

**\*UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 FRIDAY 13 SEPTEMBER\***

## **Ambitious proposals for a new Midlands-North West Rail Link revealed**

- *Opportunity through connectivity: catalysing growth through a Midlands-Northwest Rail Link*, has published recommendations exploring the role the private sector can play in accelerating growth between the Midlands and towns and cities in the North.
- Commissioned by the Mayors of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, the project has been chaired by industry expert Sir David Higgins, led by Arup, and supported by a private sector consortium including Arcadis, Addleshaw Goddard, EY, Dragados, Mace and Skanska.
- The report concludes that the private sector must play a new role in delivering and financing infrastructure projects and that a new rail line connecting Lichfield to High Legh is a golden opportunity for the West Midlands and the North West.
- Inclusion within the forthcoming budget would be welcomed by the Mayors and the private sector consortium. This will ensure that the feasibility study can start immediately.

**13 September 2024** – A private sector consortium has today shared proposals to create jobs, skills and growth by connecting the Midlands with Northern towns and cities by constructing a new 80km rail line – the Midlands-Northwest Rail Link (MNWRL).

### **The Report calls for the new government to:**

- Establish a Steering Group between the private sector, combined authorities and central government to drive forward development of an ‘at pace’ feasibility study and technical analysis over the next six months focused on:
  - Working with the newly established British Infrastructure Council, the government should convene global private sector investors to attract investment into this critical link. This is a golden opportunity to reposition the UK as a nation open to institutional infrastructure investment;
  - Undertaking further financial, commercial, and economic analysis to develop a more detailed investment prospectus for the private sector, and to optimise value for money for the public sector;
  - Advance the technical solution, working closely with industry stakeholders; and
  - Developing an appropriate governance structure to take the project forward.
- Critically we need to time to get this right and support from the Government to work with our consortia, to develop this concept further and build on the work we have done to date. The government could help the private sector advance technical and commercial solutions by:
  - Maintaining ownership of the current landholdings on the former Phase 2A route from Handsacre to Crewe whilst this work is underway;
  - Reinstating safeguarding for the land not-yet-acquired; protecting and prolonging existing planning powers; and maintaining flexibility to reincorporate the Crewe to High Legh segment into the repurposed NPR Hybrid Bill while a new solution is finalised and agreed.
- To formally consider the network wide benefits of this proposition alongside proposals for enhancing east-west connectivity in the North and the economic benefits this would bring to the whole of the UK.

The model for the MNWRL outlined in the review has been created with the following four principles in mind:

- 1) **Affordability** – Reduces pressure on finite Government capital budgets and overall debt, enabling greater quantities of infrastructure to be delivered in less time.
- 2) **Cost Control** – With overrun risk appropriately transferred, the contractor is better incentivised to drive down cost during design and construction. Costly variations and stop-starts can also be avoided.
- 3) **Timeline** – Rail projects with more private sector involvement are typically delivered faster. This not only brings forward benefits but also revenue - and it mitigates cost inflation impacts.
- 4) **Risk Management** – Carefully structured contracts struck early in design development allow risks to be identified and controlled, incentivising good behaviours around delivery to quality, time and budget.

The Midlands - North Rail West Rail Link has the potential to connect towns and cities such as Leeds and Bradford, which is a critical connection for enhancing capacity for passengers and freight in the UK.

The report echoes findings of the recently published Juergen Maier review, commissioned by the Labour Party on Rail and Urban Transport. It backed the case for connecting the Midlands and the Northwest with a new line, warning the M6 corridor would collapse within a decade if no action is taken.

The review found that ‘doing nothing’ on this corridor is not a viable option, from either economic or operational perspectives.

The team assessed various options, which included doing nothing, bare minimum upgrades and a new rail link. It is envisaged the new rail line will substantially reduce costs from the previous HS2 scheme through lower design speeds, ballasted track, UK rather than European standard cross-sections, and simplified interfaces with the existing rail network.

The review team analysed these concepts through ‘traditional’ criteria such as costs, benefits, and deliverability finding that the new line has the potential to deliver roughly 85% of the benefits of HS2 Phase 2, at a fraction of the costs (c.60-75%).

The project could deliver the transformational outcomes in capacity and connectivity that the original HS2 line would have delivered (equivalent seat numbers and train frequencies), with only marginally slower journeys (approximately 15 minutes longer on the London-Manchester route – which is still 30 minutes faster than today’s services).

The team also found that a new line is the only suitable option for attracting private finance. It is also thought that it could also save the taxpayer £2bn on costs from the HS2 Phase 2 cancellation through re-use of much of the land, powers, and design work that has already been secured through public investment.

Additionally, the creation of a new rail link between Birmingham and Manchester will move some passenger services to this new line, opening additional freight paths on the West Coast Main Line – the most heavily-used freight corridor in the nation. This will greatly contribute to the Government’s target of 75% rail freight growth by 2050, a key pillar in reducing carbon emissions from transport.

**Rt Hon. Andy Burham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, said:**

“The report is clear: if we fail to put in place a plan soon to fix rail capacity and connectivity between the North and the Midlands, the already-congested West Coast Main Line and M6 will become major barriers to economic growth in the UK.

"But there is good news for the Government. The report concludes that we do not have to revive HS2 to unlock those benefits. There is a viable option to build a new rail line between Lichfield and High Legh, connecting HS2 to Northern Powerhouse Rail, with almost all of the benefits of HS2 delivered quickly and crucially at a significantly lower cost.

"Doing nothing is not an option as demand for rail services on the West Coast Main Line is set to exceed capacity within a decade. We are ready to work with Government, colleagues in the West Midlands and the business community to build a railway fit for the 21st century. But we do need early decisions to end the uncertainty."

**Richard Parker, Mayor of the West Midlands:**

"This report confirms what we've been saying – additional rail capacity to and from the North is vital for the West Midlands. It's about more than quicker journeys; it's about connecting people, communities, and businesses to jobs and opportunities."

"I'll work with the government to ensure this happens, but we must also learn from successful rail systems around the world to deliver the best network and real value to the public. Without this extension, we will continue to be reliant on the West Coast mainline, which is already maxed out and impacting on the people of this region and wider. We need to free up capacity and we need to get this right - for our future and our economy."

**Sir David Higgins OBE, added:**

"Our review sets out a plan to get connectivity between the Midlands and the Northwest back on track. We don't pretend that solving the rail challenges between these two places will be easy. We know it will be hard graft. What we need now is for the new government to work together with the business community and Combined Authorities – take the practical steps to make a new rail link a reality. We have conclusively shown that a new line can be built cheaper and faster – we now need to get on and deliver it."

"Taking the time now to get these strategic decisions right would come at minimal cost but potentially enormous long-term benefit to the nation. Our future connectivity – and by extension, the economic and social health of our society for generations to come – depends on us making the right choices today."

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

To read the report in full, including policy recommendations, please visit: [Midlands-North West Rail Link \(midlandsnorthwestrailink.co.uk\)](https://midlandsnorthwestrailink.co.uk)

***About the Opportunity through Connectivity: Catalysing Growth through a Midland-North West Rail Link Report***

Following the cancellation of HS2 last year, the Mayors of Greater Manchester and the West Midlands Combined Authorities commissioned a private sector consortium to explore the role the private sector can play in delivering and financing connectivity options, with the aim of identifying a new way of delivering infrastructure projects in the UK.

The Mayors of the West Midlands and Greater Manchester are committed to exploring how rail connectivity can be improved between the Midlands and the towns and cities of the North, and catalyse the growth, skills and jobs across the regions and the UK. The project to explore this connectivity is chaired by infrastructure expert Sir David Higgins and led by Arup alongside a private sector consortium of Addleshaw Goddard, Arcadis, Dragados, EY, Mace and Skanska.

This follows the recent publication of the Juergen Maier review of Rail and Urban Transport. A key policy recommendation from the review called for the Midlands - North Rail West Rail Link to be introduced to connect towns and cities in the North and provide a critical connection for enhancing capacity for passengers and freight in the UK. This vital connection will build necessary confidence in the investor community and encourage investment in more vibrant and innovative local supply chains, so they become strong engines of our local manufacturing economy driven by increasing export opportunities. It will bolster a strong skills supply strategy for apprenticeships and careers in this sector that could grow significantly over the next decades.

### **About Arup**

Arup is the UK's second-largest employee-owned business and has a strong track record of providing sustainable and innovative solutions for urban development and infrastructure. Arup employs over 18,000 specialists across more than 90 disciplines, with projects in over 140 countries. Arup are multidisciplinary professionals with expertise in fields such as urban regeneration and planning, building decarbonisation and major transport infrastructure.