

Building Back Greener

The case for reconnecting Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham by rail



Midlands Connect
Transport | Investment | Growth

May 2021



Cllr George Duggins, leader of Coventry City Council

Sir Peter Soulsby, Leicester City Mayor

“There’s no other way of looking at it – here we have a missing link, a really important link between the East and the West Midlands, and this is our opportunity to re-forge it. These plans will open up Coventry, its jobs, leisure destinations and universities to communities across the East Midlands and vice versa. At the moment the Midlands’ east-west rail connections are sub-standard, holding us back from a more productive and sustainable future. Turning these plans into reality is an essential step in boosting prosperity and public transport use across our region – let’s get on with it.”

“I can’t think of two UK cities other than Coventry and Leicester, that are as close, yet so appallingly connected by rail. At the moment it can take up to an hour and twenty minutes to travel less than 25 miles, and passengers have to change trains half-way – it’s simply not good enough. Given this, it’s no wonder that 97 per cent of trips on this route are made by road. By reintroducing faster, direct connections we can encourage more people to travel sustainably, strengthen working relationships and increase productivity. We must now move ahead to create detailed plans for delivery, with the support of Government.”

The Status Quo

In the decade leading to the outbreak of COVID-19, rail usage rose faster in the Midlands, than anywhere else in the UK¹. However, despite this growth, the majority of trips between the region’s cities were made by car. Improving the speed, reliability and frequency of rail services is essential if we’re to encourage more travellers to take the train and leave their cars at home.

One route in desperate need of investment is the rail corridor that runs from Coventry through to Leicester and Nottingham. These three major cities have a combined population of over one million people, yet amazingly, no direct rail link.

At the moment, travelling from Coventry to Leicester or Nottingham requires passengers to change onto another train at Nuneaton, leading to a slow, irregular service with an increased risk of delays. This inconvenience is why just three per cent of trips between Coventry and Leicester are made by rail – much lower than between equivalent city pairs such as Coventry and Birmingham (30% of trips by rail), Leicester and Birmingham (24% of trips by rail) and Leicester and Nottingham (24% of trips by rail) that enjoy a regular, direct connection.



Why did direct services stop running?

Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham were directly linked until 2004. After this time, an upgrade to the West Coast Main Line meant that more fast trains could run to and from the West Midlands and London. These new services created extra traffic at Nuneaton, a major pinch-point on the rail network, meaning that there was no longer space to run Coventry-Leicester-Nottingham trains through the station.

Journey mode share (rail vs road)

Coventry -> Leicester (indirect) 3% / 97%



Coventry -> Birmingham (direct) 30% / 70%



Leicester -> Birmingham (direct) 24% / 76%



Leicester -> Nottingham (direct) 24% / 76%



¹Midlands Connect: Midlands Engine Rail Summary Document

Our work

Midlands Connect has worked alongside Network Rail to create a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) outlining plans for reconnecting Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham by rail. The study suggests that building a dive-under at Nuneaton (a new train route that runs underneath the West Coast Main Line) could allow us to achieve this, alongside investment to increase line speeds between Coventry and Nuneaton from 45 to 60mph. These interventions would allow two new direct services to run every hour, removing the need for passengers to change at Nuneaton.



Our estimates suggest that introducing these new direct services will markedly increase the number of rail journeys undertaken on the corridor, for example, the 3% of journeys undertaken by train between Coventry and Leicester could rise to 20%. As well as improving the journey for existing travellers, this connection will also encourage new journeys to be made that would not have been made previously.

Research undertaken by Midlands Connect with over 3,000 local residents showed that 87% supported plans to reintroduce direct rail services between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham.

The Benefits

This scheme would drive significant social, environmental and economic benefits, estimated to be worth £179 million.

By slashing journey times between the town and city centres on this route, the improvements will bring these economic centres closer together (otherwise known as agglomeration), creating new education, employment and business opportunities for local workers and organisations. Faster and more frequent rail journeys alongside a reduced risk of delays or missed interchange connections will provide a real alternative to travelling by car. For businesses this will mean better access to labour markets, supply chains and customers.

From	To	Journey times (before -> after)	Interchanges before	Extra direct services
Coventry	Leicester	54 minutes -> 38 minutes	1	+2tph
	Loughborough	88 minutes -> 50 minutes	2	+2tph
	East Midlands Parkway	104 minutes -> 56 minutes	2	+2tph
	Nottingham	108 minutes -> 70 minutes	2	+2tph

There is also an option that would see Nuneaton station served along this route, exact stopping patterns will be confirmed at the next stage.

Indirect vs direct

Why this, why now?

There are a number of reasons why this scheme should be prioritised for progression and delivery as soon as possible, including its ability to:

Reduce carbon emissions

To achieve net neutrality, we need to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases we emit by 100% compared to 1990 levels. Despite excellent progress in the energy and business sectors, which have so far reduced emissions by 63% and 42% respectively, transport emissions have fallen by just 3% over the last thirty years². Every journey along this corridor taken by rail rather than by car, will produce 80% less emissions³.

The new dive-under at Nuneaton that this project creates could also be used by freight trains that currently have to take a longer route. This extra freight capacity will take lorries off our roads and reduce the carbon footprint of goods transported.

Level up the regional economy

This project delivers on the levelling up agenda, as outlined in Government's National Infrastructure Strategy which states "The Government wants to use infrastructure to unite and level up the UK, delivering a stronger Union, thriving regions, cities living up to their full potential and revitalised towns and communities."

It will do this by encouraging social mobility and access to new opportunities. Improved connectivity between the towns and cities on the corridor will

allow businesses and residents to take up new education, leisure and employment opportunities.

Over the next decade both the local population and jobs market on the corridor are forecast to grow, with new city centre developments (e.g. Friargate in Coventry, and Broadmarsh and Southern Gateway in Nottingham) set to create thousands of new, highly-skilled jobs. Many of these new opportunities will be in the professional services sector where employees traditionally use the railway network to access jobs and businesses to access their clients.

Integrate with other schemes

Plans are being drawn up elsewhere to create more space for extra trains to run into and out of Leicester station, and to increase capacity at Coventry station. We need to progress this business case quickly to ensure all plans are properly aligned.

Create new demand

This scheme introduces new connectivity where it is currently lacking and will hugely increase the number of passengers using the railways along this corridor. This, combined with the scheme providing excellent value for money (it will create significantly more in economic benefits than it costs to deliver), means it should be progressed and built as soon as possible. Our work tested the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated changes in travel demand; this scheme is still needed and provides good value for money, as it offers a transformational change in rail connectivity.



²2019 UK greenhouse gas emissions, provisional figures (publishing.service.gov.uk)

³Which form of transport has the smallest carbon footprint? - Our World in Data

Coventry-Leicester-Nottingham in numbers



Would create over **2million** extra train seats per year



Estimated cost **<£100m***
Estimated benefits **£179m***

*Exact cost and benefits depends on final option selected in the Outline Business Case



87% of local residents support plans to reintroduce a direct rail link between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham



New direct rail connections for **five Midlands towns and cities**



Coventry <-> Leicester
54 minutes -> 38 minutes
(30% faster)

Coventry <-> Nottingham
108 minutes -> 70 minutes
(35% faster)

Coventry <-> Loughborough
88 minutes -> 50 minutes
(43% faster)



Increasing proportion of journeys from Coventry <-> Leicester made by rail from **3% to 20%**



Delivery
2025-2030

What next?

Midlands Connect has shared the findings of this Strategic Outline Business Case with the Department for Transport; the study will be formally submitted in June 2021.

We are now seeking support from Government to move the plans forward and create an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the scheme, which will examine how the services will be timetabled, the impacts this will have on performance and more detailed engineering blueprints. Midlands Connect's Partnership has agreed to cover around a quarter of the OBC development costs.



Feasibility Study

Completed July 2020

Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC)

Completed May 2021

Outline Business Case (OBC)

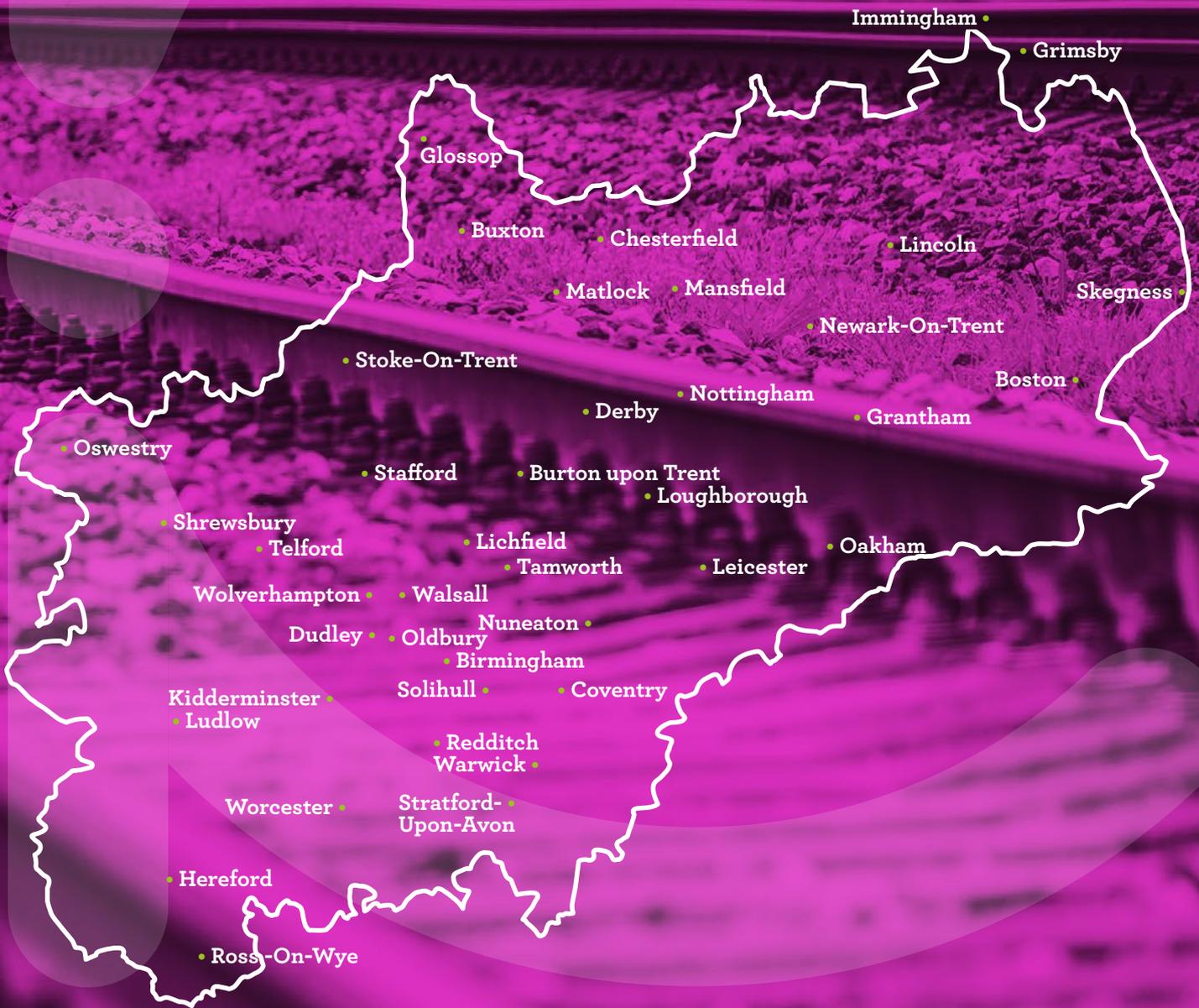
By end of 2022

Full Business Case (FBC)

By 2023/2024

Delivery

2025 - 2030



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