

# HS2's journey north accelerates as Bill extending the route to Manchester is handed to Parliament

January 24, 2022



The prospect of high-speed journeys adding extra capacity into the rail network, and helping to close the distances between towns and cities in the Midlands and North, took a giant leap forward on Monday (January 24) as the Bill for the Crewe-Manchester extension of the HS2 network was submitted to Parliament.

The Bill sets out legislation for the next phase of Britain's new high-speed, zero carbon railway (known as the Phase 2b Western Leg), which will free up capacity on the congested West Coast Main Line and deliver significant connectivity, reliability and journey time benefits for passengers travelling between Scotland, the North, the Midlands and the South East. The Bill, called the 'High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill', seeks powers to construct and operate the Phase 2b Western Leg.

Mark Thurston, CEO at HS2 Ltd said: "HS2 has an integral role to play in levelling up and rebalancing Britain's economy, and this extension of the network fuels that role by bringing the country's economic centres in the North and Midlands closer together.

“Construction of the first phase of HS2 is already supporting over 20,000 jobs and spearheading investment and growth in major population centres along the route. This Bill is a vote of confidence in HS2’s ability to help towns and cities in the North realise their economic potential.”

The investment plugs towns and cities all the way up to Edinburgh into the spine of Britain’s new high-speed transport network, making zero carbon journeys more accessible for millions of people and helping to take cars and lorries off the roads as we strive towards the UK’s Net Zero carbon emissions target.

The 85km (52 mile) route includes new high-speed stations at Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly, and provides the critical infrastructure required for Northern Powerhouse Rail and provision for new Metrolink routes, making Manchester the best-connected city outside of London.

Commuter towns south of Manchester could also feel the benefit when new zero carbon high-speed trains shift onto the dedicated HS2 track. Up to three new train paths per hour could be released between Crewe and Manchester via Stockport, and the number of seats on services between Crewe, Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester Piccadilly could more than double during the evening peak as a result.

Damian Waters, Regional Director, CBI North West said: “Better transport links are crucial to growing the economy and we welcome the first step in bringing high speed rail to Manchester. HS2 is already having a positive effect on investment in other parts of the country before a single train has started running and business in the North West will see this as a vote of confidence in the region’s future.”

Investment would also give the green light for a new junction north of Crewe, known as the Crewe Northern Connection, for a future NPR scheme which could allow up to seven high-speed trains per hour to call at the town. As well as boosting connectivity to the heritage railway town, the infrastructure facilitates better links between Chester, North Wales and Birmingham and Shrewsbury and Manchester. Combined with the Government’s plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail, the Crewe Northern Connection could also facilitate faster journeys between Liverpool and the capital.

Delivery of the Phase 2b Western Leg fuels an employment boost for the North. 17,500 jobs are forecast to support the construction programme and thousands more are expected as plans for new homes and commercial development around the new Piccadilly and Airport Stations spring into life.

Darren Caplan, CEO at the Rail Industry Association said: “It is encouraging to see the bill for HS2’s Western Leg deposited in Parliament today. Rail businesses up and down the country stand ready to support this transformational project, supporting jobs and investment whilst delivering a new sustainable railway for the nation.

“Of course, this development should be accompanied by a commitment to deliver the HS2 Eastern Leg too – only by delivering the full scheme will all the benefits of HS2 be realised. So we continue to urge the Government to develop the Birmingham to Leeds stretch of HS2 at the same time as pushing on with the Western Leg to Manchester.”

The announcement was coupled with confirmation of the HS2’s Minister’s decision to include plans for a rolling stock depot north of Crewe and a smaller depot and train stabling facilities in Dumfries and

Galloway in the scheme proposals. The depots would support the creation of hundreds of permanent skilled jobs.

HS2 has already announced that its trains will be powered by zero carbon energy from day one, offering a cleaner alternative to long distance car journeys and domestic flights. Plans for the Western Leg extension of HS2 fully support that vision with journey times between Glasgow and the capital slashed by 49 minutes and Edinburgh and Birmingham made 43 minutes faster. Construction of the Phase 2b Western Leg sets a further aspiration for cleaner, greener travel by becoming the first major infrastructure project to set out its ambition to deliver a net gain in biodiversity.

Reacting to the news, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, is concerned that it is the wrong plan for the North as a whole. He said: “We remain committed to working with the Government to bring HS2 to our city-region. But we remain of the view that this is the wrong plan, both for Greater Manchester and for the North as a whole.

“Building HS2 on the surface at Manchester Piccadilly means the new station will be at full capacity from day one. It means the new train services from Liverpool and Leeds having to reverse out. And it also means forever losing prime development land and the economic opportunity that goes with it.

“We also again have to ask again: why is Greater Manchester the only part of the country being asked to make a substantial financial contribution to the cost of HS2?

“We believe there is a better plan which would do much more to level up the North of England with the South. An underground station would be an investment in building a bigger Northern economy and would pay for itself over time. It could also help deliver an entirely new line between Manchester and Leeds, which is what we were promised.

“We call on the Government to listen to the North and work with us to get right solution. This decision will have a huge bearing on the future of the North for the rest of this century and the next and it is vital that it is not sold short. We will be pressing the case for major changes to the Bill and seeking the support of MPs on all sides.”

*Photo credit: HS2 Ltd*