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Plans unveiled for crucial Midlands rail link

Restoring the Stonebridge Railway would transform rail travel in Central England and provide another 'engine for growth'

Restoring a railway of 11.7 kilometres (7.3 miles) that last carried passengers 97 years ago can transform rail travel in central England — including linking directly with Birmingham Airport and the new high-speed railway, HS2 — and provide another 'engine for growth.'

Potentially, the railway would make train services from the existing rail network to Birmingham Airport directly accessible to more than eight million people in Central England and avoid the need to change trains at Birmingham New Street station. A recent study by Steer Davies Gleave found that 78 per cent of passengers who now travel to the airport by rail have to change trains in Birmingham.

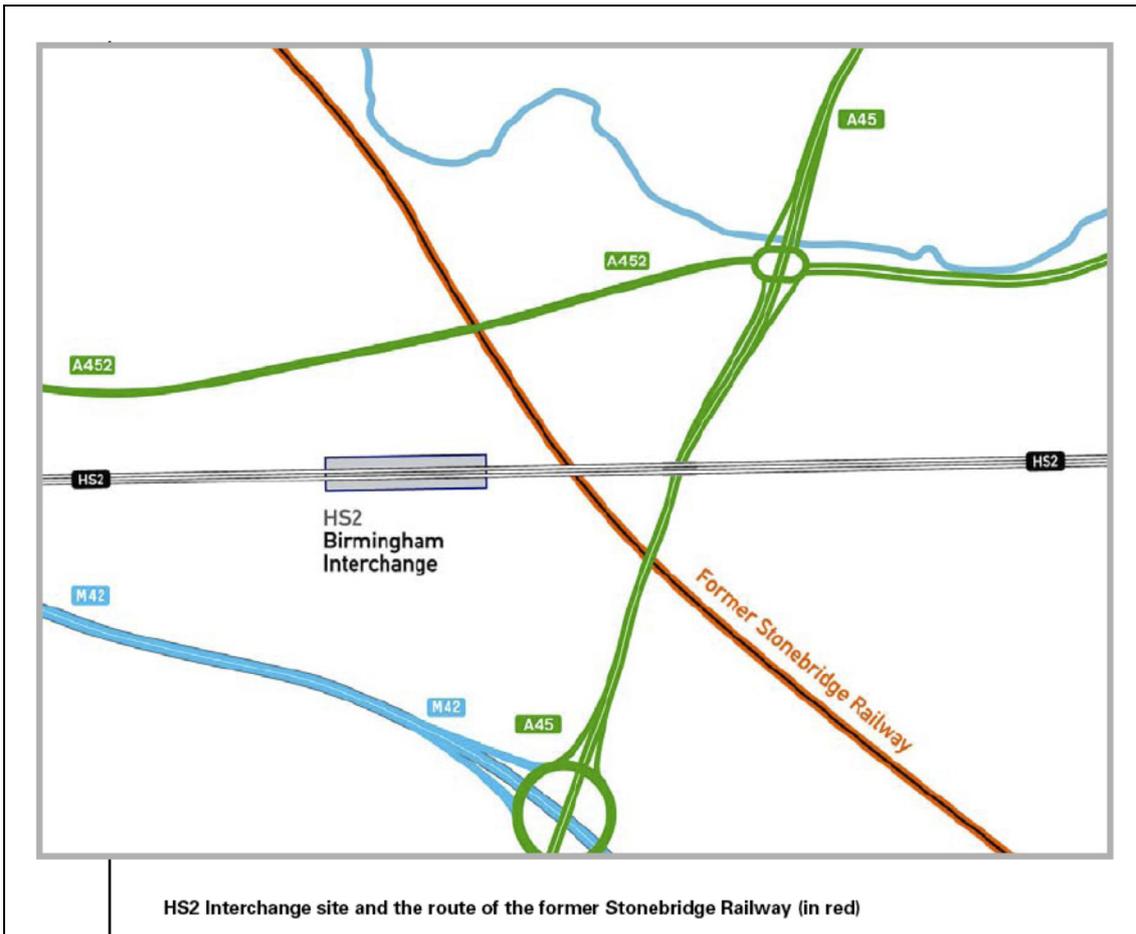
But restoring the former railway would also make the HS2 Interchange much more accessible from the surrounding areas, including from Coventry, Nuneaton and Tamworth, as well as the Black Country and south and south west of Birmingham.

And once the HS2 'Y' network is completed northwards, it would also give these areas direct links, via the Hub Interchange station, to High Speed Rail services to North West and North East England and to Scotland, as well as to London and the Continent, and air services from Birmingham Airport.

Rebuilding the original railway between Hampton-in-Arden (near Solihull) and Whitacre (North Warwickshire) is proposed in a report prepared by Railnews editorial director Alan Marshall together with Michael Byng, a specialist quantity surveyor and construction economist dealing with heavy and light rail projects world-wide. Both of the authors live nearby in Warwickshire — Alan Marshall in Kenilworth and Michael Byng in Whitacre Heath.

Their proposal is particularly relevant to Birmingham Airport’s plans to become a major alternative to airport expansion in South East England, and will now be included in the airport’s submission to the Airport Commission, chaired by Sir Howard Davies, examining future airport capacity requirements. The airport company is seeking for the government to recognize it as an international gateway to the Midlands at the heart of UK manufacturing.

The authors say the purpose of their report “is to ensure that provision is being made for HS2 to facilitate the future prospects for the Whitacre Link and not extinguish them.”



Rebuilding the old railway to serve a new station linked to the HS2 Interchange and Birmingham Airport — at an estimated cost of around £240 million at today’s prices, including a new station and segregated junctions at either end — would be key to creating a major transportation hub alongside the M6 and M42 motorways, the A45 and A452, HS2, the nearby National Exhibition Centre and the present Birmingham International station — as well as Birmingham Airport itself.

The link would have its own four-platform station on the restored railway alongside the planned HS2 Interchange. These side-by-side stations would also be connected to a new International Terminal where passengers could check in for train services to Continental Europe via the Channel Tunnel or for flights to anywhere in the world served from Birmingham Airport — which is currently extending its runway to enable operation of the longest-haul flights, including to China, South America, South Africa and the West Coast of the USA.

Checked-in airline passengers and their luggage would be conveyed to secured areas of the airport by a dedicated People Mover system. This would be in addition to the planned ‘open’ People Mover system linking the car parks for 7,000 vehicles alongside the A452 with the HS2 station, the NEC, the existing Birmingham International station and bus interchange, and the public areas of Birmingham Airport.

And because the Stonebridge Railway project will provide alternative railway routes between Birmingham Airport and the HS2 Interchange and both Birmingham and Coventry it would mean that, unlike now, train services could be maintained round the clock even if one route was closed for essential engineering work.

Provision for a light rail system is also proposed — possibly as an extension of the Midland Metro — which could link the new transport hub with areas such as Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham Business Park and Solihull’s Blythe Valley Business Park, as well as new developments around the hub which are forecast by Greengauge21 to create 3,750 new jobs once HS2 is in operation.

The report by Alan Marshall and Michael Byng also says the hub would “benefit considerably the economic activity and employment opportunities of the surrounding sub-region — principally comprising Solihull Borough, Coventry City, and the Warwickshire Districts of North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, and Warwick (including Leamington Spa and Kenilworth) — with a total population of 0.85 million.”

* A full copy of the proposal can be downloaded from the Railnews website at www.railnews.co.uk

NOTE TO EDITORS

Growth around the A45 and M42 corridor – which already supports an estimated 100,000 jobs and £5.1bn of regional income — is forecast to be a key driver of the West Midlands economy in the future.

The Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBS LEP) recently proposed there should be a ‘strategic alliance’ of LEPs in the region ‘to ensure the wider travel to work area is supported by strong

transport governance.’ In its ‘Strategy for Growth’ GBS LEP stated: “We will focus on reducing journey times for employees, and for businesses. Championing HS2, we will ensure a complimentary package of investments ensures the wider LEP geography will be connected to this key development.”

The advent of the new multi-modal transport hub, including restoration of the Stonebridge Railway, will boost growth considerably. Some of the region’s key assets — including Birmingham Airport, the existing Birmingham International rail station, the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham Business Park, Blythe Valley Business Park and Land Rover — are all located close to the site of the planned Interchange.

Solihull Borough Council is expected to announce long-term plans for the area around the Interchange station and the M42 corridor in the near future.

CONTACTS:

Alan Marshall 07958 553095 Michael Byng 07710 456601

See next page for some journey time examples . . .

Whitacre Link – some examples of comparative journey times

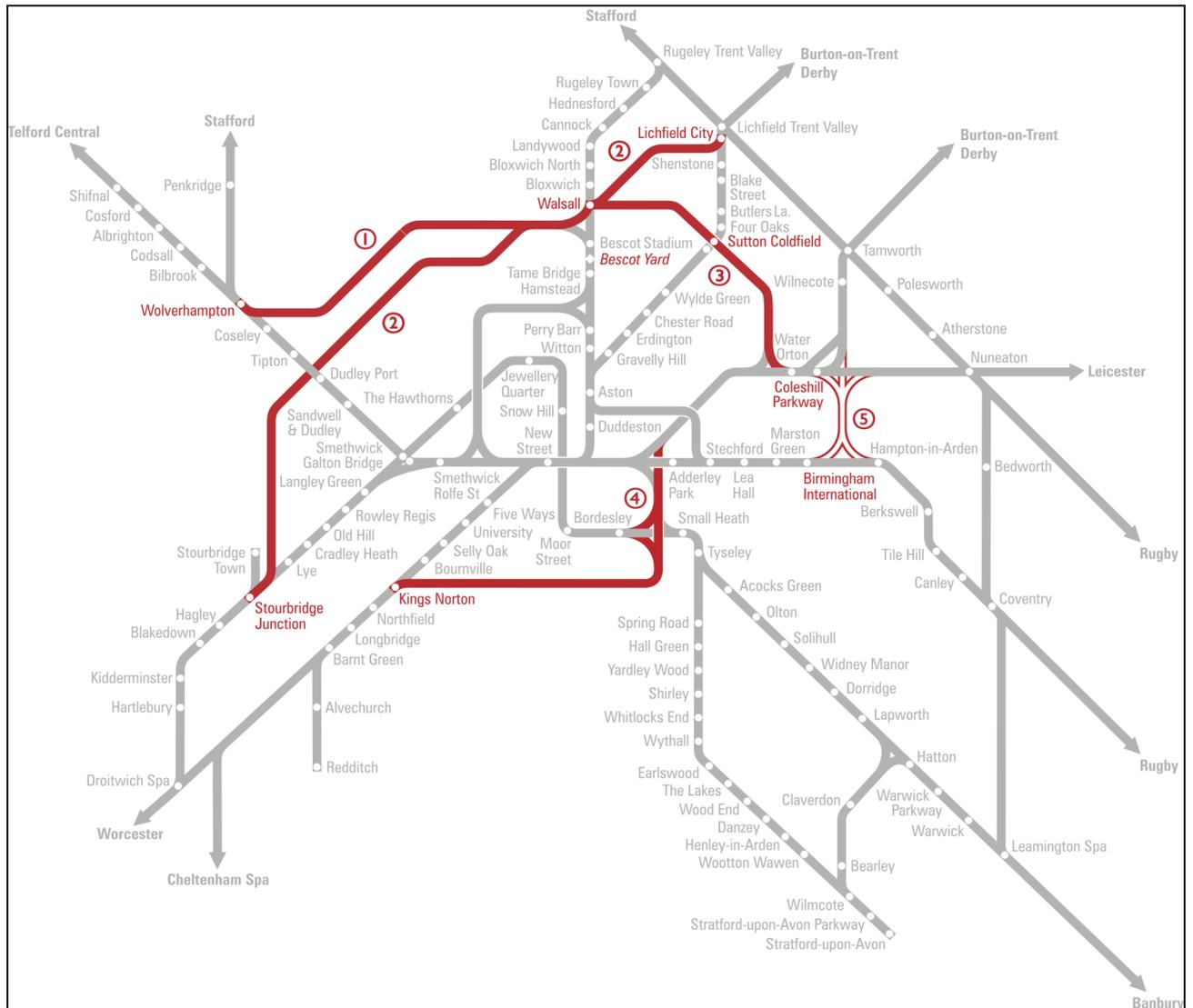
The journey times below are based on present-day stopping patterns and the Working Timetable point-to-point times currently in operation.

to BHX /HS2	With Whitacre Link	Today via Bham New St	Time Saving
<u>From</u>	<u>Mins</u>	<u>Mins</u>	<u>Mins</u>
Peterborough	93	128	35
Stamford (Lincs)	82	115	33
Oakham	66	99	33
Melton Mowbray	54	87	33
Leicester	38	71	33
Nuneaton	18	51	33
Derby	40	85	45
Burton on Trent	27	71	44
Tamworth	18	48	40
Water Orton	9	27	21
Coleshill Parkway	6	30	24
Coventry	14	}	
Canley	12	}	
Tile Hill	9	}*	12 - 15
Berkswell	6	}	
Hampton-in-Arden	5	}	

* Journey times would be approximately the same as today's to Birmingham International — but by going direct via the Whitacre Link passengers would avoid the inconvenience of having to transfer between Birmingham International and the HS2 Interchange using the People Mover via the NEC — saving an estimated 12-15 minutes (*alighting at the present station, transferring to people mover, and travelling on the people mover*) to reach HS2 services.

*Diagramme of rail routes in the West Midlands proposed for reopening
and/or restoration of passenger services follows*

Rail routes in the West Midlands proposed for reopening
and / or restoration of passenger services together with the Whitacre Link



Key:

- 1** - Wolverhampton – Walsall (proposed for passenger or tram-train operation)
- 2** - Stourbridge Junction – Walsall – Lichfield – Wychnor Junction (proposed freight route avoiding Lickey Incline, including possible development of additional strategic freight terminal at Bescot and tram-train service Dudley-Wednesbury)
- 3** - Sutton Park line (proposed for restoration of passenger services and reopened stations at Aldridge and Streetly)
- 4** - Camp Hill Line (proposed for restoration of passenger services and reopened stations at Hazelwood, Moseley and Kings Heath) and new Camp Hill Line chords at Bordesley
- 5** - **Stonebridge Railway/Whitacre Link** (with junctions at each end) - serving HS2 Interchange and Birmingham Airport