



How HS2 could provide a direct hourly train service halving journey times between Leicester and Leeds

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The proposal is part of a case that could help save the £88 billion rail scheme from being scrapped



The planned rail hub at Toton where trains from Leicester would join HS2

Plans to establish a direct hourly train service between Leicester and Leeds via HS2 have been proposed to the Government.

The rail journey up to the Yorkshire city currently requires at least one change at Derby, Chesterfield or Sheffield and takes around two hours.

Midlands Connect - a regional group of councils and business leaders – however say a direct service between Leicester and Leeds could have a journey time of 46 minutes.

Midlands Connect officials are presenting the proposal to the [Government and the Oakervee review which will make a recommendation on whether HS2 should be scrapped or not.](#)

HS2 critics say the scheme has been beset by spiralling costs – potentially up to £88 billion – and delays and have argued the money could be better spent on other major transport schemes.

However Midlands Connect says the scheme will provide major investment in the region, relieve passenger number pressure and provide an alternative transport option to cut congestion on the roads.

How HS2 could be connected to Leicester

The organisation says its Leicester to Leeds plan, and another to connect Nottingham and Birmingham directly by HS2 in just over half an hour, will add £1.4 billion to the economy over the next 60 years – half of that in the East Midlands region.

While HS2's proposed route cuts through North West Leicestershire the nearest planned station is a huge hub at Toton between Derby and Nottingham.

It has been suggested that trains capable of running on both conventional and high speed rails would travel up the existing Midland Mainline and, when it crosses the Trent, continue up what is now a freight only track to Toton and then further north on HS2.

The business case says it is technically feasible, financially viable and an environmentally sustainable case for an hourly direct service between Bedford, Leicester and Leeds via the HS2 East Midlands Hub, with additional stops at Wellingborough, Kettering, Loughborough and Market Harborough.

Midlands Connect say the capital cost of implementing the two new services is estimated at £170 million.

Leicester mayor [Sir Peter Soulsby](#) is chairman of Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM).

He said: “Bringing HS2 trains into Leicester city centre will mean a direct link to Leeds that would boost the economy by tens of millions of pounds every year and encourage more people to get off the M1 and out of their cars.

“If we get the conventional-compatible HS2 services Midlands Connect is looking for, we can look forward to reigniting our productive dealings with the north.”

Leader of Leeds City Council and Chairman of the Core Cities group Judith Blake said: “HS2 is about much more than travelling to and from London.

“It will help connect cities such as Leeds and Sheffield with towns and cities all across the East Midlands and beyond, providing links by rail that are vastly under used at the moment because of how long journeys take.

“This will really help maximise the economic benefits of HS2 for the Leeds City Region and the East Midlands.

“Done right, HS2 can be a real catalyst for growth across the country. We are working together with Midlands Connect, HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport to put the case for the delivery of HS2 in full given how vitally important it is to the future economic success of the UK.”

Midlands Connect chairman Sir John Peace said: “Now we have more clarity over the costs and timescales of HS2, is it time that the true benefits of high speed rail are also fully understood to make sure the project goes ahead in its entirety.

“Our proposals are a genuine game changer for connections between the East Midlands and West Midlands and on to the north of England, revolutionising the way regions do business with each other and demonstrating that HS2 will spread the economic benefits far beyond the cities with a dedicated station.”

“We are working closely with HS2 Ltd and the Department for Transport to develop our compelling business cases, and submitting our findings to the HS2 Oakervee review.

“We are sending a strong message to the government that delivering HS2 in its entirety is absolutely essential to the future economic success of the whole of the UK.”

Train journey times 'will be halved' under 'game-changing' HS2 proposals

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Plans have been submitted to the Government and the independent HS2 review panel for changes to a key rail junction

Current train journey times between major Midlands cities and Leeds could be slashed under "game-changer" proposals for part of the HS2 project.

Plans have been submitted to the Government and the independent HS2 review panel for changes to a key rail junction, halving travel times for Nottingham to Birmingham and Leicester to Leeds services.

The regional transport organisation, Midlands Connect, has said its proposals to alter the Toton East Midlands Hub station in Nottinghamshire, on the planned Leeds branch of HS2, could be less expensive than current thinking.

The business case, submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) and the recently-announced review panel, is estimating the economic benefit to be at least £1.4 billion.

Sir John Peace, chairman of Midlands Connect, called the plans a "genuine game-changer" for regional rail connections, adding that it is "absolutely essential" to the economy that HS2 is delivered in its entirety.

HS2

The plan would see hourly services operating between the new Birmingham Curzon Street station in the city centre and Nottingham, via the Toton hub, and also between Bedford, Leicester and Leeds.

As a result, the Nottingham to Birmingham journey time, currently 72 minutes, would be halved to 33 minutes, according to Midlands Connect.

Leeds to Leicester travel time would also fall, from two hours to 46 minutes.

The plans have the support of council leaders in Birmingham, Nottingham and Leeds, as well as Leicester's mayor and business group the CBI.

Passengers would use the existing travel network to get to Toton, in Broxtowe, before changing to an HS2 train or vice-versa.

The proposal's authors have said direct services would be made possible by using new conventional compatible trains which can travel on both the high-speed and electrified track.

The plans would see alterations to the Toton junction, sited between Nottingham and Derby, which itself is currently contained as part of Phase 2 of HS2.

More than half of the estimated economic benefit, coming from travel time saved and the boost to cities' businesses through closer transport links, would come to the East Midlands, Midlands Connect said.

The DfT has asked HS2 Ltd, which is delivering the high-speed rail project, to look at the feasibility of the alternative junction.

The cost of implementing the services is estimated at £170 million, including the junction and upgrades to the line.

Securing the proposed Bedford-Leeds service would mean investing in electrification of the Midland Main Line, north of Market Harborough in Leicestershire.

For the Birmingham to Nottingham service, it would mean similar upgrading of the line, west of Nottingham.

Sir John said: "Now we have more clarity over the costs and timescales of HS2, is it time that the true benefits of high-speed rail are also fully understood to make sure the project goes ahead in its entirety.

"Our proposals are a genuine game-changer for connections between the East Midlands and West Midlands and on to the North of England, revolutionising the way regions do business with each other and demonstrating that HS2 will spread the economic benefits far beyond the cities with a dedicated station."

He added: "We are sending a strong message to the Government that delivering HS2 in its entirety is absolutely essential to the future economic success of the whole of the UK."

CBI regional chairman Richard Butler said: "For too long connectivity within the Midlands has been beleaguered by congestion on roads and by slow and infrequent services by rail.

"Better connecting communities across the Midlands and to cities in the North will open up investment and employment opportunities, boosting local economies and people's job prospects.

"Public transport needs to be convenient and accessible to all; enhancing existing HS2 plans to link more cities and towns will encourage more people to leave their cars at home - reducing congestion and the impact on the environment."

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps announced an "independent and rigorous" Government review into HS2 on August 21, led by Douglas Oakervee.

It is set to report back by the autumn.



Midlands Connect's HS2 rethink plans to link Birmingham and Nottingham city centres

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Regional transport body is hoping to convince the Department for Transport to revamp its plans for East Midlands Hub to enable direct services between the two city Midlands centres

Midlands Connect wants a direct service between Birmingham Curzon Street and Nottingham (Image: HS2)

Transport chiefs in the West Midlands are hoping to convince [HS2](#) bosses to rethink their plans for the second phase of the high-speed line.

Midlands Connect has submitted a case to the Department for Transport to amend its proposals for the new East Midlands Hub in order to allow services to run directly between Birmingham and Nottingham city centres.

The current plans for phase 2b of HS2 would see services lasting 18 minutes between [Curzon Street](#) in Birmingham and the new East Midlands Hub station in Toton, seven miles south west of Nottingham. But passengers wishing to travel between the hub and Nottingham city centre will have to switch between HS2 and conventional rail services.

Midlands Connect wants to see changes made to a junction design in Toton which would allow HS2 to run directly between Curzon Street and Nottingham via the new East Midlands Hub without the need to switch trains.

Under the proposals, the total journey would be just 33 minutes - a reduction of around 40 minutes on the existing National Rail route between Birmingham New Street and Nottingham.

The option would be made possible by using new so-called 'conventional-compatible trains' which can travel along both high-speed and electrified tracks, allowing them to call at both new HS2 and existing railway stations.



The transport body claims its plans would actually work out cheaper than the current proposals by HS2 and it has now submitted a business case for consideration by the [new review being carried out by Douglas Oakervee](#).

Midlands Connect has also submitted a second proposal for an hourly direct service between Bedford, Leicester and Leeds via the East Midlands Hub with additional stops at Wellingborough, Kettering, Loughborough and Market Harborough.

It says this would offer a direct service between Leicester and Leeds lasting 46 minutes - passengers currently have to change trains and the journey takes around two hours. Both of these proposals require sections of the tracks to be electrified.

Midlands Connect claims these two new connections would generate at least £1.4 billion of economic benefits against an estimated cost of £170 million for their implementation. Phase one of HS2 is set to run between Birmingham and London while other parts of phase two will connect Birmingham with Crewe, Manchester and Leeds.

The two phases were originally supposed to be completed in 2026 and 2033 respectively but [last week those dates were revised](#) to up to 2031 and 2040.

The projected cost of the overall scheme has also been revised upwards from £55.7 billion to up to £78 billion, prompting renewed calls by some campaigners to scrap HS2 altogether.

Sir John Peace, chairman of Midlands Connect and the Midlands Engine, said: "Now we have more clarity over the costs and timescales of HS2, is it time the true benefits of high-speed rail are also fully understood to make sure the project goes ahead in its entirety. Our proposals are a genuine game changer for connections between the East Midlands and West Midlands and on to the north of England, revolutionising the way regions do business with each other and demonstrating that HS2 will spread the economic benefits far beyond the cities with a dedicated station."