

Background

1. West Midlands Rail Executive (WMRE) published its draft West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy (WMRIS) for public and stakeholder consultation between 25/10/22 and 28/11/22.
2. The consultation was principally targeted at stakeholders, however feedback from individual members of the public was also encouraged. The consultation process was undertaken using the WMRE website, which included asking consultees to respond to a number of specific questions, while also allowing for more general feedback.
3. The consultation was supported by the issuing of a press releases and emails to interested parties, and this achieved a good level coverage in the local and industry press.

Consultation Responses

4. In total we received 333 responses to the consultation of which 90% were from individual members of the public.
5. The overall sentiments were strongly supportive of the strategy and its objectives. The table below shows how strongly the Strategic Objectives were supported by both individuals and organisations. Only in relation to HS2 was there some limited level of opposition, which was largely linked to people’s opposition to the project itself and its high costs.

	Strategic Objective	Desired outcomes	All %		Individual %		Business %	
			Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose	Support	Oppose
1	To support the recovery from Covid-19	Recovery of passenger volumes to pre-pandemic levels as soon as possible	87	1	86	1	100	0
2	To contribute to net zero	Modal shift from road to rail and a rolling programme of electrification	89	2	89	2	100	0
3	To deliver Midlands Rail Hub	Our key transport project that delivers improved connectivity across the region	86	1	87	1	89	0
4	To maximise the benefits of HS2 to the West Midlands	Improving access to HS2 from across the region and improving HS2 service offer	72	8	72	9	100	0
5	To develop high growth corridors whilst reducing social deprivation and levelling up	A train service on each corridor that matches demand whilst also providing access to jobs and education	85	2	85	2	100	0
6	To maximise access to the rail network	A network that is easy to use for all people, inclusively	97	0	97	0	100	0
7	To support the movement of goods by rail	A network that has the capacity and flexibility to carry more freight	89	1	89	1	100	0
8	To consider radical change in the long term	A plan that can be developed with industry support for the network needed in the 2050s	85	2	85	2	88	0

6. Consultees were asked to comment both on the overarching objectives of the strategy, but also on the individual plans for each line of route. While there was very little dissent from any of the proposals, there were a number of key themes that were raised in people’s comments. These included:

- The need for rail service frequencies to be restored to pre-Covid levels as quickly as possible. This was particularly flagged for the Shrewsbury, Cross City and Snow Hill lines.

- The need to deliver improvements as quickly as possible, and not wait many decades for some changes to be delivered
 - Very strong support for decarbonisation initiatives, and in particular the delivery of electrification
 - The importance of ensuring that rail is properly integrated into wider public transport networks, with affordable and simple fares.
 - The importance of ensuring that the rail network is fully accessible to all users.
7. It was only on the subject of maximising the benefits of HS2 were there any significant negative comments which were along the lines of:
- HS2 won't benefit the whole region
 - HS2 is a waste of money/funding should be spent on existing network
 - HS2 is not green and will damage the environment
8. However, even these comments should be seen in the context of the vast majority supporting the need to invest in the current network to maximise the benefits of HS2.
9. A number of respondents suggested other projects that the RIS should be promoting, including re-opening the Wellington-Newport-Stafford and Stratford-Honeybourne lines. There were also individual comments on detailed local issues such as what stations should be called.
10. Many respondents thought that we were not being ambitious enough in the strategy, and we should have been bolder in our aspirations. However, others thought that we were being too bold, and that it was extremely unlikely to be deliverable.

Stakeholder Comments

11. There was a good cross-section of different stakeholders who responded to the consultation ranging from TfWM, Transport for the North, Midlands Connect and local authorities, to rail user groups and consultancy companies. The stakeholders were generally supportive of the document, and were keen to work with WMRE to take forwards its conclusions.
12. Some of the responses from stakeholders were extremely detailed and thorough, and indicated that people had taken considerable time and effort to review and respond to the document.
13. Many of the responses recognised the extremely challenging circumstances that exist in planning and developing rail services, with short-term delivery and funding issues currently affecting many services. The need for the strategy to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances was flagged by a number of consultees.

14. Other comments raised by stakeholders included:

- The need for the customer to be considered at the heart of any plans
- The need to ensure that freight is integrated throughout the document
- Stronger recognition of the role the Cotswold Line has in serving the south of the region
- Stronger discussion about the links to mid/north Wales, Cheshire and the North West, including specific concerns about any potential future loss of connectivity between Wales and Birmingham International.
- The need for rail to adapt to the impact of wider policy changes – e.g. the move to electric vehicles and possible future policies on charging for road use
- The need to align rail plans with wider development plans and partner authority Local Transport Plans
- Stronger recognition of the benefits that Community Rail initiatives can have in delivering a better customer service and quality of network

15. A number of stakeholders noted that the Rail Investment Strategy does not explicitly promote the reopening of the Stratford to Honeybourne line which is referenced in other strategy documents (e.g. the Gloucestershire Rail Strategy).

16. Network Rail didn't formally respond, but have passed their comments on to us.

17. As a result of the consultation feedback we have made a number of amends to the final document, including:

- updating the post-COVID rail industry situation
- strengthening the narrative with regard to supporting rail freight growth
- reflecting the importance of the North Cotswold line and Crewe – Stoke – Derby line to WMRE partner authorities
- supporting the principle of sustainable housing development around both new and existing stations
- revising some of the text to reflect more recent updates regarding projects such as HS2 and Midlands Rail Hub
- clarifying that some scheme development options have not yet been settled (notably the alignment of the proposed Nuneaton dive-under)
- acknowledging that the case for some new railway proposals (notably Stratford – Honeybourne) may need to be revisited in the longer term

18. A full list of the organisations that responded are shown in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1 Organisations that responded to the Consultation

Organisation – Online Form

Solihull and Leamington Rail Users Association

Electoral Councillor WCC

Marches Rail Users Alliance

Royal Shakespeare Company

Telford & Wrekin Council

Arup

Jacobs UK

Stratford-upon-Avon Town Transport Group

Birmingham City Council

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

Community Rail Network

Organisation – Formal Response

Balsall Heath Neighbourhood Council Steering Group

Birmingham City Council - Cabinet Member for Transport in Birmingham

Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

Shakespeare Line Promotion (Rail Users) Group

Stourbridge Line User Group

Birmingham City Council Conservative Group

Rail Freight Group

Conservative Group, Birmingham City Council

Transport Focus

Siemens Mobility Limited

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership

West Coast Partnership

Logistics Capital Partners

Coventry City Council

IM Land Limited

Stantec UK, Ltd

Coventry University

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

Campaign for Rail

Birmingham Friends of the Earth

Organisation - Emailed or Letter

Beaudesert & Henley In Arden Joint Parish Council

Transport Focus

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL WEST MIDLANDS (SUSTRAVWM)

Gloucestershire County Council

Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce

Living Streets Birmingham

Midlands Connect

Rail Freight Group

Stratford Rail Transport Group (SRTG)

West Midlands Rail Investment Strategy Consultation Responses Summary Report



Stantec UK
Trafnidiaeth Cymru - Transport for Wales
Warwickshire County Council
Transport for West Midlands
Transport for the North