

Growing places – GWR, 23 March 2026

Railway to unlock 1 million jobs and £79bn for UK economy by 2036

- New research reveals railway stations are regional growth engines driving jobs, housing and investment across the UK.
- Development associated with the rail network - “The Rail Catalyst Effect” - projected to support over 1 million jobs and deliver £79bn boost to the economy by 2036.
- Findings underscore need for continued rail investment to generate employment, unlock prosperity and power the UK’s social and economic future.

Railway stations across the UK could unlock 1 million jobs and deliver £79 billion in economic value by 2036, according to new research published today.

The findings, revealed in a [new report](#) from leading economic research consultancy Development Economics show how stations are anchors for growth. The report reveals the "Rail Catalyst Effect": how stations act as catalysts for investment, opportunity and prosperity across the UK.

The Railway Catalyst: driving economic growth near GWR stations

The “catalytic effect” of railway stations, focusing on development activity within an 800-metre radius of 11 selected GWR stations. Contrasting recent successes with ambitious 15-year growth forecasts for the GWR network and the wider UK regional rail network.



Commissioned by Great Western Railway, the study analysed 11 locations on the GWR network, looking at how development around railway stations supports new homes, businesses and skilled jobs. The research uses these case studies to model the wider economic impact of regional rail investment across Britain.

As new figures show unemployment in the UK sits at a five-year high of 5.2%¹, the report makes the case that continued investment in rail supports regional economies and unlocks future prosperity for communities across the UK.

Railways: a national growth engine

The research finds that development around UK railway stations could support more than 1 million permanent jobs by 2036, generating £78.7 billion for local and regional economies.

Around £64.6 billion - 82% of projected economic value - is expected to be generated near larger stations, with at least 580,000 passengers a year, such as Cambridge South and Birmingham Interchange.

Over the next decade, construction activity alone near regional stations is expected to contribute £7.1 billion, providing an immediate boost to jobs, businesses and supply chains.

Mark Hopwood, Managing Director, GWR, said:

"The findings of this report are clear: the railway, its stations, and the trains that serve them are powerful drivers of economic growth, community prosperity and regeneration. Across our network, development around the railway is delivering thousands of homes, new commercial space and thousands of jobs, generating hundreds of millions of pounds in economic value for the communities we serve. I'm pleased to see the railway recognised as a key part of the Government's plans to support the continued growth of towns and cities across the country."

Powering regional prosperity

When applying the same model across the Great Western Railway network, railway stations are projected to create 238,000 jobs and £14.25 billion in annual economic value by 2036, much of it in high-skilled sectors such as professional services and technology, bringing opportunity closer to where people live.

Similarly, across just nine stations in the South West and South Wales, development within an 800-metre radius over the past five years has delivered 3,500 new homes, 67,000 square metres of commercial space, supported 4,500 jobs, and generated £328 million in annual economic value.

Olly Glover MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Transport and MP for Didcot and Wantage:

"It is great to see GWR appraising the economic impact of both rail's workforce and wider contribution. For too long, the UK has viewed rail and public transport in isolation, and has failed to recognise the enormous economic contribution it makes. This report is an important step in changing that, and I hope will pave the way for the investment in existing and new railways and stations across the GWR area that communities are clamouring for, including Grove and Wantage in my constituency."

Rebecca Smith MP, member of the Transport Select Committee and MP for South West Devon:

"Rail connectivity is vital to unlocking economic growth across South West Devon, and this report rightly highlights the powerful role that stations can play in supporting jobs, housing and thriving local communities. That's why I have been actively working with local partners, rail campaign groups and ministers to push for practical improvements to our network. If we are serious about unlocking rail's full potential for growth, we must ensure communities like ours in the South West are included in that investment."

Driving social value

Beyond the economic impact, railway stations play a vital role in driving social mobility and widening opportunity, particularly for those without access to a car, which accounts for around 22% of households in England¹.

With over 1.6 billion passenger journeys made each year², rail is enabling access to opportunity at scale, shaping where people can work, learn and build their futures.

Jon Shaw, Professor of Transport Geography at University of Plymouth, and Chair of the Devon & Cornwall Rail Partnership said:

"Across the South West and Wales and the UK as a whole, rail plays a critical social and economic role in the communities it serves. It connects people to jobs, skills and education, and supports housing growth by linking new and existing communities to centres of employment. At the same time it underpins sectors like construction, enabling the movement of materials and people we need to build the places we live and work in. It sustains our vibrant hospitality and tourism economy by bringing visitors into our towns, cities and coastal communities. For many businesses, reliable rail services are not simply a convenience; they are part of the foundation on which investment decisions are made".