

IRP and the HS2 western leg: confirmation of the Crewe to Manchester high speed link

November 18, 2021



It has been confirmed that the HS2 western leg, which runs from Crewe to Manchester is going ahead as planned.

The government says as things stand the times between Manchester and Birmingham are poor when compared with Birmingham and London. Given the need to serve intermediate towns, it says there is no possibility of improvement without greater track capacity.

It adds that north of London, Manchester has the greatest demand for journeys. Since links to Manchester have been improved, demand on West Coast intercity services has increased.

Greater capacity will drive further growth.

“Improving links to Manchester, as the centre of the largest conurbation in the North,” it says, “is critical for improving the connectivity of neighbouring towns and cities for onward travel.”

The DfT, in the Integrated Rail Plan, has emphasised that as part of this improvement, there should be a

new station based at Manchester Airport, although this is subject to a local funding contribution.

This station is for use by Northern Powerhouse Rail services, as well as HS2's longer 400-metre train services.

The hope is the move will double capacity between the city and London, with 1,800 seats travelling per hour to about 3,000. It would triple capacity between Birmingham and Manchester.

The government projects that journey times will be even shorter than originally proposed under phase 2a; the times will be cut down from an initial reduced commute of 90 minutes to 70.

The UK Government has added that Manchester Piccadilly should be the place for an HS2 station in the heart of Manchester. It maintains that a six-platform surface station can meet this need and cut cost and construction impact — which a proposed underground alternative would not do.

It says this western leg should include Crewe Northern Connection, meaning that trains can call at Crewe and re-join HS2 lines.

There are some other possibilities also: the government says The Union Connectivity Review is considering the case for further changes to the plan, including alternatives to the Golborne link from the HS2 Line to the West Coast Main Line.

Image credit — taken from Integrated Rail Plan