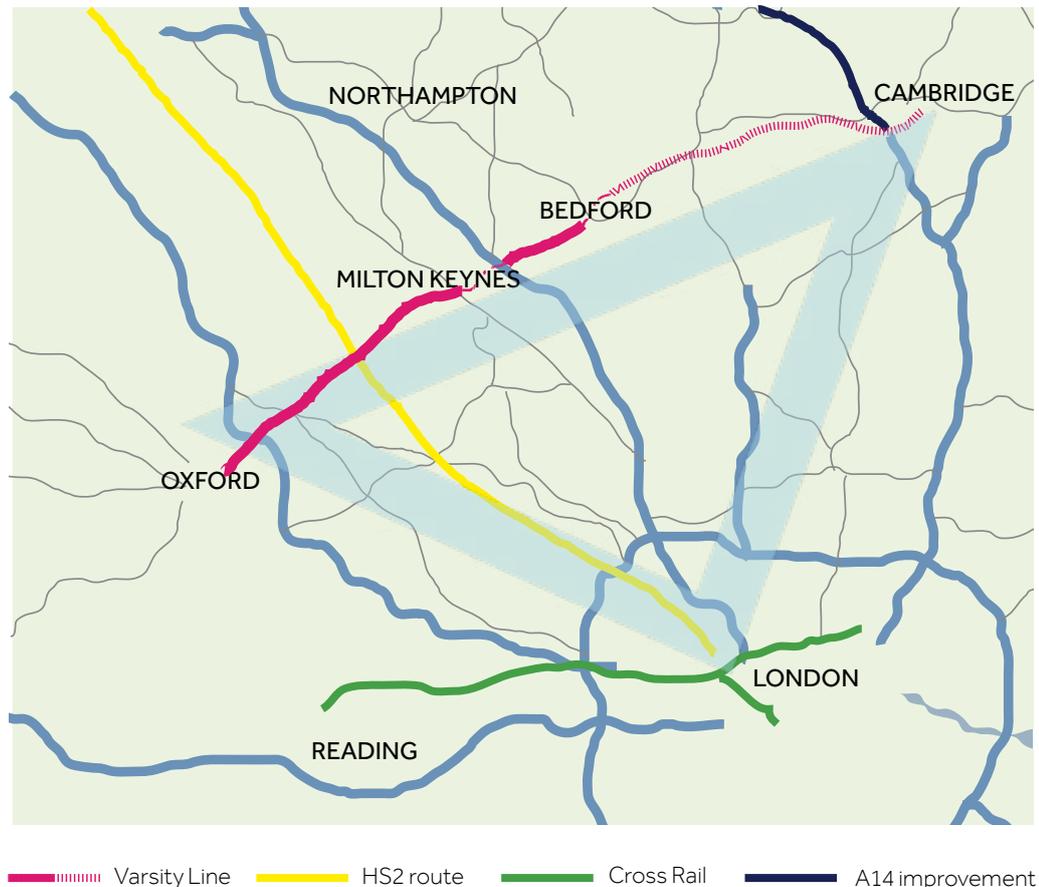
The Corridor recommendations are a key element in a range of infrastructure related proposals relating to the Golden Triangle, as illustrated in the map below.

In summarising recent initiatives and this week’s announcements, Mike Derbyshire, Partner & Head of Planning at Bidwells notes: “The National Needs Assessment recommends that major housing projects be viewed as infrastructure developments of national significance. With housing provision and affordability absolutely vital to the ongoing economic success of the Oxford to Cambridge Corridor, Bidwells fully support this recommendation.”

At the same time, the Needs Assessment underpins the formal ratification of the National Infrastructure Commission in January next year. The Commission will ensure that new developments move through the planning process more easily and incorporate the best possible infrastructure standards. This will be critical in further realising the national and international potential of the Golden Triangle and all areas of investment and employment growth across the country.”

Bidwells will be reporting regularly and in more detail on all infrastructure projects and policies which impact on the Golden Triangle.

Infrastructure improvements in the Golden Triangle



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