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PRESS RELEASE

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RAIL CAMPAIGNERS WELCOME MAJOR RAIL PROJECTS

Rail campaigners have welcomed confirmation of two rail major projects in the Chancellor's autumn statement. The go-ahead was given for the East West rail link from Oxford to Bedford and electrification of the trans Pennine route.

Hugh Jaeger from Railfuture said "We've been campaigning for the East West rail link since the mid-1990s, so we're delighted that it's finally been approved. We've had enough of studies that have consistently shown it's worth doing. We know that this is a busy passenger corridor where there is plenty of demand. It represents fantastic value for money for the taxpayer, as research has predicted £6 returned for every £1 spent."

"This has to be the first step towards the full line to Cambridge, connecting together the whole of the "knowledge arc" of high-tech companies. This is not just a passenger line it can be used for freight too. Once we get to Cambridge, that opens up the link to Felixstowe and Harwich which gives us huge potential for taking freight off the roads."

He did query the likely timescale though. "Why 2017 when the route is already a railway? Railway works will stop during the Olympics and Paralympics next year and rail engineers will have less work to do – how about making a start on the works then when the machinery is underutilised? The announcement of the TWA Order for the Marylebone-Oxford link – which we expect in January – can't come soon enough. Could anything be done to utilise the team on that for the Bicester to Bletchley link to get things moving faster?"

Commenting on the Trans Pennine link electrification, Railfuture chairman Mike Crowhurst said: "Whilst it's very welcome, it's imperative that it doesn't stop at Leeds. To make sense, it must continue to York and include the branches to Hull, Middlesbrough and Scarborough. It would be nonsense to force passengers to change from electric to diesel trains at Leeds, or to run diesel trains under the wires."

"This is a logical follow-on from the electrification work announced for the north-west. Manchester seems to be emerging as the hub of an increasing web of electrification. The trans Pennine route will become a major electric link between the east and west coast main lines, increasing connectivity of the electric network."

"Electrification means that passengers will enjoy quicker and more reliable services. Electric

trains are also cheaper to buy and cheaper to run, as well as polluting less, so that's why we've been campaigning for them for so long. We've still got a long way to go to catch up with other European countries, and we want to see a rolling programme of electrification which will include the Midland mainline from Bedford to Sheffield"

Notes for editors:

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Rail is a vital part of an integrated efficient transport system serving a modern, vibrant, environmentally sustainable economy. We are pro-rail but not anti-road. Railfuture maintains that investment in rail travel and rail freight is vital to the future of the UK economy and environment.

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