

# Release of 'Marches Road and Rail blueprint'

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Sub-national Transport Body Midlands Connect has released its 'Marches Road and Rail blueprint' at a virtual conference, which will help 'unlock the full economic potential of the 'Marches and Mid and West Wales'.

The proposals are a suite of upgrades for rail improvements in Herefordshire; Shropshire; and Telford & Wrekin as well as counties in Mid and West Wales. The plans have been created in conjunction with the Welsh Government.

Midlands Connect also has a series of road improvement schemes that it is prioritising within the region.

The document is being released at The Marches Transport Summit this morning. The blueprint outlines a series of plans to improve the transport network across the region.

**For the Chester to Shrewsbury rail Line (which stops at Wrexham, Ruabon, Chirk & Gobowen) Midlands Connect is proposing:**

- Secure faster and a higher frequency of trains, with greater direct connectivity between Telford and Chester
- Reviews of accessibility to train stations, identifying any barriers people may have in using them for the “first and last mile” of their journey.

**For the Welsh Marches rail line (stopping at Yorton, Wem, Prees, Whitchurch, Wrenbury, Yorton, Wem, Prees, Whitchurch, Wrenbury) Midlands Connect is proposing:**

- Cut journey times from Hereford to Cardiff to under 60 minutes, encouraging people onto the train and away from their vehicles
- Cross-border integration of the bus network – to enable residents in Herefordshire to access rail at Abergavenny, which is closer than Hereford
- Additional stations between Hereford and Abergavenny to give direct rail access to those living in rural communities along the Herefordshire/Monmouthshire border.

**On the Heart of Wales Line (which stops at Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Craven Arms, Broome, Hopton Heath, Bucknell & Knighton) Midlands Connect is proposing:**

- Secure faster and a higher frequency of trains, also enhancing the effectiveness and comfort of the interchange at Shrewsbury
- Integrating bus and rail for rural communities along the line.

**On the Cambrian line (From Shrewsbury to Welshpool, Caersws and on the West Wales ending at Aberystwyth or Pwllheli) Midlands Connect is proposing:**

- Cut journey times and maintain direct services to Birmingham, optimising connections at Shrewsbury.

We also propose the government support upgrades on the Birmingham – Black Country – Shrewsbury rail line as the ‘gateway’ to the Marches and Mid and West Wales. Following the Union Connectivity Review, in August 2022 we submitted our Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) to improve journey times on the corridor by speeding up the line to 90 mph from Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton.

Midlands Connect also recommend road upgrades for the A5 not just to improve local safety, but to enhance the longer distance role played by the A5 in connecting England to Holyhead and beyond. We also suggest delivery of the Pant – Llanymynech bypass as soon as possible as well as the A49 corridor given its role in moving people and freight in and out of Wales.

Midlands Connect will take this blueprint to Government to ask for funding, specifically for the rail schemes as part of the Union Connectivity Review, in conjunction with the Welsh Government. Funding was set aside to progress key projects in the report, released in November 2021.

Commenting on the release of the document, Maria Machancoses, CEO of Midlands Connect said: “This document outlines a series of road and rail projects that we believe could unlock the full economic potential of the Marches and Mid and West Wales.

“Midlands Connect has been working closely with the Welsh Government to create a plan that we will take to government in Westminster.

“All these improvements would help bind the union together but help Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin get the rail and road improvements they need.”

Helen Morgan, Liberal Democrat MP for North Shropshire, said: “Communities across the Midlands and Wales are being held back by a lack of public transport, particularly in rural areas like North Shropshire.

“It’s vital that rail and bus routes are expanded, integrated and made accessible so that everyone can reach the jobs and services they need wherever they happen to live.

“It’s also crucial to improve safety in the villages of Llanymnech and Pant and Llynclys by building a bypass along the Welsh border, so I’m pleased that Midlands Connect’s proposals reflect all of these key priorities.

“The case for connecting the region is clear. The Government must now build on these proposals and implement them as soon as possible.”

Sonia Roberts, chair of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, welcomed the proposals. She said: “An efficient, effective and reliable transport network is absolutely essential if the Marches is to fully realise its potential. It is vital that we work with partners on both sides of the border to ensure that our transport network meets the needs of business, wherever in the region it is based.”

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