

Midlands Connect
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2021-03-19

Dear Sir / Madam,

Midlands Connect Transport Strategy refresh

Railfuture is Britain's leading, longest-established, national independent voluntary organisation campaigning exclusively for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users, to support economic (housing and productivity) growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities. We seek to influence decision makers at local, regional and national levels to implement pro-rail policies in transport and development planning.

This response brings together the submissions of Railfuture's three regional Branches within the Midlands Connect area: West Midlands, East Midlands, and Lincolnshire.

1) To support the economic recovery post-Covid, which specific transport projects would you prioritise for delivery within the next 5 years? (Please note the projects must address east-west connectivity in the Midlands) *

Railfuture supports the priority given by Midlands Connect to east – west connectivity across the Midlands. For rail, these have traditionally been more limited and of poorer quality than the primary north – south Intercity main lines.

The following rail projects should therefore be prioritised for delivery within the next five years:

- A very short-term project to attract passengers back to rail post-Covid by offering deals to encourage travel, such as free tickets for railcard holders, and 2-for-1 travel deals to local attractions.
- A smart ticketing project supporting multi-modal travel across the Midlands area.
- Crewe – Stoke – Derby (which runs through to Nottingham and Newark from May 2021): Resignalling, capacity and line-speed improvements, with train frequency doubling to two trains per hour (one semi-fast). This service offers the most likely short-term prospects for improved East Midlands – North West connectivity, so the potential for extension beyond Crewe should be explored, by means of combination with existing services either to Liverpool or to Manchester Airport.
- Leicester to Birmingham line: higher speeds and more capacity.
- Leicester to Coventry: direct services via Nuneaton in the short term.
- Derby – Burton – Lichfield line: reopening to passengers, for two trains per hour, with an intermediate station at Alrewas serving the National Memorial Arboretum.

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- Lincoln to Nottingham line: higher speeds. (This would be in readiness for later connection to the new Nottingham – Birmingham high-speed line as a package to give, in conjunction with existing routes, a rail passenger and freight corridor to complement the A46 ‘Trans-Midlands Trade Corridor’.)
- (In association with the above ‘package’), reopening to passengers of the Stenson Junction to Sheet Stores Junction line for a Burton – Nottingham service, with an intermediate station at Castle Donington to serve the local population and, via bus connections, employment opportunities at East Midlands Airport and the associated Freeport area.
- Reopening to passengers of the Maid Marian Line (perhaps as a Leicester – Mansfield service, in advance of the Toton regeneration project plus possible HS2 connections at either Toton or East Midlands Parkway. Some services could run alternatively to Derby).
- Reopening to passengers of the ‘Robin Hood Line’ branch from Mansfield Woodhouse and Shirebrook to Edwinstowe and Ollerton, reconnecting deprived ex-coalfield communities to wider employment opportunities.
- Working with England’s Economic Heartland and Transport East to upgrade the Felixstowe to Nuneaton (F2N) freight corridor to support intermodal logistics growth by rail. Within the Midlands Connect area, this would include progress in implementing the Network Rail *Leicester Area Strategic Advice* (July 2020) recommendations for four-tracking between the Wigston Junctions and Leicester, and through to the Syston Junctions, with speeds on the fast lines through Leicester station raised for faster freight train movements. Possible alternative routes bypassing Leicester station could also be investigated.
- Projects to connect to the rail network, where viable, major distribution sites that are not yet rail-served, to encourage modal shift of freight.

2) In response to the Government’s levelling up agenda, Midlands Connect is identifying major transport projects which will improve the lives of people in the region and across the UK. Which specific transport projects would you prioritise for delivery by 2030? (Please note the projects must consider pan-regional connectivity). *

We support the levelling-up agenda and see this as a means of promoting greater equality of access to jobs, retail, education, healthcare, leisure, and recreation for all, both within the Midlands Connect region and between it and other regions. An interconnected and comprehensive rail network has a fundamental role to play, both in being accessible to all (whereas roads primarily benefit car-owners), and in offering great potential in terms of carbon reduction. With these objectives in mind, the following should be prioritised for delivery by 2030. In most cases, they would build on the projects listed under Question 1.

- Leicester – Coventry direct, with tunnel or bridge across the West Coast Main Line at Nuneaton.
- The Midlands Rail Hub, especially construction of Bordesley chords to north-east and south-west, coupled with expansion of Birmingham Moor Street station.
- Nottingham – Birmingham high-speed – whether as part of HS2 or stand-alone (albeit integrated with existing network).

- Nottingham – Lincoln line: grade-separation (flyover) at Newark and further upgrade through to South Humberside. This should be integrated with the new Nottingham – Birmingham high-speed line as a package, to give, in conjunction with existing routes, a rail passenger and freight corridor to complement the A46 ‘Trans-Midlands Trade Corridor’.
- Leicester – Burton upon Trent ‘Ivanhoe Line’ reopening, giving both:
 - connectivity to a significant population isolated from effective public transport in a post-industrial area with an emerging tourism economy,
 - another east – west link, across the central part of the MC region.
- Stratford-upon-Avon to Honeybourne, in conjunction with the proposed North Cotswold Line enhancements, to support housing growth and tourism connectivity.
- Direct and faster services linking the East Midlands with the North West. This is the main inter-regional ‘missing link’ in rail connectivity in the context of the NIC’s *Rail Needs Assessment*. It should include the proposed Peaks & Dales Railway (Matlock – Buxton and Chinley) as a direct East Midlands – North West route that would also give access to the Peak District area of Derbyshire as well as providing a more direct route for the Derbyshire quarry freight, thereby relieving other rail routes as well as local roads.
- Leicester and East Midlands direct and fast trains to Leeds, York and Newcastle, (eventually via HS2 East).
- Leicester – Rugby line reopening, both for passengers (to serve the growing town of Lutterworth and connect the West Coast and Midland Main Lines, enhancing pan-regional connectivity), and freight (especially for ‘Golden Triangle’ logistics, including Magna Park at Lutterworth) in conjunction also with the Felixstowe – Nuneaton (F2N) improvements.
- Upgrades of other pan-Midlands regional links, such as infrastructure and signalling improvements between Nottingham, Grantham and Skegness to improve the economy and opportunities of the Lincolnshire coastal community.

There should also be radical improvements to local transport, to widen opportunities beyond the reach of the rail network, and do so in an accessible and low-carbon way:

- Better integration of rail with tram, bus and active travel, both in physical interchange hubs and through digital enhancements to ticketing and information provision.
- Significant extension of the existing light rail networks (Birmingham and Nottingham) plus introduction of light rail elsewhere, where viable, including lightweight trams (such as Very Light Rail, VLR) in smaller cities.

3) As a region, we need to respond to the climate change emergency. What are your top three priorities for a greener, sustainable transport network? *

1. **Modal shift from road to rail, including freight.** Though emphasis is placed on carbon emissions, ‘electrification’ of road transport does nothing to reduce ‘Oslo Effect’ particulates from tyre, brake and road surface wear. It also does nothing for road congestion.

In freight, modal shift needs to take account of the massive growth in light van traffic on the roads, generated by e-commerce and the decline of High Street retail; a trend that was under way before the Covid pandemic and is likely to continue. Measures

should be taken to promote more sustainable distribution alternatives, with rail for the bulk and long-distance traffic, supplemented by more sustainable 'last mile' delivery.

For passengers, as well as the above specific rail infrastructure projects, there should be significant extension of existing light rail networks (Birmingham and Nottingham) and introduction of light rail elsewhere, where viable, including ultra-lightweight trams (such as Very Light Rail, VLR) in smaller cities. Other measures to increase public transport's share of journeys include bus priority measures and better integration of rail with tram, bus, and active travel, by means both of physical interchange hubs and through digital enhancements to ticketing and information provision.

2. **Decarbonisation of rail via a rolling programme of electrification**, starting with:
 - The Midland Main Line throughout (including speed upgrade to 125mph throughout where practicable, including the existing electrification south of Bedford).
 - The main intermodal freight routes:
 - Felixstowe to Leicester, Nuneaton and Birmingham (F2N plus modest extensions)
 - Peterborough to Doncaster via Lincoln
 - Didcot to Coventry and Nuneaton.
 - The Birmingham Snow Hill local lines (starting with Stourbridge Junction to Dorridge and Whitlocks End).
 - The Derby – Birmingham – Bristol corridor, plus completion of electrification of the passenger network centred on Birmingham including Lichfield and via Tamworth to Derby.

We note the potential for bi-mode trains to maximise use of electrified sections of the network and extend through-working to other lines pending further electrification.

3. **Promotion of active travel** through safe cycling and walking routes, especially linking residential localities with town centres, employment opportunities, and rail and other public transport interchanges.

In this, the stated intention to '*Positively contribute to the 'Net Zero' carbon target by 2050*' should be strengthened to a more definite objective than 'contribute to' with an earlier date, perhaps matching neighbouring England's Economic Heartland's stated 2040.

4) What technology solutions do you think the Government should invest in to support the Midlands achieve a greener, low-carbon economy? *

- **Electrification** of mechanised transport of all modes, supported by electricity generation by renewable energy methods.
- **Support for low-cost VLR or equivalent light rail technology**, including eventual autonomous operation, to make it viable in smaller cities.
- Use of **digital technology** to increase public transport modal share of passenger journeys, including 'smart' multi-mode ticketing (mobility as a service); clear information provision; and ease of access and interchange at all points.
- **Road-use charging** (financial) (subject to national policy), in an equitable way, both to recognise and replace the forthcoming loss of revenue from petrol duties, and to manage road use demand in a way that is equitable both for users and non-users of the roads.

Yours faithfully,

Steve Jones, Secretary, East Midlands regional Branch, Railfuture
On behalf of the West Midlands, East Midlands and Lincolnshire Branches

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