

# EAST MIDLANDS COUNTY COMBINED AUTHORITY

Consultation 14/11/2022 – 09/01/2023

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/council/partnerships/county-deals/county-deals.aspx>

## Railfuture – East Midlands Branch – Full Comments

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### INTRODUCTION

Railfuture is the UK's leading independent organisation campaigning for better rail services for passengers and freight. We are a voluntary group representing rail users, with 20,000 affiliated and individual members; all members have an equal say. Railfuture is not associated with or funded by the rail industry, political parties, or trade unions. It has 12 regional Branches; this response is from the East Midlands Branch, which covers the counties of Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, together with the unitary authorities of North Northamptonshire, West Northamptonshire, Rutland, and the cities of Derby, Leicester and Nottingham.

We in East Midlands Branch welcome the formation of the EMCCA. We see it helping to coordinate infrastructure planning and increase funding for a region that has traditionally fallen behind others in per capita transport investment. Formation of the EMCCA should help in levelling up the influence the East Midlands region has relative to the West Midlands.

Our aim is to promote the expansion and improvement of rail – both for passengers and freight – as well as its integration with all other modes. Accordingly, we hope to establish and maintain a constructive working relationship with EMCCA, just as we already have with Midlands Connect, East Midlands Councils and Transport for the East Midlands. We intend to be a responsive and responsible consultative body on transport matters, and we look forward to playing a full part in helping the Combined Authority as it develops and refines its transport policies and projects.

The comments below refer to the policy areas as set out in the consultation documents.

### HOMES

Though the quoted £ figures are not large when set against the housing needs for a large area, we agree with the proposals. Being able to take a more region-wide view of housing and other development needs, the Combined Authority should be well placed to promote good planning practice. A major factor is the accessibility of new housing by high quality and sustainable transport, rather than the often disjointed and car-dependent suburban sprawl of the past century or so. The Combined Authority should have as a matter of policy the location of significant housing development – of all kinds – such that it can be well-served by high-quality public transport, especially rail or NET tram. Ideally, this infrastructure should be in place before the majority of the new homes are occupied, so as to be available to residents from 'day one'. We would also support a general policy of using brownfield rather than greenfield land for housing.

### SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

As with Homes, employment and training and skills provision (i.e. both jobs and education) should be located where it can be well served by active travel and public transport, especially

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rail and NET. The individual, the employer, and the training provider all benefit from good accessibility. We welcome the reference in the consultation to the East Midlands Freeport, HS2 and rail, and the East Midlands Development Corporation. Collectively, these offer great potential for high-skills employment plus strong linkage with the existing city centres and universities. Suitable investment in rail infrastructure including HS2 at East Midlands Parkway, upgrades of the existing railways, plus extensions to NET, are essential to maximise this potential. That includes good connectivity with surrounding smaller settlements such as Long Eaton and Castle Donington.

We note that hitherto there has been pressure for housing development to the east of Nottingham and employment opportunities to the west. Good sustainable transport provision across the Greater Nottingham conurbation to link the two is essential if this development trend is to continue.

### TRANSPORT

We strongly agree with the essence of these proposals. Combining the numerous local transport plans into one single plan will promote better integration by removing artificial boundaries. In turn, this will enable more efficient development and coordination of the network for all modes: road, rail, tram, bus, and active travel (and the airport).

Railfuture's primary interest is, of course, rail. We have long been concerned that the East Midlands is a region that has received much lower per capita transport investment than other regions in the UK. We note the reference in the Draft Proposals to poor East-West and North-South connectivity, and transport isolation. We therefore see the Combined Authority and its accompanying devolution offering a great opportunity to promote such investment. HS2 at least to East Midlands Parkway is a major opportunity, as is full electrification of the Midland Main Line. The region is traversed by other inter-regional rail routes, such as Norwich – Nottingham - Liverpool; Nottingham – Birmingham – Cardiff; and Nottingham – Derby – Stoke – Crewe. These all need investment and development, as does the Nottingham – Lincoln – South Humberside route.

We welcome the possible expansion of the NET tram system to support the East Midlands HS2 Growth Strategy. However, the full potential of NET should extend far wider than that. We would expect the Combined Authority to explore other extensions to the tram network to serve the whole of the Greater Nottingham conurbation plus Derby.

We welcome the proposal for integrated smart ticketing on all public transport, plus new concessionary fare schemes. These could play a major part in making public transport more attractive and accessible to groups within society who may currently not derive sufficient benefit from it. Facilitating physical mobility is one means of aiding social mobility: for example, by bringing employment and training opportunities within physical and financial reach of deprived areas. The Robin Hood Line and NET have both provided such benefits, and we see more such opportunities in the region.

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As well as the major intercity routes traversing the region, there are local and regional routes where rail could play a much greater part. There are many significant market towns in the Combined Authority area. The distances between them, around 15 – 25 miles, make rail ideally placed to strengthen its travel market share by reason both of population sizes and interactions, plus the need to offer transport that is quicker than bus but less intrusive than private car. We note, however, that Derbyshire is not well connected internally by rail, especially between Derby itself and the Peak District and Buxton.

There are numerous instances of commuter and other flows between towns within the EMCCA area and major cities outside it, particularly Sheffield and Manchester. We would expect the EMCCA Mayor to be able to liaise effectively with Mayoral counterparts in other combined authorities on such cross-boundary transport flows, to mutual benefit. This also gives an opportunity to work towards addressing the poor connectivity between the East Midlands and the North West. Similarly, formation of the EMCCA would help in levelling up the influence the East Midlands region has relative to the West Midlands, with particular reference to transport.

Though Railfuture naturally focuses on rail, we advocate proper integration of rail with all other modes, where each does what it does best. We support multi-modal interchange such that a journey using more than one means of travel is as seamless and easy as possible. One means of achieving this is park + ride stations and services such as that proposed on the Poacher Line at Saxondale, close to the A46/A52 junction; this could be served by an eastward extension of the Robin Hood Line. Another important factor is information provision, including onward travel information at stations. This would include live departure information at rail stations for connecting buses and trams, and ‘next stop’ information on such vehicles. The references both to bus franchising and better management of highways are also relevant to this and we welcome them. Local bus services, especially in the more rural areas, have been much reduced in recent times. We would look to see a more comprehensive network and more connectivity between significant destinations, irrespective of local authority boundaries.

We welcome the reference to a refreshed Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and would wish to see consistent implementation of active travel infrastructure. Active travel is, of course, a major component of ‘last mile’ connectivity with rail stations.

Passenger transport inevitably receives the most attention, but freight must not be overlooked, especially as the East Midlands Development Corporation area falls within the logistics ‘Golden Triangle’, with the Erewash Valley nearby. This includes light goods such as parcels, as well as more traditional freight. Rail has been strengthening its market position in intermodal logistics in recent years; the Combined Authority offers the potential to promote suitable development of strategic and other freight interchanges in the optimum locations. Similarly, the East Midlands rail network must provide sufficient capacity for the large volumes of mineral traffic from the various quarries in the region.

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We welcome the reference to speeding-up decision-making. Many projects of regional and national importance have been under discussion for decades; Midland Main Line electrification is a good example.

In all of this, we would expect the Combined Authority to work closely with the sub-national transport bodies, especially Midlands Connect. Similarly, East Midlands Councils and Transport for the East Midlands have an important role to play in determining and promoting infrastructure priorities, though over a wider area than that of the Combined Authority. This is, of course, subject to any changes in their role and functions resulting from the formation of the Combined Authority.

We welcome the reference to ‘A new rail partnership with Great British Railways’ and would expect the Combined Authority to work with them (assuming GBR actually does come into existence) to improve and expand the area’s rail network and services.

### REDUCING CARBON

We welcome these proposals. Rail, including light rail, offers much potential for low- or zero-carbon travel, both directly through electrification and indirectly through modal shift from road. This is true both for passengers and freight. The benefits are strengthened if the electricity itself is generated from renewable sources.

### PUBLIC HEALTH

As Railfuture is a rail advocacy body, public health essentially falls outside our expertise. However, with investment, public transport, especially rail, can be a major contributor to better air quality by means of potential zero-pollution at the point of use, plus modal shift from motorised road transport. Good public transport also promotes mobility by all sectors in the community. It can therefore reduce social isolation, helping to enhance both prosperity and wellbeing.

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