



# Rails to Recovery: Building Back Stronger



**Midlands Connect**  
Transport | Investment | Growth

June 2021





## Sir John Peace, Chairman

I'm proud to see Midlands Connect taking on the critical task of tackling some of the region's biggest transport challenges and improving this key rail corridor is one. Schemes like this can show how we can go from Rails to Recovery.

Currently services on the Shrewsbury-Black Country-Birmingham corridor are slow and do not offer the connectivity required to rebuild the economy and generate jobs – in particular fast connections between the principal urban centres on the corridor and London.

Network Rail forecasted, pre COVID-19 that, without intervention, the corridor will soon be subject to “acute overcrowding”. We are working

with West Midlands Rail Executive to examine the case for accelerating services on the corridor and introducing regular fast services to London, made possible by capacity released post-HS2.

The scheme could potentially be delivered in two phases – first, acceleration of line speeds to enable existing services to run faster and second, introduction of hourly Shrewsbury-London trains.

Of course, this is just a feasibility study, and there is a long way to go, but today is a critical first step and I know, working in partnership with local councils, LEPs, chambers and critically the government we can put this forward, together.

The route is the gateway then onto Wales, and could play a key part of the government's Union Connectivity Review and any proposed national transport network as trains go on from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli.

I firmly believe this scheme aligns perfectly with the government's agenda of levelling up and the report's name is apt. This project, delivered as proposed, will get the Black Country and Shropshire Building Back Stronger.

# Headlines from our work

1

Up to **£500 million** of benefits to businesses and residents from electrifying the route through Shropshire to the Black Country

2

Time savings to passengers are valued up to **£377m** and the benefits of fewer cars on our roads and other environmental benefits are worth up to **£145m**

3

Trains could run as fast as **90miles-per-hour** along the Birmingham-Black Country-Shrewsbury route

4

Up to **5,300** diesel train miles per day could be converted to carbon neutral electric

5

Fast services from Shrewsbury through the Black Country and onto Birmingham will see train times cut from **56 minutes** to around **45 minutes**, a reduction that can be achieved via track upgrades and possible electrification. Local services stopping at all other stations will also see journey time savings too.

6

The scheme has a '**short-term win**' with improved services / journey times between Shrewsbury, Telford and Birmingham through a line speed improvement and then, in time, we would use the released capacity from HS2 on the West Coast Main Line to deliver direct services to London. All of this would deliver an upgrade for communities up and down the line.

7

Shrewsbury, Wellington, Telford and Wolverhampton could see **hourly trains** to the capital

8

Commuters at Smethwick Galton Bridge, Sandwell & Dudley, Dudley Port, Tipton, Coseley, Bilbrook, Codsall, Albrighton, Cosford, Shifnal and Oakengates **will also see benefits from this scheme** – as increased fast services on the route will mean fewer customers from Shrewsbury, Wellington and Telford needing to travel on the all-stations stopping service, releasing capacity on these services for commuters from other stations.



# Scheme in detail

The rail line linking Shrewsbury, Telford, Wolverhampton, Sandwell & Dudley and Birmingham currently does not provide the connectivity or capacity needed to support business and housing growth. At Midlands Connect we believe that quick, reliable and comfortable rail services allow businesses to attract and access a wider pool of skilled workers, giving people more choice over where they live and work. This scheme would deliver up to £500 million of economic benefits along the route and has a value for money ratio of 3.6 with an estimated funding requirement of £140m for the full scheme. There would also be wider economic benefits that have not yet been assessed.

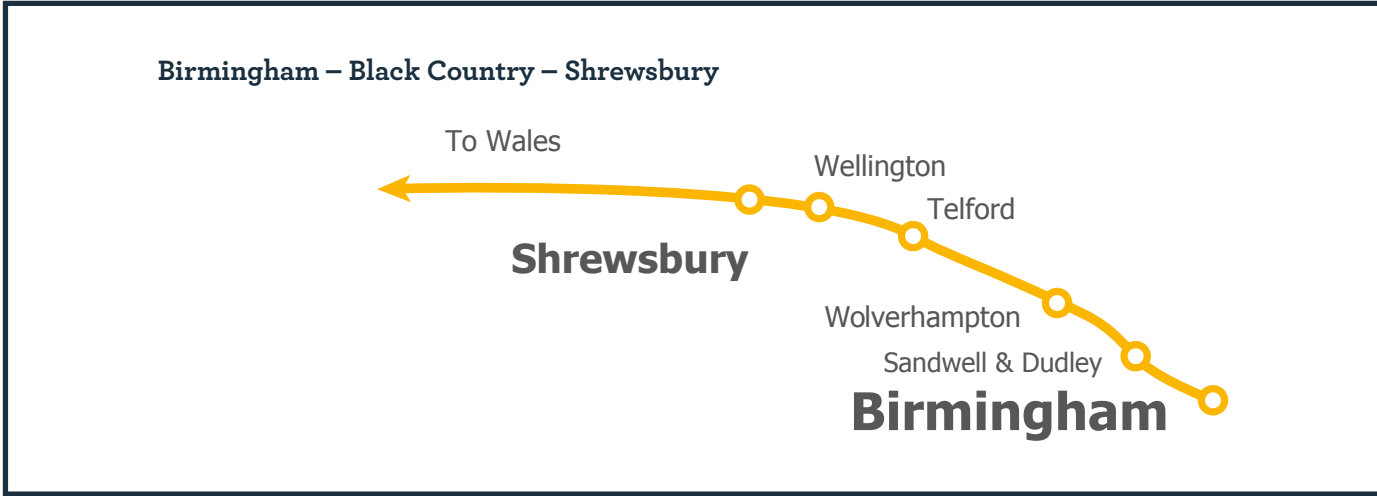
Slow journey times and low service frequency along this route are reducing productivity in Shropshire and the Black Country. Working with partners, Midlands Connect have examined the line and we believe it is possible to speed up services and increase the number of trains on the corridor from three to four per hour. This is made possible by extending the hourly Wolverhampton-Birmingham that is included in the post-HS2 assumptions to start at Shrewsbury.

These plans could introduce a direct, hourly service from Shrewsbury, Telford and Wellington to London, which would also have the effect of doubling services to Birmingham International. To add to this we believe that trains along the route could travel up to 90 miles-per-hour, which is 20mph faster than the current fast services along the line. This would drive additional benefits, reducing operating costs to accommodate the introduction of longer trains, increasing capacity even further.



Our study examined the economic case for speeding up Shrewsbury-Birmingham services from 56 minutes to around 45 minutes, a reduction that can be achieved via track upgrades and possible electrification.

Ideally this scheme would involve electrification of the railway between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury, offering faster, greener, more reliable journeys. Our analysis predicts that by upgrading the route we could see up to 5,300 diesel train miles per day converted to carbon neutral electric.



“This scheme is another part of my work to level up Wolverhampton and the Black Country, and shows how we can build back better, fairer and greener.”

*Jane Stevenson, MP for Wolverhampton North East*



“Businesses, commuters and residents in Shrewsbury deserve a first-class rail service and I will work to deliver the rail infrastructure that Shropshire deserves.”

*Daniel Kawczynski, MP for Shrewsbury & Atcham*



# What it means for my local station

If this plan is delivered, in full, it would mean a series of improvements for commuters at stations up and down the line. At Midlands Connect, as part of our research we believe that residents and businesses would all see quicker journeys with the linespeed improvements - either without or with electrification and all stations would see increased capacity to deal with overcrowding and some stations would see hourly, fast, direct trains to London. This will build on the improvements customers are expected to see between now and 2022 with the introduction of new trains by West Midlands Trains and Avanti West Coast.



Station	Quicker trains to Birmingham	More seats at busy times	New hourly direct trains to London
Shrewsbury	●	●	●
Wellington	●	●	●
Oakengates	●	●	
Telford Central	●	●	●
Shifnal	●	●	
Cosford	●	●	
Albrighton	●	●	
Codsall	●	●	
Bilbrook	●	●	
Wolverhampton		●	●
Coseley		●	
Tipton		●	
Dudley Port		●	
Sandwell & Dudley		●	
Smethwick Galton Bridge		●	
Smethwick Rolfe Street		●	
Birmingham New Street		●	

# What happens next

Building on this feasibility study Midlands Connect will now commission a more detailed engineering feasibility study, alongside engaging with DfT and Network Rail to agree how the proposals can be progressed. The purpose of this next stage of work is to further develop a number of infrastructure and operational options that are affordable, deliverable and endorsed by our industry partners.

This scheme sits within a network of other projects which could potentially impact upon it. With this in mind we will review the business case in light of the emerging outputs of the West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy and WMCA Movement for Growth refresh and we will test the scheme again using Midlands Connect’s new rail model to see the impact of HS2 on the project once this is available. We are hopeful, especially in regards to HS2, this will boost the benefits of the scheme and improve its value for money.

We are also speaking to the promoters of the proposed new stations at Shrewsbury Parkway at Tettenhall.

The next stage will deliver a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) that will be submitted to DfT, and will make the case for a funding ask to develop the scheme beyond that, to Outline Business Case (OBC). It is important in these early stages of scheme development to identify and assess all options before identifying a preferred option, so it could take 18-24 months to reach OBC stage.

If an OBC is approved by DfT further funding would be provided to move through statutory and regulatory processes, including public consultation, environmental surveys, preliminary designs and submission of a planning application, before a Full Business Case would then be provided for the approval of DfT. With that approval, the scheme would then move to delivery.







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