

Less than a month to express an interest in being home to Great British Railways

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Towns and cities across England, Wales and Scotland have less than a month to apply to be the new home of Great British Railways (GBR).

The government announced earlier this month that the new GBR HQ will be based outside of London and bring a number of high-skilled jobs to the winning location.

Local economies will be further boosted by a number of new regional headquarters across the country, putting decision making and investment at the heart of the communities who use those railways day-to-day.

The expression of interest deadline is March 16, with a shortlist announced in May 2022.

Among the areas to bid is Crewe. Councillor Sam Corcoran, leader of Cheshire East Council, said: "We welcome the news and the opportunity to demonstrate why Crewe should be the home of Great British Railways.

“Crewe has a proud rail heritage and has long been seen as the gateway to the north, making it the perfect location for GBR’s headquarters.

“Rail is in the blood of so many people in Crewe and bringing the Great British Railways headquarters to the town will create huge opportunities for levelling up and creating skilled jobs that will build on the town’s proud rail heritage.”

Swindon Borough Council has also signalled its intention to put forward a bid to the government.

Councillor David Renard, leader of the council, said: “This is a fantastic opportunity for Swindon and we will make the strongest case possible to the Government.

“Swindon is synonymous with the railways. Brunel’s decision to choose Swindon as the home of the Great Western Railway means our railway heritage is part of the fabric of our town today.

“We not only have our hugely popular STEAM museum, a major part of the railway works has been converted into the Swindon Designer Outlet, while our railway village and the historical buildings around it form an important part of our nationally significant Heritage Action Zone.

“We are also breathing new life into the Carriage Works to ensure our railway legacy lives on.

“Our location as a town is also a major selling point, being less than an hour away from London on the train and we have one of the most productive workforces in the country. Being home to the GBR would also give our town centre economy a huge boost.

“We have so much going for us and we will be doing everything we can to make sure we are on that shortlist for the public vote in May.”

The creation of Great British Railways was announced as a major pillar of the once in a generation reforms launched by Transport Secretary Grant Shapps in the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail. GBR will be a single guiding mind that ends the fragmentation of the rail industry and drives benefits and improvements across the network for passengers and freight customers.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said: “Our railways have kept this country moving for almost two hundred years, but it’s time to kickstart a new age that will shape our network for the next two hundred.

“I’m calling on people across the country to make the case for why the true home of the railways is on your doorstep.”

Locations across the country with strong historical links to the railway are encouraged to make the case for why they should be the new home of GBR. The GBR Transition Team (GBRTT) will shortlist the best applications in May, after which a public vote will help determine the winning location.

Applications will be measured against six criteria:

- Alignment to Levelling Up objectives
- Connected and easy to get to
- Opportunities for Great British Railways
- Railway heritage and links to the network
- Value for money
- Public support

This central headquarters will be the heart of the rail network and provide strategic direction for the running of GBR.

Leader of the GBRTT Andrew Haines said: “This is the chance for cities and towns across the UK to pitch to be a key part of an exciting chapter in the history of Britain’s railway.”

Local authorities, MPs and business groups are being encouraged to drive forward campaigns for why their community should be the #DestinationGBR by visiting www.gbrtt.co.uk/hq

Today’s announcement follows the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper which sets out the government’s plan to transform the UK by spreading opportunity and prosperity, with improving transport a core driver of this mission.

It includes twelve bold national levelling up missions, which will be given status in law, and shift government focus and resources to Britain’s forgotten communities throughout the 2020s.

- Michael Portillo appears in the promotional video and photos with the Transport Secretary but is not involved in the selection process.

Photo credit: Department for Transport