

West Midlands Rail Devolution: Realising the West Midlands' Rail Vision



“Championing the needs of passengers and business, West Midlands Rail will manage local rail services as part of an integrated public transport network, directing future investment at increasing our economic performance”

1 The West Midlands Rail (WMR) Opportunity:

In March 2015, the Secretary of State for Transport approved the start of a process for re-tendering of the London Midland rail franchise. This should lead to the creation in 2017 of a distinct West Midlands Business Unit, specified and managed jointly between the Department for Transport and West Midlands Rail (WMR), a partnership of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (ITA) and 14* metropolitan, shire and unitary authorities.

The West Midlands Rail partner authorities have a clear ambition, as outlined in the 2014 West Midlands' Rail Vision, to maximise the contribution the local rail network can make in terms of achieving our wider economic, social and environmental objectives and, in particular, support the Midlands' role as Britain's "Engine for Growth".

To support these objectives, West Midlands Rail focuses on 5 key outputs known as the “5Cs”:

Capacity

- Providing for increasing rail passenger numbers and facilitating economic growth

Connectivity

- Aligning rail services with changing market and economic requirements and providing seamless integration between rail and other transport modes

Customer-focused

- Delivering a high-performing, quality rail service which is accessible to all

Clarity

- Providing a coherent, readily understandable and “smart” network of rail services, fares and information

Cost-effective

- Delivering an efficient, competitive rail service which provides value for money for both taxpayers and passengers

In the first instance, these outputs relate primarily to the next West Midlands rail franchise which is currently due to commence in late 2017. However, as a high proportion of the region's rail services will continue to be provided by other train operators, it is ultimately envisaged that these objectives will eventually apply to all rail passenger operators serving the West Midlands.

* WMR Partner Authorities are Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Herefordshire Council, West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority, Northamptonshire County Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Council, Shropshire Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, Telford and Wrekin Council, Walsall Council, Warwickshire County Council, Wolverhampton City Council and Worcestershire County Council.





2 WMR: Realising the West Midlands' Rail Vision:

The West Midlands rail network already contributes significantly to the region's economic, social and environmental wellbeing in that it:

- is increasingly important in providing access to employment and education
- links businesses to suppliers and customers
- provides access to retail and leisure facilities
- reduces congestion and contributes to a more sustainable, lower carbon economy

However, there are significant opportunities for the West Midlands rail network to play an even greater role in meeting our regional ambitions for sustainable economic growth and an improved quality of life, especially given that:

- much of the network is at or approaching capacity and many services are overcrowded
- connectivity between many areas across the West Midlands region (or to economic centres in the East Midlands) remains poor
- High Speed Rail is coming to the West Midlands in 2026 and we need to be "HS2 Ready"

- there is an inconsistency of passenger offer in terms of fare structures, station and rolling stock quality / accessibility and service frequencies which have failed to keep pace with changing customer demands

The 2014 "Rail Vision for the West Midlands" sets out the region's ambition for a modern, accessible, rail network, which is more responsive to the needs of passengers and businesses and "supports sustainable economic development, job creation and social cohesion". This will be achieved through:

- a passenger network that is more closely aligned to regional priorities and objectives
- improved connectivity to areas of economic activity, population centres and national and international hubs such as Birmingham Airport and the proposed new HS2 Stations.
- provision of capacity for growth across all rail freight and passenger sectors
- maximising the benefits of investment such as HS2 and railway electrification

The West Midlands region is already making the case for further investment to support these objectives in the medium to long term (see section 4). A devolved West Midlands rail franchise, with greater local control over the specification and management of local rail service provision, will however be key to unlocking the potential of the existing rail network in the immediate term and to maximising the benefits of that future longer term investment.

3 West Midlands Rail: Achieving the Outputs

Achieving the “5 key” outputs will require a variety of measures to address current or emerging challenges.

Capacity

West Midlands rail passenger numbers have doubled from 37m in 2005/6 to 74m in 2012/13, the highest rail growth of any region in the UK. Rail's commuter market share has also increased from 17% to over 30% in the last decade and passenger growth is continuing at significantly above industry forecasts, resulting in high levels of overcrowding at peak times and on off-peak services associated with major events.

The key short-term requirement is for additional carriages and longer trains to:

- deliver the DfT's target of 3,900 additional peak seats by 2019
- meet the *actual* growth in passengers which continues to be over and above industry forecasts
- resource committed schemes e.g. NUCKLE new stations or Walsall – Rugeley Electrification

Connectivity

Fast, high-frequency rail services have the potential to shrink the economic geography of the region, improve access to jobs and education and enable the Midlands to realise its full potential as the nation's “Engine for Growth”.

However, links between some centres are poor (e.g. Black Country to Birmingham Airport and Coventry) whilst historic service patterns, especially in the evening and on Sundays, have failed to keep pace with changing customer demands.

Whilst the base service timetable specification for WMR services should protect existing services, key requirements for connectivity improvements to meet the demands of the modern rail market include:

- more frequent / later evening services
- earlier / more frequent Sunday services
- faster journeys on longer regional routes
- more direct and earlier / later services to Birmingham Airport (and future HS2 Interchange Station)
- better connectivity between services (especially where services are infrequent)
- better integration between other modes (bus, car, cycle, pedestrian)

Customer-focused

Consistency of service provision on a predominantly high subsidy rail network will require a focus on performance and quality with appropriate incentives for the train operator. Particular attention will need to be paid to:

- punctuality and reliability
- stations (including facilities, accessibility, security, cleanliness and upkeep)
- on-train passenger environment (including new requirements such as Wi-Fi) & compliance with EU “Persons with Reduced Mobility” legislation
- reliable information provision (before, during and after journey)
- the fares structure and passenger offer
- car parking availability and cost

Clarity

Providing a network that is understandable and easy to use, instils passenger confidence and encourages additional travel. Key requirements for WMR are:

- coherent, strong, consistent branding across the network and other customer interfaces
- clear information, delivered through a variety of channels, which keep pace with technological and communications advances
- simpler fare structure, restrictions and availability of more customer-friendly, “Smart” ticketing

Cost-effective

Reducing the cost of the railway to both the taxpayer and passenger through initiatives such as:

- more efficient operation of services and station facilities
- moving towards a lower-cost, fully electrified regional rail network
- investment in modern information and ticketing technologies
- replacement (or extensive re-engineering and refurbishment) of older rolling stock to improve passenger experience and reduce operating costs
- ensuring rail remains competitive with other, less sustainable, modes of transport

Longer Term

However, whilst a correctly specified and managed WMR rail franchise can deliver much of the required improvement in local rail services, it will not replace the need for a targeted programme of investment in the rail network infrastructure over the medium to long term.

4 Investment for Economic Growth and Demand

As part of the nation's "Engine for Growth", the West Midlands is rightly benefitting from investment in rail schemes such as Birmingham New Street "Grand Central" and new local rail services and stations. Similarly, the new HS2 rail line will place the region at the heart of the new national transport network for the 21st Century.

However, there is still an urgent requirement to invest further in the region's existing rail infrastructure to improve connectivity (especially to the new HS2 Station Hubs and between the West and East Midlands) and provide capacity for economic and passenger growth.

The rail industry's new West Midlands and Chilterns Route Study (WMCRS) is therefore focusing on options to meet future rail network capacity requirements, especially on the critical, but already heavily congested, rail corridors into Central Birmingham.

In parallel to the WMCRS, the Midlands Connect initiative is making the economic case for transport investment across the East and West Midlands which will enable the wider region to realise its full economic potential as Britain's "Engine for Growth".

Similarly, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP's HS2 Growth Strategy makes the case for a programme of transport connectivity improvements to the new

HS2 Station Hubs and the Curzon / UKCentral regeneration areas in order to both maximise their growth potential and spread the benefits of HS2 across the wider region.

Finally, the West Midlands regards the ongoing electrification of the national rail network as a huge opportunity to simultaneously: improve services and connectivity; support further economic growth; maximise use of available capacity; and further reduce the environmental impact and ongoing cost of rail transport. We therefore strongly support Government and emerging rail industry proposals to further electrify the rail network, including the following principal corridors.

- Worcester - Stourbridge - Birmingham - Stratford / Leamington Spa (Snow Hill Lines)
- Connections to West Midlands Intermodal Freight Terminals
- Felixstowe - Leicester - Nuneaton - Birmingham for both freight and passenger
- Derby - Birmingham - Bristol (plus connections)
- Chiltern Main Line (West Midlands to London)
- Wolverhampton - Shrewsbury
- Walsall - Aldridge - Castle Bromwich for freight and future passenger services

Crucially, electrification of the busy Snow Hill rail lines will have the additional benefit of releasing a large number of modern diesel trains to provide additional passenger capacity elsewhere on the network.

Summary:

A devolved West Midlands Rail franchise represents a huge opportunity to provide a rail network that better reflects and is more responsive to local requirements:

Key Principles:

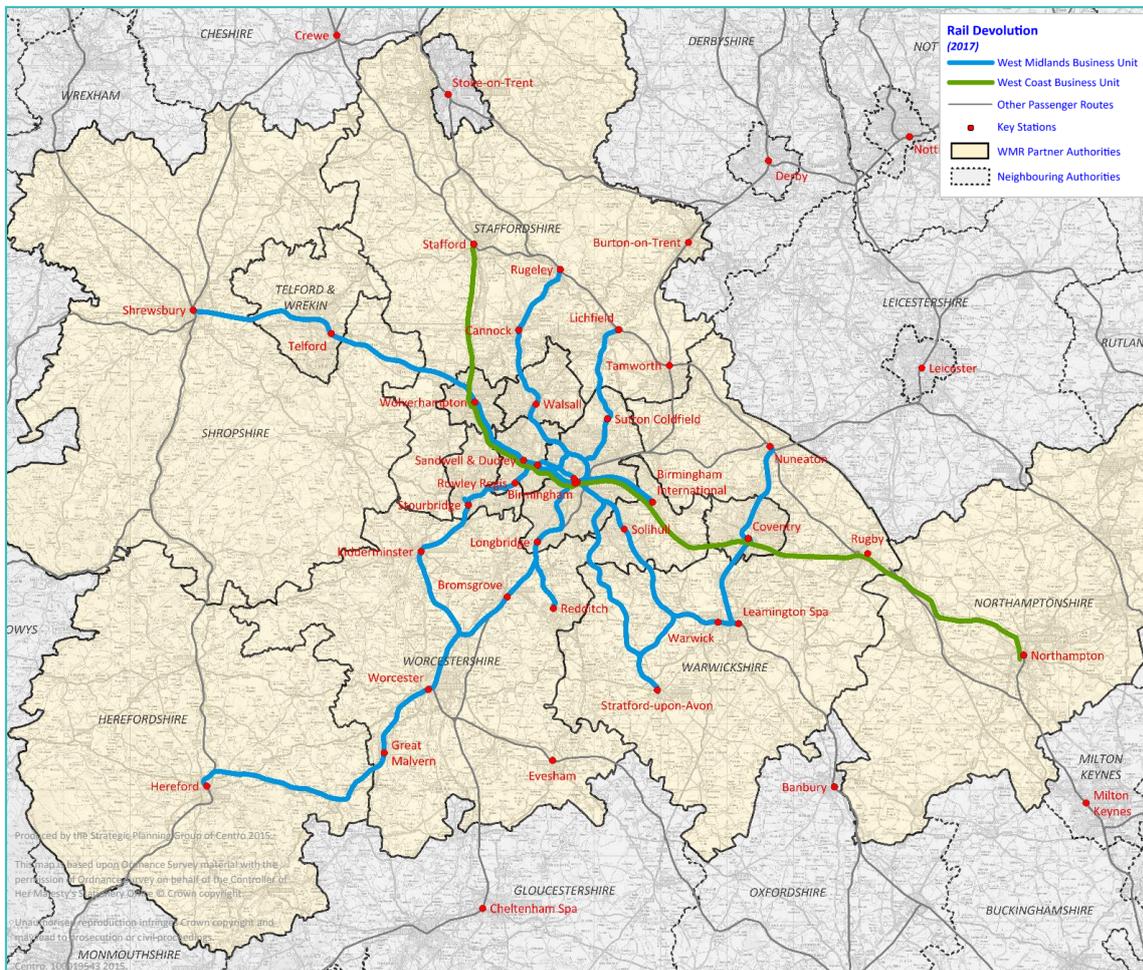
To be effective WMR needs to meet our "5C" commitments at the earliest opportunity & provide:

- Capacity for Growth
- improved Regional Connectivity
- a Customer-focused, High Quality Service Offer
- passenger Clarity in provision of a Coherent Rail network
- a Cost-effective rail operation

in order to deliver tangible benefits for passengers, businesses and stakeholders and support the region's role as Britain's "Engine for Growth".

This will provide the foundation for realising the longer term West Midlands Rail Vision which will also require significant investment in the expansion of the capacity and capability of the rail network.

The case for this investment is being made in parallel with West Midlands rail devolution, through the Midlands Connect and HS2 Growth Strategy initiatives as well as through the rail industry's own Long Term Planning Process for 2019 and beyond.



westmidlandsrail.com
info@westmidlandsrail.com

