

Transport forum, 28th January 2025 – Key summary of meeting

Presentation on rail link between West Midlands and North West, delivered by Arup

Arup's publication 'Opportunity through connectivity', (launched in September 2024), as a new proposal to connect West Midlands and North West by rail, securing economic growth and prosperity.

The proposal looks at questions which aim to understand the new baseline following the former government's decision to cancel HS2 Phase 2 (and commitment to Northern Powerhouse Rail – (NPR)). The proposal is looking at rail connectivity between Handsacre Link (to the north west of Lichfield) and NPR at High Legh, near Warrington. There are a number of constraints in the rail network between West Midlands and Manchester, including a bottleneck at Colwich junction to the west of Rugeley and a congested corridor between Stockport and Manchester. Such constraints have held back improvements to capacity, reliability and journey times.

Passenger demand has more than doubled since the early part of the 21st century. Further growth of just 2% would see demand exceed capacity in just over a decade from now. Improving rail connectivity between Birmingham and Manchester, could be worth an additional £70bn GVA, per year. There are three proposals to improve rail connectivity:

- A. Upgrade existing infrastructure (address bottlenecks etc.)
- B. Mix of upgrades and bypasses (to avoid congested stretches).
- C. Entirely new rail line, with different design specification than HS2.

West Coast Mainline (WCML) is regarded as a key artery for the movement of freight, with an estimated 40% of UK rail freight being moved along WCML. A lack of capacity on the WCML will limit the potential for increasing freight services and supporting long term economic growth in the North West and Scotland.

Arup keen to press ahead with improvements to rail connectivity, delivered at a lower cost and through an investment partnership with the private sector, with opportunity to bring together the best of public/private sectors.

Presentation on Staffordshire County Council Freight & Communities Forum and Freight Survey by Staffordshire County Council.

Staffs County Council (SCC) is working towards attainment of a net-zero transport system by 2050. This will depend on a combined approach influenced by spatial planning and place-based solutions to deliver transport decarbonisation.

The existing Staffordshire Freight Strategy identifies the objective of minimising any adverse impacts of freight in the county, whilst maximising its benefits. It also sets a vision of benefiting from economic growth including development along key strategic corridors and the importance of not missing opportunities afforded by Staffordshire's location at the centre of the UK and its strategic road and rail network.

The Local Transport Plan is under currently under development, informed by a comprehensive consultation exercise, including a new online tool Let's Talk Transport.

<https://letstalk.staffordshire.gov.uk/let-s-talk-transport>

As part of this consultation exercise, SCC is developing a freight and logistics related questionnaire for businesses, to help inform the freight section of the LTP and understand likely future priorities and asks in relation to freight and logistics in Staffordshire.

Staffordshire Freight and Communities Forum, which is a dedicated platform to address various issues related to freight traffic in Staffordshire. The Forum engages with a range of key stakeholders and balances community concerns, finding realistic solutions to reduce HGV impacts and supporting businesses relying on timely transportation and delivery.

Staffordshire Chambers' of Commerce Transport priorities

These will be added to the dedicated Transport forum webpage on the newly revamped Chamber website.