

Northern mayors share plans to improve rail links between Greater Manchester and West Midlands

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In a joint press conference on Wednesday 7 February, the mayors of the West Midlands and Greater Manchester outlined potential plans to improve rail links between their regions.

Andy Street and Andy Burnham announced that they are working on plans with a consortium of businesses, following the cancellation of **HS2** Phase 2.

The mayors outlined three options at the press conference in Birmingham: the enhancement of the West Coast Main Line, the introduction of bypasses to relieve congestion, and the construction of a new line, which could follow the scrapped HS2 route.

They added that they are now reviewing these three options, with a focus on benefits and costs.

Andy Street, the Conservative Mayor of the West Midlands, stressed that better connectivity between the regions would lead to “better economic opportunity”, adding that they believed there is a “substantial way forward.”

He indicated that the completely new line would be primarily used by passenger trains, producing extra freight capacity on the existing West Coast Main Line. The new line would possibly follow the cancelled HS2 route, however construction costs would be reduced by the use of lower specification, slower running trains.

Andy Burnham, Labour Mayor of Greater Manchester, said that problems with capacity meant doing nothing was “not an option.”

Led by Sir David Higgins (who was formerly Chairman of HS2), the consortium comprises seven private businesses – Arcadis, Arup, Skanska, EY, Dragadus, Mace, and Addleshaw Goddard.

The mayors added that government had been involved in discussions, and that plans would be presented to the Transport Secretary at the end of March.