



Media Q&A

Midlands Connect – background

Midlands Connect is the transport component of the Midlands Engine.

Eighteen months ago Midlands Connect was formed with the task of researching and developing a strategy for improving transport connectivity across the Midlands to boost economic growth.

The Midlands Connect Strategy published today proposes a 25 year programme of investment in strategic road and rail improvements that will reduce congestion and improve journey times across the Midlands.

The strategy has the potential to boost the Midlands economy by £5 billion and contribute to the Midlands Engine target of creating 300,000 new jobs in the region.

The Midlands is located at the heart of the UK and as such whatever benefits the Midlands, benefits the UK. Our location offers unique opportunities for connections to existing and new markets.

The Midlands will be at the centre of a new HS2 network, offering major economic opportunities. But we need to ensure the Midlands's road and rail networks are ready for HS2 so those opportunities can be realised.

About the announcement – key messages:

The Midlands Transport Strategy identifies the key infrastructure investments that will improve connectivity between Midlands towns and cities and deliver the extra road and rail capacity so badly needed at the crossroads of the nation to support the UK economy as a whole.

Better connectivity is vital to improving the productivity of businesses, providing more job opportunities for local people and increasing quality of life for everyone.

As a result, the Midlands Connect Strategy will:



- boost the Midlands economy by £5 billion and contribute to Midlands Engine target of creating 300,000 new jobs; and
- support small businesses and supply chains through creating better connections with major companies to enable them to grow and create more jobs

Key early priorities include:

- The 'Midlands Rail Hub', which will help release an extra 85,000 train seats across the network every day and allow up to ten extra trains an hour through central Birmingham – currently a key bottleneck limiting east-west rail movements.
- A package of improvements along the A46 corridor running across the Midlands from Tewksbury to the Lincolnshire coast to support the manufacturing sector – starting with improvements around Newark.
- A package of improvements along the A52 corridor between Derby and Nottingham including access to the East Midlands HS2 Hub Station at Toton and East Midlands Airport - to be delivered by the end of the 2020's as a critical part of improving east-west connectivity.
- A series of improvements to help relieve traffic pressures across the heart of the midlands motorway network, including the future roles of the A42 and A5 corridors in improving east and west links.
- Over-arching all the projects is an ambition to increase intelligent connectivity across the Midlands. This could involve smart and digital travel applications as well as trials for connected passenger and freight autonomous vehicles.



FAQS

What is Midlands Connect?

Midlands Connect is a partnership of local authorities and local enterprise partnerships from across the Midlands, working together with central government.

The Midlands Connect Partnership has developed a transport strategy that identifies the major infrastructure improvements needed realise our economic potential and power the Midlands Engine.

As the UK plans for post-Brexit scenarios, the role of transport infrastructure is more vital than ever if we are to secure the nation's international competitiveness.

Is Midlands Connect part of the Midlands Engine?

Yes. Midlands Connect has developed a long-term strategic transport strategy to power the Midlands Engine. This strategy has prioritised key infrastructure improvements, which if delivered, will result in more prosperity, growth, jobs and ultimately a better quality of life for the people in the Midlands.

Midlands Connect as part of the Midlands Engine is working closely with regional and national government agencies, as well as the private sector, to encourage investment into the region's transport network that will enable businesses to grow and create more jobs.

Will Midlands Connect and Midlands Engine only benefit Birmingham?

No. Midlands Connect has developed a transport strategy that will benefit the whole of the Midlands - from the Marches to the Lincolnshire Coast.

Given the nature of our transport networks, improvements in one location will often benefit many others.

The Midlands is at the very heart of the UK, so what benefits the Midlands benefits the nation.

What has Midlands Connect recommended to the government?



The Midlands Connect strategy proposes a 25 year programme of investment in strategic road and rail improvements that will reduce congestion and improve journey times across the Midlands.

What projects have you recommended to the government?

Midlands Connect has recommended a series of improvements to benefit the whole of the Midlands region. These aim to ease congestion, improve journey times and help boost not just the Midlands but also national economy.

What is the Midlands Rail Hub?

The Midlands Rail hub consists of a number of infrastructure improvements which will increase the capacity of the rail network and enable better connections between East and West Midlands.

The projected works will deliver an additional 85,000 seat capacity per day and up to 10 trains extra per hour running through central Birmingham - currently a key bottleneck limiting east-west rail movements.

Are there any concrete projects which you can talk about that are underway now?

Key early priorities include:

- The 'Midlands Rail Hub', which will help release an extra 85,000 train seats across the network every day and allow up to ten extra trains an hour through central Birmingham – currently a key bottleneck limiting east-west rail movements.
- A package of improvements along the A46 corridor running across the Midlands from Tewksbury to the Lincolnshire coast to support the manufacturing sector – starting with improvements around Newark.
- A package of improvements along the A52 corridor between Derby and Nottingham including access to the East Midlands HS2 Hub Station at Toton and East Midlands Airport - to be delivered by the end of the 2020's as a critical part of improving east-west connectivity.



- A series of improvements to help relieve traffic pressures across the heart of the midlands motorway network, including the future roles of the A42 and A5 corridors in improving east and west links.

Do smart motorways actually work? How do they work? Don't they just risk further accidents or emergency services not getting to an accident?

The Midlands has some of the most congested roads in UK. We need to find ways to make better use of existing infrastructure if we are to keep traffic moving, particularly during peak hours. Using technology to manage traffic flows is becoming more important, and if properly implemented the evidence suggests smart motorways can be both safe and effective.

How much will these projects cost if all were carried out?

The Midlands Connect Strategy highlights every £1 spent invested in our priorities will result in at least £2 of economic output.

How much money will you be asking for from government?

We are working with government to identify key improvements that can start to be delivered from 2020 onwards.

These will all be subject to full business case appraisal before funding is released for delivery, but though Midlands Connect we have established that they are needed for our economy to grow.

Where will the money come from to fund these projects?

We will need to work with Government and the private sector to identify the necessary funding

The Midlands Connect strategy highlights that every £1 spent on our priorities will result in at least £2 of economic output.

How much does the Midlands receive in funding from the government and will this change based on the Midlands Connect transport strategy?

The Government has made available £17 million to Midlands Connect over the next 3 years to develop our proposals further.



The Midlands Strategy highlights every £1 spent on our priorities will result in at least £2 of economic output.

Are you in competition with the Northern Powerhouse?

We are not in competition with the Northern Powerhouse, we are in competition with the world. Many of our proposals will also benefit the north of England.

Will the benefits of the Midlands Connect transport strategy be exclusive to the Midlands?

The Midlands is placed at the heart of the UK transport network, so what benefits the Midlands benefits the UK.

What happens next with the strategy?

The Midlands Connect transport strategy has outlined the improvements that the region requires to help reduce congestion and increase productivity over the next 25 years.

In October 2016, government announced further 3 years of funding for Midlands Connect totalling £17 million. Using this time and investment we will continue to work alongside government to develop strategic transport improvements that will benefit not just the Midlands but the wider UK. This will enable implementation to start from 2020 onwards.

These projects are not yet approved, will they actually happen?

We are working with government to identify key improvements that can start to be delivered from 2020 onwards.

These will all be subject to full business case appraisal before funding is released for delivery, but though Midlands Connect we have established that they are needed for our economy to grow.

What can you do to help ease transport issues now rather than 25 years' time?

The Midlands Connect Strategy supports the delivery of improvements that have already been announced by government – but we also need to plan for the future to secure long-term investment. That is why we are setting out a 25 year programme of improvements that will boost economic growth both in Midlands and the UK as a whole.



What about projects like Midlands Main Line upgrade and electrification?

We welcome the Government's commitment to work with Network Rail and the wider industry on improving journey times and the passenger experience on the Midlands Main Line. Network Rail is committed to implementing the enhancements and preparing for electrification. The timescale for electrification is ultimately a matter for Government. Our strategy focusses on a range of transport interventions we want to see in the Midlands that can help support economic growth and unlock the potential of the region.

You mention that HS2 is of great benefit to the UK, but at what cost? Haven't lots of people been negatively affected by HS2 by being moved from their homes?

HS2 is the biggest infrastructure project in a generation, and disruption unfortunately is unavoidable. It is therefore important that we work with those people affected by the planned works to minimise the impact on their lives, whilst safe-guarding a prosperous future for the UK.

HS2 will connect the UK and allow businesses and people to take advantage of the economic benefits it will bring. Our current rail network is almost at capacity, and the Midlands Connect strategy identifies how HS2 will help alleviate congestion and improve rail services.

HS2 and other improvements don't come near my area, what's in it for me?

HS2 will release capacity on the existing rail network that will enable places not served by HS2 to benefit from improved rail connectivity – for example through more direct services between Lincoln and London.

Wouldn't the money spent on researching and developing these projects be better spent on direct investment in businesses – especially with the increase in business rates which will see many small companies struggle or fold?

The improvements outlined in the Midlands Connect transport strategy are essential to help small business to thrive. We have consulted with businesses – small and large – across the region, and the feedback is that that they believe their ability to grow and expand is negatively impacted by a congested transport network.

The aim of Midlands Connect has consistently been about planning ahead for economic growth of not just our region but the whole of the UK.



The government has announced a plan to roll out 5G across the UK? Is it really necessary that we become a ‘world leader’ in mobile technology? Will this have any tangible benefits?

The next ten years of business will be linked to being connected on public transport or wherever we are travelling that day. Therefore it is important for businesses that they can connect while they are on the move. If we do not have this, we will fall behind. It is essential to us cementing our position as one of the best places to do business in the world.

We outline in our strategy that for successful integration of public transport across the Midlands, being able to check train, bus and metro times while on the move as well as buy tickets will be essential.

Interview advice

- Take control of the interview by sharing the insights that you think the journalist will find useful – this can be done in a very natural way as part of the conversation.
- Use your expertise to answer the questions. The interviewer has asked to interview you because you are an authority on the subject and can explain the issue better than anyone else.
- You are well-versed in business, the Midlands area and are the expert the interviewer has asked to take part in the discussion. Have confidence in your knowledge.
- Avoid getting into in-depth discussions about the negative aspects of the market and instead focusing on highlighting the positives.
- Take your time to answer questions and consider the best, lay man’s terms to use that will explain your thoughts to a wide audience. Do not use technical speak or buzzwords.
- Most importantly, relax and enjoy it!