



Midlands Connect Annual Business Plan 2025/2026



Sir John Peace Chair, Midlands Connect



Maria Machancoses CEO, Midlands Connect

"2025 is set to bring huge changes to not just the Midlands, but the entire country. Following the publication of England's Devolution White Paper in late 2024, the foundations of the region's governance are setting the stage for what could bring about once-in-a-generation transformations.

"Alongside that change is a flurry of other activities, like the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV), which mandates the introduction of new bodies like Great British Railways (GBR), National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) and GB Energy. This will allow the connections between infrastructure investment, devolution, industrial strategy, and national growth to be appreciated for the first time.

"The Government's national mission to create sustainable growth is shaping the future of infrastructure across our country. We know transport is a critical component. Creating a reliable, safe, efficient, integrated and affordable transport system, is essential to connect businesses and people, unlock opportunities for growth, and bring about a great renewal in the Midlands and beyond.

"Midlands Connect brings together councils,

businesses and key partners to determine and deliver the strategic transport infrastructure the region needs to meet Government targets and to enhance our lives with the opportunities that new technology offers. In 2025/26, the Midlands Connect partnership will continue to bring leaders across the region together to ensure we shape this bigger picture, bringing about the best future for the Midlands.

"Our 2025/26 Annual Business Plan sets out how we will continue to transform East West connectivity across this region, linking to HS2, and to key UK international gateways – enabling more effective working and setting the region on the right path to increasing economic productivity.

"By advancing the move to greener transport and accelerating the roll-out of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, we will also reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and support the transition to homegrown power. This will not only lower costs, but will boost our energy security, and help deliver the emissions savings needed to achieve net zero.

"Around the world, the impacts of climate change – rising temperatures, shifting patterns of rainfall,

and more frequent and intense extreme weather conditions are already having an impact on transport infrastructure. This is a new priority area for Midlands Connect – Working with our Mayors, our local leaders and a range of partners, ensuring together we can climate-proof rural and urban infrastructure and advance and incorporate resilient infrastructure planning in all our activities.

"The Government's new priorities in terms of the policy, political and governance direction of the country, give space to consider longer term investment needs and allow for the integrated approaches which we know are needed to achieve this sort of catalytic change. We hope to use vehicles like our leading Centre of Excellence to deliver real support for councils by sharing skills, support and tools.

"This year is a pivotal one, and Midlands Connect continues to remain laser focused on working with partners to deliver real change for the Midlands."



About us

The Midlands Connect partnership brings together Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) including Combined Authorities, Local Highway Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, major airports (Birmingham & East Midlands), as well as our Government sponsor, the Department for Transport, alongside national agencies like Network Rail (NR)/Great British Railway Transition Team (GBRTT), National Highways (NH) and HS2 Ltd.

Our role

At Midlands Connect, our mandate from the Government and our partners remains clear:

- Develop and maintain a transport strategy for the region.
- Provide advice to Ministers on prioritising transport investment.
- Grow the capability of LTAs in the Midlands by facilitating collaboration across the region on a number of topic areas, such as the electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, alternative fuels, transport decarbonisation, freight and rural mobility.

Midlands Combined Authorities	WMCA Councils	EMCCA Councils	GLCCA Councils	Non-Mayoral Authorities	Airports	Chambers of Commerce	Government Agencies	Government Departments
West Midlands Combined Authority	Birmingham	Derby	North Lincolnshire	Herefordshire	Birmingham Airport	Black Country	Great British Railways Transition Team	Department for Transport (Sponsor)
East Midlands Combined County Authority	City of Wolverhampton	Derbyshire	North East Lincolnshire	Leicester	East Midlands Airport	Coventry & Warwickshire	National Highways	Department for Business & Trade
Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority	Coventry	Nottingham	Lincolnshire	Leicestershire		East Midlands	HS2	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
	Dudley	Nottinghamshire		Rutland		Greater Birmingham	Network Rail	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
	Sandwell			Shropshire		Herefordshire & Worcestershire	National Infrastructure & Service Transformation Authority	
	Solihull			Staffordshire		Lincolnshire		
	Walsall			Stoke-On-Trent		Shropshire		
				Telford & Wrekin		Stoke & Staffordshire		
				Warwickshire				
				Worcestershire				

What we have achieved

The past 12 months have once again demonstrated the power of the Midlands 'One Voice' approach, identifying transport connectivity improvements that will provide the biggest possible social, economic and environmental benefits for the Midlands region, and the rest of the UK. 2024/25 has been a landmark year for the partnership, which saw major achievements and developments, including:



Securing funding for the Midlands

In close collaboration with our LTAs, Midlands Connect has developed projects that have secured millions of pounds of DfT investment for the Midlands to maximise long-term economic growth. Over the past few years, these have included:

- £123m for the Full Business Case for the Midlands Rail Hub and a commitment of up to £1.75b for the 'full delivery' of the project.
- £110m for North Hykeham Relief Road in Lincolnshire.
- £50m upgrade of the A38 in Bromsgrove and Worcestershire.
- Over £40m for the rollout of EV charging infrastructure, as part of England's largest consortium of local authorities.
- £28.6m plans to upgrade six junctions along the A614/A6097 corridor.
- £24m to keep the Black Country moving by upgrading Birchley Island junction.



Sharing best practice with our partners

Our Centre of Excellence strengthens the connection with our LTAs by bringing partners together in one place, where they can share and receive tools, data, evidence and best practices. This collaboration maximises the impact of our collective experience and knowledge, accelerating the delivery of infrastructure and services across the Midlands. In 2024/25 the Centre of Excellence program provided technical services and advice, including analysis, modelling and planning tools such as the EV planning tool and our pioneering Alternative Fuels for Freight Infrastructure tool (ALFFI). These tools help LTAs to identify potential areas to place publicly accessible goods, vehicle charging and refuelling hubs, including alternatives like hydrogen and biomethane.



Supporting EV infrastructure

Midlands Connect is driving transport decarbonisation across the region to improve air quality and people's health. We continue to work closely with 14 LTAs to coordinate and support the delivery of over £40m worth of EV charging infrastructure, which will provide over 17,500 new convenient and affordable charging points across the Midlands, to meet the growing EV market.



Strengthening strategic road cases

Midlands Connect strengthened the case to secure investment along our strategic trade and logistic corridors (A50/A500, A46, A5, A38). These corridors serve a local, national and international purpose, linking major businesses to suppliers, customers, ports and airports. The economies they support and the communities and businesses they serve are key to achieving sustainable growth in our region and the wider economy.



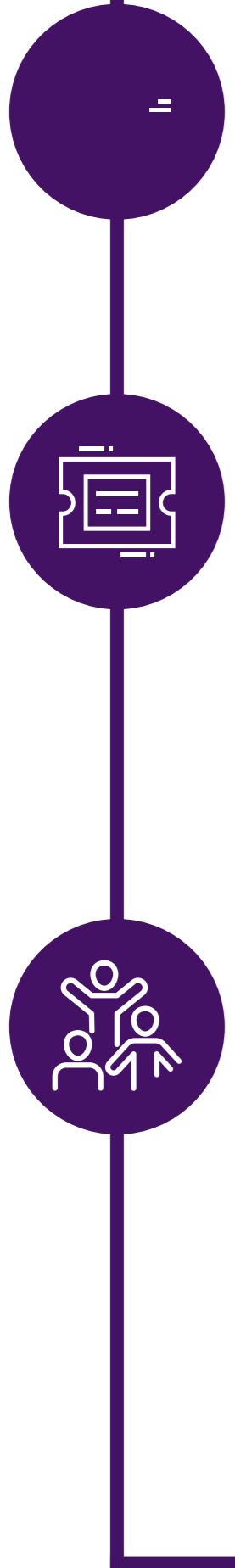
Prioritising road schemes

In August 2024, Midlands Connect published "Keeping the Midlands Moving", a report highlighting our 17 prioritised strategic road schemes with the ability to transform regional East-West connectivity. These schemes will support access to UK international gateways and unlock the full economic potential of the region by enabling the creation of new jobs and homes.



Partnering with the East Midlands Freeport

Midlands Connect formed a strong partnership with the East Midlands Freeport through the "Wider Integrated Strategy for Energy, Rail & Road" (WISERR) project. This collaboration, involving other public and private sector organisations, allows Midlands Connect to explore how public-private partnerships can be developed to accelerate the investment required to support growth proposals within and surrounding the Freeport area. This is done through efficient strategic road and rail connections, as well as other strategic infrastructure, particularly energy, when considering decarbonisation.



Encouraging network resilience

To secure an operationally climate-resilient transport network, Midlands Connect brought together key regional and national partners at a “Network Resilience Connected” event. In doing so, Midlands Connect continues to work hand-in-hand with the Department for Transport (DfT), our national delivery agencies and other parts of government including DEFRA, encouraging economic growth and enabling a sustainable future for all.

Collaboration on smart ticketing

In close collaboration with Project Coral (bus operators' group), Midlands LTAs and other Sub-national Transport Bodies (STBs), Midlands Connect continues to play a leading role in the national conversation around integrated ticketing through our ‘Tap & Cap’ Broker initiative. Our work will make multi-modal travel cheaper and easier, breaking down barriers to opportunity while supporting our Midlands Mayors' and Local Authorities' (LA) bus reform plans. Though developed in the Midlands, this solution will be designed to be a model for all of England outside of London.

Celebrating our 10th anniversary

In 2024, Midlands Connect celebrated its 10th anniversary and welcomed the arrival of a new Government that introduced major policy developments. These included an increased focus on economic growth, a push for devolution, the commitment to establish Great British Railways (GBR), housing and planning reforms and accelerating the transition to Net Zero. To maximise its impact, Midlands Connect kickstarted a strategic review to optimise its role in advancing the Midlands and wider UK.



2025/26 ABP: programme overview

In 2025/26, Government will be finalising investment proposals for transport infrastructure through the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) for rail and the emerging Road Investment Strategy (RIS3) for the Strategic Road Network. This includes plans for investment on the Major Road Network (MRN).

Midlands Connect will work in close collaboration with the DfT, NH and NR to drive forward its prioritised pipeline of strategic transport interventions.

During this year, Midlands Connect will ensure strategic transport priorities remain mission-driven, represent value for money and their impact on the people, businesses, towns and cities are robustly evidenced and understood. Our work needs to optimise the need for economic growth with the need to develop sustainable transport solutions that meet the wider priorities of Government and our partners.

Economic growth is the number one mission of Government and the Ten-Year Infrastructure Strategy (aligned with both Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy and the National Integrated Transport Strategy), will play a key role in supporting this ambition for sustained growth, whilst also aiming to achieve the UK's environmental targets.

We need to work with our local leaders and Mayors to ensure that this potential growth is harnessed and progressed sustainably throughout the Midlands. If done correctly, this growth will benefit far beyond the local, regional and even national boundaries.

We know that across the Midlands, there are a number of strategic growth opportunities. These include the East Midlands and Humber Freeports, the West Midlands Interchange and MIRA Technology Park to name but a few. We must also look to where

energy technology is attracting both people and investment – sites such as the STEP Fusion site in West Burton and the ongoing success seen at the Tyseley Energy Park in Birmingham. We have Investment Zones throughout the region, our towns and cities are growing, we have cyber security agglomerations in rural Worcestershire, space technology in Leicestershire, and food technology in Lincolnshire. We need to ensure that all these sites have the connectivity, opportunity and the resources they need to thrive. During 2025/26 Midlands Connect will continue to offer strategic planning support to maximise the biggest possible social, economic and environmental benefits from these strategic opportunities across the region.

This context, alongside the clear direction set by partners in their local transport and growth plans, will inform the direction of our work. Ensuring that our regional, multi-modal, land-use based forecasting system, Midlands Connect Analytical Framework, incorporates emerging priorities, enabling a pipeline of infrastructure projects which in turn will enable us to deliver a sustainable and integrated transport network that supports the Government's core missions.

1. Priorities for growth

Over the last five years, Midlands Connect has been advancing several strategic projects. These projects will transform regional and UK gateways, improve East-West connectivity and unlock the full economic potential of the Midlands by making it an attractive location for business and thus, enabling the creation of new jobs and opening up sites for housing.

Working in close partnership with DfT, NR, West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE), Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) and Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM), these rail projects constitute a solid Government investment pipeline to transform connectivity across the Midlands and to key UK international gateways, enabling the Midlands to work more effectively together and setting the region on the right pathway to increasing economic productivity, social inclusion and meet commitments to net zero. Our work continues to reflect the changes in the Midlands, such as the establishment

of the East Midlands Combined County Authority, Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority and Warwickshire devolution plans, as well as any further proposals set out in the Government's Devolution White Paper, including for Local Government Reorganisation in 'two-tier' areas. We will reflect this within the partnership to build upon the opportunities that emerge ahead.

Strategic rail and road enhancements

Following the cancellation of HS2 Phase 2 and HS2 East, the delivery of rail/road capacity and East-West connectivity across the Midlands is of critical importance for the region. It will enable Local Plans and Spatial Development Strategies and our recommended schemes will enhance connectivity across the region, reduce barriers to opportunity and support key sectors.



1. Midlands Rail Hub and HS2

Our flagship rail program, Midlands Rail Hub (MRH), is progressing at pace with unprecedented levels of collaboration between the DfT, NR, WMRE and Midlands Connect. In 2025/26, we will see further development of MRH proposals, particularly around the Birmingham-Leicester, Birmingham-Derby-Nottingham and Birmingham-Worcester-Hereford corridors. Midlands Connect will continuously evolve and refresh robust strategic and economic narratives for MRH to aid NR in finalising a Programme-Wide Outline Business Case during 2025/26, which highlights the benefits to local people and businesses – connecting millions more people to the network, creating space for millions more rail journeys and opening up faster and more frequent rail links for



commuter, business and leisure travellers.

We will continue to work closely with the DfT to gain a better understanding of the interfaces between MRH and HS2, and how we can best support the DfT with plans to the north and east of Birmingham, together with the delivery of Phase 1 between the Midlands and Euston, to maximise the regional and national benefits. We will also work to understand the relationship between MRH and the Government's Midlands, Yorkshire and North-East (MYNE) Study, and with emerging Network Rail thinking on the long-term role of the East Coast Main Line.

2. East-West rail connectivity programmes

In addition to MRH, we have identified several other East-West projects that will support economic growth, help break down barriers to opportunity and support planned housing developments along under-served rail corridors. During 2025/26 Midlands Connect's close collaboration with NR, WMRE, TfWM, TfEM and EMCCA will progress further business case development on the following schemes:

- Coventry-Leicester-Nottingham.
- Nottingham-Lincoln.
- Connections from Birmingham to Mid-Wales via the Marches.

3. RIS 3 (including MRN/LLM priorities)

During 2025/26, Government will be finalising investment proposals for the next Road Investment Strategy (RIS), including investment on the Major Road Network (MRN) and Large Local Majors (LLM) pipeline. In August 2024, Midlands Connect launched 'Keeping the Midlands Moving – Our RIS 3 recommendations' listing the 17 strategic road schemes we believe should be prioritised for funding. The cost, impact and benefits of each project have been carefully examined to prioritise the most urgent and beneficial improvements for the region, transforming mobility across the Midlands.

To help Government finalise investment proposals for RIS 3, Midlands Connect will maintain its evidence base, ensuring alignment with emerging local growth plans and with our wider Network Resilience and Integration Programme. To support NH, we will also

seek to undertake a strategic study of the wider network and the potential solutions that can help alleviate the 'Birmingham Box' – the loop formed by the M5, M42 and M6 – and support the future RIS pipeline and National Infrastructure Strategy developments.

Our recommended RIS priorities are aimed at supporting Government's missions of kickstarting economic growth and breaking down barriers to opportunities, which can be achieved by enhancing connectivity, enabling more efficient movement of people, goods and services, and reducing socio-economic divisions.

Transport & energy investment

Both the East Midlands Freeport and the Humber Freeport will create tens of thousands of new jobs, raising productivity levels and billions in additional Gross Value Added (GVA). These sites will need to be supported by appropriate transport interventions to avoid congestion and delays, enabling economic growth. The EM Freeport will be focused on innovation and developing the skills that will put this region in the vanguard of the transition to a low-carbon economy.

During 2024/25, Midlands Connect generated a robust evidence base which led to a strategic and economic narrative for transport investment. This sets out a plan to improve connectivity to the East Midlands Freeport and other major growth sites in the neighbouring areas.

In the coming year, we will focus on facilitating an integrated partnership approach between the public and private sectors, looking at the potential to leverage private investment and investigate alternative delivery models, allowing key infrastructure to be delivered to shorter timescales.

Network resilience and integration

Midlands Connect is working with partners and stakeholders to collaborate on resilience planning across our roads and railways. As recent experience has demonstrated, the need to improve network resilience will only increase in the coming years as

travel demand continues to grow alongside the direct and indirect impacts of climate change.

Strengthening our understanding of the long-term impact of climate change on our transport infrastructure, in line with DfT's emerging adaptation strategy, is central to this work. This will incorporate safety and operational resilience, and how a programme of maintenance and renewals can address challenges and support our partners to optimise programmes of investment, whilst minimising disruption, along key corridors.

Through this work we will be able to support our partners in providing more resilient, reliable and cost-effective connectivity, to better support key sectors like freight, manufacturing and construction, and enable safer and more efficient journeys that support the NHS and emergency service operations.

1. Multi-modal resilience

Future network resilience needs to be delivered through enhanced multi-modal integration and be supported by improved planning and communication across modes. During 2025/26, Midlands Connect will build on the research and tools developed during 2024/25 by taking a multimodal, cross-border, corridor view of future network resilience and the associated optimisation of renewals and maintenance. This should lead to a more integrated transport planning approach, to minimise disruption and improve operational performance.

2. Network integration - freight modal shift

Last year, Midlands Connect focused its transport integration programme around "access to rail", leading to the identification of three pilot schemes aimed at improving station access to support the visitor economy.

During 2025/26, our focus will be on identifying key interventions along our network that will support a greater shift from road to rail for freight. This includes considerations of multi-modal freight and logistics resilience, using our evidence base to deepen the understanding of LTAs knowledge of the sector and assist them in their local planning.

2. Accelerating Net Zero

While the UK has made huge strides in reducing carbon emissions in other industries, the transport sector continues to lag. The uptake in EVs is a central part of reducing transport carbon emissions and delivering a sustainable transport strategy, one which sees the reduction of harmful tailpipe emissions and improved overall air quality. However, there are huge challenges ahead to meet targets set by Government, including phasing out the sale of new diesel and petrol vehicles, plus wider transport climate targets. Midlands Connect is helping drive the rollout of EV charging infrastructure, and alternative fuels for freight, to accelerate Net Zero and support Government's mission of making Britain a clean energy superpower.

Supercharging the Midlands

During 2025/26 we will assess the progress that has been made to develop EV infrastructure across the region since our last Supercharging the Midlands report in 2021. As part of this, we will present Government with the latest figures on the current use of EVs in the Midlands, the infrastructure in place to support it, and the infrastructure needed to meet and drive demand for zero-emissions travel in coming years.

Freight re-fuelling/re-charging hub demonstrators

In 2024/25 we began to develop the Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) for a freight re-fuelling and/or recharging hub demonstrator. In 2025/26 we will continue this work and engage closely with the private sector to develop confidence in the demonstrator proposal and develop a technological solution that meets their operational needs.

Opportunities for integrated ticketing

In close collaboration with Project Coral, Midlands LTAs and other STBs, we are leading a national conversation on smart ticketing and best value capping to support breaking down barriers to opportunity. We will generate a view of the gap in smart ticketing infrastructure across the Midlands, supporting Government's agenda of integrated ticketing, alongside the Mayors' and LA bus reform plans. We will support LAs in being able to fully exploit the benefits and capabilities of this system, both at a regional and national level. We will also support authorities in developing a business case for phased implementation to deliver benefits across the Midlands.

Alongside this, Midlands Connect will seek to understand how a fairer and more affordable transport network can be achieved, incentivising greater use of public transport to meet decarbonisation goals.



3. England's Integrated National Transport Strategy

Ministers have set out plans for a mission-driven Government with a focus on ambitious, measurable, long-term objectives including proposals for "a long-term strategy for transport, ensuring transport infrastructure can be delivered efficiently and on time". Midlands Connect will work with partners to show how the whole Midlands works towards this long-term strategy.

Strategic Transport Plan refresh

The DfT is developing a high-level strategy that will set the direction for how transport should be designed, built and operated in England over the next 10 years. The strategy will put user needs at its heart to deliver integrated transport solutions that meet the needs of their local communities. To support this, in 2025/26, Midlands Connect will commence the refresh of our Strategic Transport Plan published in 2022, which will also inform a sequenced and prioritised Strategic Investment Portfolio (SIP).

This refresh will be informed by the latest strategies and plans from the region's LTAs, and by the emerging England's Integrated National Transport Strategy. This will ensure the effective delivery of an integrated transport system that supports economic growth, environmental sustainability and improved quality of life for people in the Midlands.

Throughout the refresh, Midlands Connect will work with the DfT, LAs and Mayors, other STBs and national agencies including GBRTT and the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA). This collaborative approach will enable us to integrate strategic thinking with emerging

national strategies and policies, local plans and Local Transport Plans (LTPs), clearly defining our role in helping deliver the overall Midlands transport portfolio.

It will present place-based, people-focused future outcomes that the Midlands can expect if we continue to follow current trend-based forecasts, or the 'business-as-usual' (BAU) future travel scenario.

The overall SIP will consist of a series of regional corridor-based transport improvement programmes that can help improve these BAU future outcomes, by underpinning economic growth, reducing barriers to opportunity, and accelerating the reduction of carbon emissions.

The likely outcomes by corridor will be reported in the Midlands Connect's 'State of the Region' report, following extensive engagement with partners and underpinned by a series of engagement papers with partners. It will be underpinned by the evidence from the Midlands Connect Analytical Framework, which incorporates analysis from our Future Scenarios and Economy and Freight programme. The report will build on the findings from our research programmes, such as access to rail, future mobility, cross-border bus/coach and the cost of travel. This will be grounded in our refreshed and robust evidence base and potential options for the future.

Future scenarios

We will work to estimate projections for the BAU Midlands-wide travel markets. We will use the BAU future scenario to inform the key challenges and questions that we will need to ask ourselves about our future integrated transport system.

Our future scenarios work began in 2024/25 and will continue this year to form one of the foundational elements of the Strategic Transport Plan Refresh. This work has focused on updating the evidence for roads, moving to a current base year and developing a regional, land-use based forecasting system. In 2025/26 we will incorporate rail into this model to create a single, high-quality mode choice forecast.

As well as building an understanding of travel markets under the BAU future scenario, we will continue to research the regional impact of numerous national and local policies, which will be combined into a series of sensitivity tests against the BAU

scenario. These sensitivity tests will capture future uncertainty and help local authority partners when they are considering adjustments in policy direction. These tests will provide an alternative 'decide & provide' future for decision makers to compare against the BAU.

The sensitivity tests will build an understanding of how local and national policy adjustments, combined with the overall SIP, can help accelerate place-based, people-focused outcomes, for example increasing the likelihood of reaching our 2050 decarbonisation goals.

Economy and freight

Over the last couple of years, our economy and freight work has developed the most up-to-date national evidence base for the movement of goods across Great Britain (GB) by all modes. This GB view has been an essential first step in understanding the wider market, which has a significant impact



on the Midlands due to both our location and our importance to the industry.

During 2025/26 we will further analyse and communicate the impact of these movements across the Midlands as part of the BAU future scenario. This includes reporting and providing access to data and apps for partner use.

We will also continue to progress the evidence for various national and local economic, land-use and technology policy settings as part of the sensitivity tests against the BAU. This includes adding in local economic growth aspirations as well as potential productivity improvements and likely technology improvements.

Future pipeline identification and prioritisation

Both the BAU and associated sensitivity tests will support the development of the SIP and show how regional corridor-based transport improvement programmes can help improve future outcomes.

We will work in close collaboration with our partners, GBRTT, NR and NH to ensure we consider all options

and remain modally agnostic at this initial stage. We will start by refreshing our understanding of regional corridors and future outcomes in the BAU scenario, noting that the sensitivity tests will not be ready for use in 2025/26 (largely due to the need to research emerging local and national policy decisions).

Following these tests, we can then coordinate the development of the Midlands Connect Prioritisation Framework, which will consider how place-based, people-focused outcomes can be improved within each regional corridor, through better integrated rail, road and technology improvements.

The prioritisation framework will include many aspects of scheme delivery and use our forecasting tools to understand the future performance of the transport system. It will include a focus on extending the resilience of existing assets, including future maintenance and renewal investment programmes, alongside prioritising network resilience as part of adapting to climate change.

We will initially use the prioritisation framework to sequence the programme of schemes within several likely funding profiles. We will then look to optimise

schemes within each regional corridor and show partners how the SIP can change future outcomes within the context of the BAU future. More detailed case making for these schemes will follow, which is expected to provide even more compelling evidence for rail and road schemes already being promoted.

Monitoring future outcomes

Finally, we will also work with the DfT and our partners to ensure the Strategic Transport Plan refresh is underpinned by an effective Midlands Connect Monitoring and Evaluation Framework that tracks the impact of delivering the SIP. This framework will allow regular monitoring of progress to deliver future outcomes. It will require observing the current transport network's performance and then re-forecasting with updated local and national assumptions.

Data & analytical capability

We will continue to build and maintain the Midlands Analytical Framework to:

- Update and improve the evidence base that underpins all elements of our work from case-

making and development of tools and resources, to providing a framework for setting transport investments into the future.

- Deliver efficiencies across STBs and our partners enabling us to enhance collaboration and more effectively share evidence.
- Provide a digital platform with tools and resources which will assist partners to develop their LTPs and build their understanding in complex areas such as freight and decarbonisation.

We will work in collaboration with national and local partners to ensure a joined-up approach and minimise the potential for duplication, this will enable us to improve the quality of data and assumptions in order to assist decision-makers.





4. Enabling collaboration and delivery

Centres of Excellence

The Midlands Connect Centres of Excellence (CoE), established in 2024/25, is a digital platform for sharing tools, data and evidence with partners. By developing tools at a regional level, the CoE helps us to deliver value for money - securing the evidence and data that helps our partners to plan strategically, without needing to procure activities individually thus avoiding duplication and wasting public funds.

It provides a platform for collaboration and the sharing of resources, knowledge and best practice and all partners are encouraged to join. In 2025/26, we will ensure that the CoE responds to LTA priorities, whether mode shift, future public transport policy, delivery options or delivering carbon reductions.

The Midlands Connect CoE, will:

- Identify key workstreams being developed by us and our partners and share best practice.
- Host sessions on the Carbon Assessment Playbook allowing authorities to use this new tool to help them fill in their local transport assessments more efficiently.
- Work with partners as we explore new and different ways to fund infrastructure in the region.
- Support councils through submissions of their bus service improvement plans and writing LTPs.
- Host a CoE symposium to allow councils to highlight case studies and best practices.

In 2025/6, Midlands Connect will also host a Rural Forum to highlight the unique challenges faced by rural communities and outline the tools available on our CoE site, which will help partners address some of the issues faced.

We will also host an economy and freight workshop to highlight the workstream, the work undertaken, the data available to them, and the tools and methodologies now at their disposal.

As part of the CoE, we have rolled out a series of tools and will continue to work to make them useful and accessible to colleagues throughout the Midlands. We will ensure that these are kept up to date and remain intuitive, user friendly and effective for our partners:

They include:

- MiView which pulls together all of Midlands Connect's high-value evidence base in one place.
- MiOutcomes, a dashboard to help LTAs test how transport policy and infrastructure investment options.
- The Carbon Assessment Playbook is a national initiative to provide an evidence-informed, quantifiable approach to carbon reduction when developing LTPs.
- ALFFI the Alternative Fuels for Freight Infrastructure tool, a national site selection initiative.
- EVCI Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure, a national initiative to help identify charging point locations.
- MiIRROR, which helps LTAs identify opportunities and prioritise investment across their geography, also empowering them to collaborate with other LTAs to ensure region-wide network resilience.

Our ways of working

Following our 10th anniversary in 2024, our partnership remains committed to working collaboratively, advising Government on key strategic transport priorities for the Midlands. To continue our collaborative approach in 2025/26 we will:

- Implement the reviewed Governance & Assurance Framework.
- Review the representation within our governance structures to allow for business representation and political representation following the May 2025 elections.
- Establishment of national bodies such as GBRTT and NISTA
- Refresh Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with national agencies and the Welsh Government.

Ensuring effective engagement with our partners, local communities, businesses and central government is essential to our work. During 2025/26 we will hold a number of stakeholder activities and events including our Annual Conference, city summits and rural webinar events.

Maximising opportunities of devolution

In 2024, devolution started to change the map of local government in the Midlands, leading to a variety of agreements and partnerships across the region. It is also clear that Government wants to engage with the regions in a different way, especially through Mayors, on a range of areas such as spatial planning and economic growth.

In 2024/25, we began to explore what this changing landscape means for Midlands Connect, not only in terms of how we engage with local authorities but also the relationship and role with national transport bodies, plus the opportunities that exist to support greater alignment between strategic planning for transport, energy, economic growth and spatial planning. In 2025/26 we will use the outcomes of this work and engagement with partners to work with

Government to consolidate our role and adjust our ways of working to recognise the different needs of different types of local authority partners.

Communications

The Midlands Connect communications team will continue to aspire towards effective and engaging communications. Since the election, Midlands Connect has engaged with all 53 new Members of Parliament (MPs), meeting with two thirds already. In 2025/26, the team plans to meet with the remaining MPs to maintain a 'one voice' approach. This will ensure that the Midlands reaches a unified position on which strategic interventions are required to maximise the growth potential of the Midlands.

Following the 2024 General Election, the team plans to highlight Government's Missions. While priority schemes might not change, the way we talk about them may, to highlight how they contribute to support and deliver on Government's Missions. This year we plan to host local city summits once again, building on their success and focusing on the Midlands Rail Hub as well as the rail link for Coventry - Leicester - Nottingham.

Midlands Connect will host an Annual Conference as well as a Rural Transport event. The team will also continue to support the work at East Midlands Freeport and local EV infrastructure rollout in the months ahead.

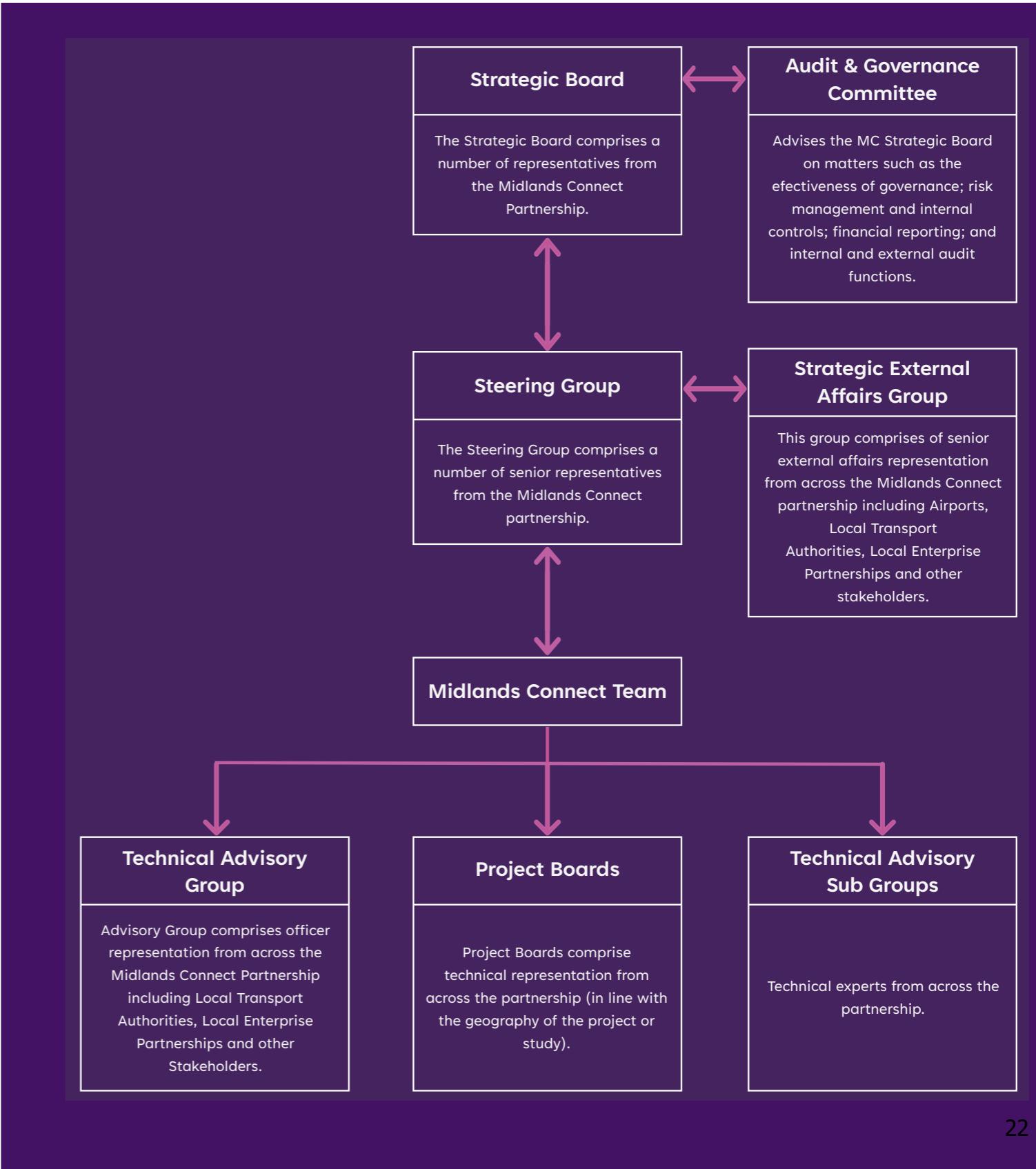
All of our work will support the technical elements and help to burnish the evidence base that Midlands Connect holds. We will continue to liaise with Department colleagues and hope to further deepen this relationship over the period.

At the heart of our teamwork this year will be collaboration across the region to deliver the best outcomes for the Midlands.

Governance and management

As a partnership of transport authorities, business representatives and delivery bodies, Midlands Connect must be supported by a clear governance structure. The Midlands Connect governance arrangements ensure appropriate approval and monitoring of the Midlands Connect programme,

plans and strategies clear along with timely decision-making. The terms of reference for all groups including Strategic Board (SB), Audit and Governance Committee (AGC) and Steering Group (SG) have been recently reviewed and agreed to ensure they remain appropriate. Midlands Connect governance structure is shown below:



Delivering value for money

The Audit and Governance Committee (AGC) will continue to advise the Strategic Board and make recommendations on matters such as:

- The effectiveness of governance.
- Risk management and internal controls.
- Financial reporting.
- Internal and external audit functions.

During 2025/26 the AGC will focus on items including:

- DfT/Accountable Body relationship.
- Internal and external reporting mechanisms.
- Refresh of Accountable Body Service Level Agreement.
- Annual review of Financial Outturn, Terms of Reference (ToR), declarations of interest etc.
- Reaffirming representations and considering future business representation options.
- Consider if there are any opportunities for seeking additional funding.

- Consider possible changes to our governance/ways of working based on any new Government guidance for STBs.

Accountable body for Midlands Connect

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) provides the accountable body function for Midlands Connect. As the accountable body, the WMCA will continue to provide the services of a Section 151 Officer. It will also allocate resources and assign appropriate officers from the WMCA to Midlands Connect to support ongoing human resources, legal, finance, procurement activities and ICT.

The role of the DfT sponsorship team

The DfT team will, through their sponsorship team, sponsor Midlands Connect and support the delivery of the Midlands Connect programme. This will ensure our outputs are robust and meet the appropriate level of assurance for the decisions we are aiming to influence, and while recognising that the partnership

is locally led, it will ensure appropriate alignment between our work and the national strategy and policy framework.

Monthly reports will be produced for DfT, and meetings held with the DfT sponsorship team are held every other month to review progress and actual expenditure variance versus the budget.

Management structure

To support the Midlands Connect partnership, the organisation is structured under the following teams:

- CEO
- Communications and Stakeholder
- Corporate Services
- Programme
- Strategy and Policy

Programme monitoring and reporting

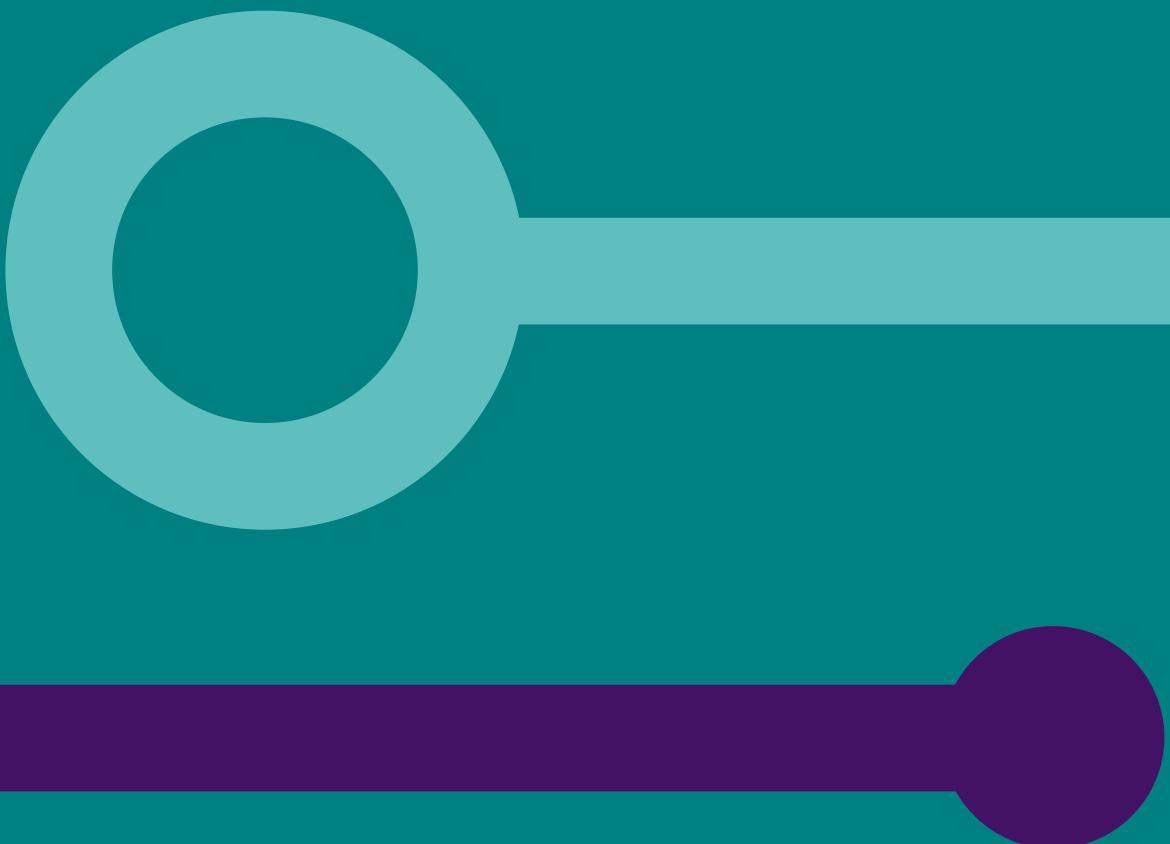
Day-to-day programme management of our workstreams is supported by the above management

structure and is carried out through a suite of reporting tools. Managing the overall programme this way ensures that all components of the programme and associated individual projects:

- Are jointly developed and delivered.
- Are delivered on time.
- Are delivered within the authorised budget.
- Meet the appropriate quality standards.
- Have appropriate change controls in place.

As the Midlands Connect team has grown and matured, we will revisit and update where necessary our management and reporting tools to ensure that the pipeline, deliverables and milestones for projects is clear. We will also ensure that reporting of the individual projects provides for appropriate and timely risk management, and alignment with the wider programme. We will also continue to strengthen our systems and processes to support scheduling (both project and programme), to ensure that provision has been made for elements such as procurement, equality, and quality assurance.





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