

New rail service proposals discussed with minister

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Options have been discussed with the under secretary of state for transport Wendy Morton and Lichfield MP Michael Fabricant for a passenger rail service between Lichfield and Burton, stopping at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas.

The two MPs met with West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) Executive Director, Malcolm Holmes, to talk through the concept.

The National Memorial Arboretum hosts over 300,000 visitors and holds 250 events, including nationally significant veterans' events and services of remembrance, every year.

The proposed passenger service, it is hoped, would provide the local community with sustainable transport access to the Arboretum, which is quickly becoming one of the UK's biggest attractions.

The service would also vastly improve the connection between Lichfield and Burton. There is a high level of commuting between the two locations, but currently no direct train service.

Malcolm Holmes said of the proposal: "There is a very strong case to open this line, not least for the thousands of visitors who go to the National Memorial Arboretum every week. We at WMRE are developing a plan through which we could establish a basic service relatively quickly and scale up over time."

Rail Minister Wendy Morton MP said: "It's been great to be hear and study this proposal in detail. Clearly it has a huge amount of support not only from Michael Fabricant, but other MPs in the area, the National Memorial Arboretum, the County, the Parish of Alrewas and the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street as it will link with the Cross-City line into Birmingham and beyond."

"I can fully understand how this scheme has the potential to reduce the pressure of road traffic on the busy A38 and improve rail connectivity in this part of the midlands."

"Today's visit has put this scheme very much on my radar for the future."

Member of Parliament for Lichfield, Michael Fabricant, said: "I was delighted that Wendy was able to accept my invitation to see the scheme. For relatively little cost, the existing line and signalling can be upgraded to provide a regular passenger service which means that the 500,000 or so visitors expected each year at the Arboretum will be able to access it by public transport from anywhere in the UK and relieve pressure on the road system."

Also attending the meeting was Philippa Rawlinson, managing director of the National Memorial Arboretum. She said: "The provision of new regular passenger service to serve the National Memorial Arboretum would be highly beneficial. As the nation's year-round place to remember, we are committed to improving accessibility for visitors who rely on public transport or those who wish to use more sustainable methods to travel."

"Every year we are proud to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors from the Midlands, other UK regions and further afield, all of them eager to pay tribute to the incredible people who service our country as members of the Armed Forces, emergency services and voluntary groups."

"A railway station service to the Arboretum would also help alleviate pressure on the local road network when the site is very busy due to events, especially those of significant national importance which can attract thousands of attendees, such as the dedication of the UK Police Memorial last year."

"As one of the UK's fastest growing visitor destinations, demand for rail transport is likely to increase in the coming years, especially with the development of new projects like our ambitious plans to create a new memorial woodlands – a place for people to remember those who have been lost as a result of the pandemic, recognise the bravery and the dedications shown by key workers and members of the NHS, and reflect on the impact that it has had on all our lives."