

Midlands Rail Hub plans pitched to minister

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The case for revolutionary proposals for the region's rail network has been put to Rail Minister Huw Merriman during a visit to Birmingham.

The Minister joined Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands and Malcolm Holmes, executive director of West Midlands Rail Executive, on a tour of the city centre and met with the team behind the new HS2 Curzon Street station.

The Midlands Rail Hub proposals, outlining up to £1.5 billion of new and improved rail infrastructure, were discussed during the visit.

Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), which is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA), and the West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) are backing the Outline Business Case for the Midlands Rail Hub which was submitted to government by Midlands Connect in December.

Government funding is needed to enable the scheme to move forward and deliver significant benefits for the region's rail network as soon as possible.

If delivered in full, the Midlands Rail Hub would create additional rail network capacity into central

Birmingham and create a major new interchange hub at Birmingham Moor Street and HS2 Curzon Street.

The proposals would provide improved connectivity across the region, delivering faster journeys from the new Camp Hill line stations into central Birmingham and the return of six trains an hour on the Cross City line.

By providing direct access to new areas of regeneration in Birmingham Eastside and Digbeth, as well as unlocking housing and employment opportunities, the plans would also deliver significant economic benefits.

The Mayor, who is also WMRE chair, said “It’s wonderful to have the chance to welcome the Rail Minister to the West Midlands and showcase the fantastic work underway on the ground that we’re delivering right across our region when it comes to new rail infrastructure.

“In order for us to deliver even more and truly maximise the potential of our regional rail network, it is imperative that we move forward with the Midlands Rail Hub as soon as possible. It would usher in tremendous benefits – creating vital extra capacity, laying the foundations for future improvements, and helping to drive economic growth in the months and years ahead.

“By better connecting the West and East Midlands, it would also unlock access to opportunities right across our part of the world, such as reopening the Sutton Park Line – supporting thousands of jobs.”

Cllr Ian Ward, WMCA portfolio holder for transport and leader of Birmingham City Council added: “The Midlands Rail Hub is vital to the future success of Birmingham and the wider region and will deliver benefits for passengers and businesses alike. This is not simply about connectivity, it’s about capacity, jobs and opportunities.

“The scheme will add more than 14 million seats on the rail network each year, providing faster, more frequent, or new rail links for over 30 locations including: Birmingham, Bromsgrove, Nuneaton, Worcester, Hereford, Cardiff, Bristol, Cheltenham, and Leicester. It will also bring 1.6 million more people to within an hour of the region’s biggest towns and cities by public transport.

“Last year, the Transport Select Committee called for the scheme to be delivered in full, so hopefully the Government will now fund Midlands Rail Hub and we can deliver the benefits in full.”

The region is not only pushing for the Midlands Rail Hub to be delivered in full, but also wider rail reforms in the shape of Great British Railways (GBR). The proposed new rail industry structure was given the green light by Transport Secretary Mark Harper earlier this week.

WMRE has been working with the Great British Railways Transition Team (GBRTT) on a partnership deal with the West Midlands which would deliver a better railway for the people of the region once GBR is set up.

Malcolm Holmes, executive director of WMRE, said “The need for the Midlands Rail Hub in our eyes is clear. Through enhancing capacity at Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Moor Street, we would be able to

provide faster and more frequent services to thousands upon thousands of West Midlands.

“However, something needed just as much as the Midlands Rail Hub, is wider reform of the rail industry. We will continue to work with GBRTT on a partnership deal that we expect to be specific to the unique requirements of the West Midlands, giving our region even more influence over our rail network.

“The railways in our region must be locally accountable to the people of the West Midlands. Therefore, it is vital that the role of WMRE is cemented at the heart of the new partnership deal, so that we can create the best possible rail network for local people.”

Photo credit: West Midlands Rail Executive