

February 2025

Midlands
Connect.

Breaking down barriers

Reconnecting Coventry, Leicester
and Nottingham by rail





Councillor Neghat Khan
Leader of Nottingham City Council

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Nottingham City Council fully supports the Midlands Connect project, which will bring huge benefits to our city and the wider region. Reinstating direct rail links between Nottingham, Coventry, and Leicester is a game-changer, cutting journey times, boosting our local economy, and unlocking over £400 million in benefits while creating thousands of jobs. Improved connectivity will open doors for businesses, attract more visitors, and provide better access for students at our universities. Crucially, this project supports our environmental goals, offering a greener alternative to car travel and reducing carbon emissions. Investing in sustainable transport is essential for Nottingham’s future, and we look forward to seeing this vital project delivered.

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This is a crucial transport project that will provide direct passenger rail journeys between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham, whilst facilitating new freight routes and removing HGVs from the highway network. It will contribute to the local economies of all three cities and provide rail connectivity between seven major universities. It will give a viable alternative to car travel between Leicester and Coventry, where rail travel has only a 3% share. With the rail lines through Leicester at capacity, this moderately-priced project is Leicester’s highest priority rail scheme. It represents excellent value for money and I commend it wholeheartedly to the Government.



Peter Soulsby
Leicester City Mayor

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There’s no other way of looking at it – the link between the East and the West Midlands is a missing link, and this is our opportunity to reforge it. These plans will open up Coventry, its jobs, leisure destinations and universities to communities across the East Midlands and vice versa. At the moment the Midlands’ east – west rail connections are sub-standard, holding us back from a more productive and sustainable future. Turning these plans into reality is an essential step in boosting prosperity and public transport use across our region. Investing in sustainable transport, especially one that represents such good value for money and has such a sound economic business case should be a really easy decision – let’s get on with it.



Cllr George Duggins
Leader of Coventry City Council

Improving services – key facts

£400m

In direct benefits

£143m

In wider economic benefits

£1 invested equals

£2.10
in benefits

NOTTINGHAM

70+

Visitor attractions opened up with direct routes

Journey time improvements

LEICESTER

COVENTRY

56 mins down to 32 mins
117 mins down to 65 mins

3,000
new jobs created

78%

students said a stronger Midlands rail network would make their university a more appealing option

72%

students would travel by rail more if local services were more frequent, faster and involved fewer changes

How things stand

In the early 2000s, direct rail links between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham were severed to make room for improvements along the West Coast Main Line, which required additional trains running through Nuneaton to the North West and Scotland.

Despite the cities being physically close to each other and having a combined population of over one million people, no direct service between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham has been reinstated since their detachment over 20 years ago.

Back in early 2021, Midlands Connect submitted a Strategic Outline Business Case to the Department for Transport, proposing the links between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham were reinstated. We still believe the project is of significant importance and have refreshed our original Strategic Outline Business Case for the project, which has only become more vital since its original submission in 2021.

Current modes of travel

Those travelling from Coventry to Leicester or Nottingham by rail have to change onto another train at Nuneaton, leading to a slow and sometimes unreliable journey. As a result, the percentage of rail journeys is significantly lower than equivalent cities, with only 3% travelling by rail between Coventry and Leicester versus 30% between Coventry and Birmingham which enjoy a regular, direct connection.

Removing the direct rail links between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham has resulted in:

- Shackled growth in good jobs, resulting in lower productivity
- Hampered access to world class educational opportunities
- Impacted on abilities to deliver on net-zero
- Failed to support sectors that have suffered most in recent years, including leisure and tourism

The Project

This project is expected to significantly increase the number of passengers using the railways along this corridor, increasing connectivity and encouraging new journeys that would not have been made previously.

Travelling via train will be a more attractive option, with journey times from Coventry to Nottingham being cut by almost one hour, reducing travel time from 117 to 65 minutes. Those travelling from Coventry to Leicester will also see a reduction in travel time, changing from 56 to 32 minutes.

From	To	Journey time reduction (mins)	Extra direct services	Calling at
Coventry	Nuneaton	22 (no change)	+1TPH	Coventry Arena, Bedworth, Bermuda Park
	Leicester	56 to 32	+2TPH	Hinckley*
	Nottingham	117 to 65	+2TPH	Hinckley* Leicester Loughborough

* Note that Hinckley is +1TPH
TPH = Train per hour

The benefits

Kickstarting economic growth

Reinstating the links between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham presents good value for money and would drive significant economic growth for the cities and surrounding areas. Our analysis has shown that the benefits of the project are estimated to be over £400m, excluding the benefits from rail freight, which could increase the benefits considerably.



For every £1 invested in reconnecting Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham, £2.10 of benefits will be gained.

Creating a direct rail link between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham will also open up a significant number of leisure and tourism opportunities for visitors, some of which may not have considered visiting beforehand. This will support local economies for the 70+ visitor attractions located within walking distance across the three city centres.

Major tourist attractions such as Nottingham Castle, The City of Caves, Coventry Cathedral and the National Space Centre will also be easier to access with direct services, including access to sporting events at stadiums in Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham.

Backed by the UK Government, the UK's only inland freeport collaborates with leading international businesses, local authorities and regional universities to form a hub for global industry and green innovation in the heart of the UK. Part of the freeport's success is its unique location at the centre of the UK, being connected by road, rail and air, with good links to the rest of the country and the world. Therefore, providing good rail access into the freeport and its surrounding area is acknowledged as being a key driver to its success in the future.

One of the project interventions, diveunder for the West Coast Main Line at Nuneaton, can provide much-needed and major benefits to rail freight travelling through the area. The intervention would create a train line that runs underneath the existing line, the existing line, creating a new direct rail connection between Nuneaton and Leicester.

The Department for Transport has set an ambitious target for rail freight – for at least 75%

growth in freight carried by rail by 2050. Lots of freight services already run through the Midlands but are constrained in terms of capacity.

Building a new diveunder at Nuneaton could provide additional capacity for rail freight, allowing for shorter routes and new services to operate. Midlands Connect will be exploring the full benefits to rail freight as part of their next stage of work.

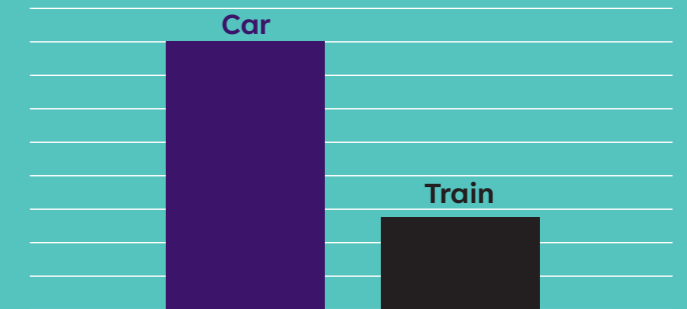


Reduce carbon emissions

Travelling from Coventry to Nottingham by train produces 67% less carbon emissions than taking the same journey by car – saving 6.1kg of CO2 per journey. That is the equivalent of completing 10 washing machine laundry loads.

Connecting Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham by rail will make the mode of travel more appealing, thereby reducing harmful carbon emissions and choosing more sustainable forms of travel.

Carbon (CO2) emissions from travelling from Coventry to Nottingham



Access to new jobs

A direct connection will open up new employment opportunities for those living along the corridor, particularly for those employed in the growing professional service sectors across all three cities. Our analysis has also shown that if the rail link is constructed between Coventry, Leicester and

Nottingham, 3,000 roles will be created during the lifetime of the construction and in the supply chain.

Local businesses will also benefit from access to new supply chains and customers, stimulating economic growth and boosting social mobility for residents.

Access to education

Local universities at Coventry, Warwick, Loughborough, Leicester and Nottingham Trent Universities are supportive of the project and believe that it could boost collaboration and improve the student experience.

Consumer research showed that 78% of students believed a stronger local rail network in the Midlands would have made their university a more appealing option and 72% would be more likely to travel by rail more if local services were more frequent, faster, and involved less changes.



How do we make it happen?

The proposed interventions for creating a direct rail link between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham are listed below, these are subject to further investigation:

Intervention	Description
Coventry bay platform	A new bay platform on the north side of Coventry station, allowing services to run from Nuneaton without needing to interact with other services running through the station.
Coventry to Nuneaton line speed	Increase line speed on this section of route from 45mph to 60mph.
Nuneaton dive-under	A new twin-track dive-under to the south of the Nuneaton station, linking the Coventry to Nuneaton line to the Nuneaton to Leicester line.
Leicester area 4-tracking	Reinstate the 4-track railway between Wigston and Leicester, improving reliability and resilience of the service.
Nottingham area improvement	Modest improvements in the Nottingham area to enable services to run into the station.



What next?

Our Strategic Outline Business Case has been submitted to the Department for Transport and should this be successful, the next stage will be the submission of an Outline Business Case.

This will require more detailed work on the engineering aspects of the project, as well as further investigation into the benefits.

The Outline Business Case will be led by Network Rail, with Midlands Connect assisting and leading on the strategic rationale piece. Works could begin as early as the 2030s following approval from Government.

Outline Business Case
2025-2026

Full Business Case
2027-2028

Delivery
By Early 2030s

