

HS2 offers West Midlands businesses a monumental opportunity

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West Midlands businesses need to seize the opportunities, jobs and investment offered by HS2 if the region is to bounce back stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic.

That was the rallying cry from West Midlands Mayor Andy Street as he hosted the UK's first and only HS2 supply chain summit.

An online audience of hundreds, representing a wide range of businesses and industries from the across the region, also heard from HS2 chief executive Mark Thurston.

HS2 will create more than 400,000 contracts to businesses during construction of the line between Birmingham and London and the message to the summit was clear – West Midlands firms need to act now to grab their share.

The country's largest infrastructure investment project has already supported 12,000 jobs in the West Midlands – with development under way on the Curzon Street and Interchange Station sites in Birmingham and Solihull.

As construction and development ramps up there will be many more opportunities for a wide range of businesses and industries.

Wolverhampton-based family business McAuliffe, a specialist in cleaning up brownfield land, has been working for HS2 on the Curzon Street Station site in Birmingham.

During its 12-month programme the firm supported the archaeological dig on the site – including the discovery of what's thought to be the world's oldest railway roundhouse.

Managing director John McAuliffe said: "As a local business, having our own people and equipment working on such a high-profile project has been a real source of pride for the company and our staff.

"The Curzon Street project has helped us to provide job and apprenticeship opportunities, and has raised McAuliffe's profile. We'd encourage fellow Black Country businesses to tender for work on the scheme."

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) is refreshing its HS2 Growth Strategy to outline how the region will make the most of the opportunities presented by the development of the high speed rail line.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street, who called the summit, said: "HS2 has a critical role to play in the West Midlands' economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

"Infrastructure projects help guarantee work for the construction sector, allowing companies to create and protect local jobs, and these projects don't come any bigger than HS2.

"HS2 has already led to the creation of more than 12,000 jobs, and we are now at another crucial stage as HS2 Ltd begins to award contracts. It is pivotal, at a time of deep economic difficulty, that as many local companies as possible get their hands on these contracts. It is, quite simply, a monumental economic opportunity.

"It was with this in mind that I was so determined to have this summit, and I was pleased to see so many businesses on the line today. My aim is to get as many local companies as possible involved with the construction of HS2, which will in turn help to create thousands of local jobs for local people."

Mark Thurston, chief executive officer of HS2 Ltd, said: "HS2 presents an unprecedented opportunity for businesses across the UK, but especially in the West Midlands.

"It was great that so many attended the webinar today and we remain committed to engaging with as many businesses as possible, helping the UK economy during the pandemic.

"Our message to business is clear: please register with us on our website and on Compete For to find out more and help us build Britain's new high speed railway."

Cllr Ian Brookfield, WMCA portfolio holder for economy and innovation and leader of the City of Wolverhampton Council, said: "The jobs and investment generated by HS2 can play a crucial role in our economic recovery and mitigate the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the region.

“It is not only a once-in-a-generation opportunity for a wide range of businesses, but also for our people to gain jobs and develop skills working in the high speed rail supply chain.”

Cllr Ian Courts, WMCA portfolio holder for environment, energy and HS2 and leader of Solihull Council said: “We have the UK’s largest infrastructure investment taking place on our doorstep and I would strongly urge local businesses, and not just those in the engineering and construction sectors, to take a close look at how they can work with HS2.

“As well as supporting jobs through the supply chain, HS2 is also triggering wider benefits for the region through the further investment in transport including our new Metro lines and other new developments in the pipeline at Solihull’s UK Central and Birmingham Eastside.”

Photo credit: West Midlands Combined Authority

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