



Midlands Engine APPG – Annual General Meeting and Transport

Date: 18 October 2022

Time: 10.30 a.m.

Venue: Room O, Portcullis House

Attendees:

- Midlands Engine APPG Co-Chair: Lord Ravensdale, Crossbench Peer
- Midlands Engine APPG Co-Chair: Jane Hunt MP, Conservative, Loughborough
- Heather Wheeler MP, Conservative, South Derbyshire
- Baroness Burt of Solihull, Life Peer
- Lord Coaker, Life Peer
- Lord Taylor of Holbeach, Life Peer
- Lord Waverley, Life Peer

Guests:

- Roger Mendonca, Interim Executive Director, Midlands Engine
- Karen Heppenstall, Head of Rail, Midlands Connect
- Ciara Jagger, Head of External Affairs, Midlands Connect
- Stephen Sutcliffe, Programme Director of ECML and Midlands Rail Hub, Department for Transport (DfT)
- Martin Bano Department for Transport
- Tim Sansom, for the office of Dr Luke Evans MP
- Christina Nielsen, Senior Researcher, Henham Strategy

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Lord Ravensdale: Opened the formal part of the meeting by confirming that the meeting was quorate, with more than five parliamentarians from either House present. Then stated that Darren Henry MP had stepped down as Co-Chair to take up a role as an Assistant Government Whip and thanked him for his work in the position over the years, particularly for the enthusiasm he had injected into the group.

Lord Ravensdale: Then confirmed that he would like to continue in his position as Co-Chair and welcomed Jane Hunt MP (Con, Loughborough) who had put herself forward to stand as the new Co-Chair to replace Darren Henry. Then opened the floor for the election of Co-Chairs, with Heather Wheeler MP (Con, South Derbyshire) proposing both Lord Ravensdale and Jane Hunt, and Lord Taylor seconding both. Lord Ravensdale and Jane Hunt were then confirmed as the new Co-Chairs.

Lord Ravensdale: Turned to the confirmation of new Vice Chairs and reflected on the significant achievements of the APPG's subgroups in the previous year. Said that all of the groups had done a great job of drilling down into the details of a number of policy areas, and particularly commended Lord Taylor's work on the visitor economy subgroup, Baroness Burt's work on skills and the wider



work done by the entire group green growth and high street regeneration. Then praised the group's work on lobbying for legislation better suited to the region's needs, referring to agreed amendments to the Subsidy Control Act and the Infrastructure Bill as evidence of this. He concluded by encouraging the group to continue flying the flag for the region, and to keep pushing it forward over the next year.

Lord Taylor: Confirmed that he would like to continue in his position as a Vice Chair of the APPG. Followed up on Lord Ravensdale's point about the work of the APPG's subgroups and said he was been working hard to put the Midlands visitor economy in the spotlight. Explained that he would be meeting with Nick de Bois (Chairman of Visit England) in the coming weeks to discuss the possible selection of an area of the Midlands as a pilot model for Destination Management Organisations, which would encourage the development of other groupings. Then noted that the visitor economy subgroup had significant influence, and that it illustrates the potential for what the APPG can achieve.

Baroness Burt: Announced that she would be standing down as a Vice Chair of the APPG given her upcoming retirement. Thanked Lord Ravensdale and Darren Henry for their work in leading the APPG and wished the whole of the APPG the very best of luck for the future.

Theo Clarke (in absentia): Announced that she would like to continue as a Vice Chair of the APPG upon her return from maternity leave.

Martin Vickers (in absentia): Confirmed that he would like to continue in his position as a Vice Chair of the APPG.

Lord Coaker (in absentia): Confirmed that he would like to continue in his position as a Vice Chair of the APPG.

Presumed continuations to be confirmed at the next full meeting :

- Kate Kniveton MP (Con, Burton)
- Jane Stevenson MP (Con, Wolverhampton North East)
- Lord Rooker (Labour Peer)
- Lord Hunt of King's Heath (Labour Peer)
- Baroness Verma (Conservative Peer)
- Lord McLoughlin (Conservative Peer)

Lord Ravensdale: Turned to the secretariat aspect of APPG and asked the Midlands Engine if the organisation would continue to support the APPG by providing the secretariat function. This was confirmed by the Interim Executive Director of the Midlands Engine, Roger Mendonca.

Lord Ravensdale: Then notified the meeting that the expenditure for the APPG had not exceeded £12,500 for the previous year and concluded the AGM portion of the meeting.

This concluded the official business of the Midland Engine APPG AGM.

Transport update

Lord Ravensdale: Welcomed the delegation from Midlands Connect and explained that they would be delivering a presentation on the progress of the Midlands Rail Hub project. Reiterated that it was particularly important to generate support for these plans among parliamentarians to ensure that there is sufficient focus on pushing these through given the expected cuts to Government spending. Then handed over to Karen Heppenstall.

Midlands Connect Presentation ([link here](#))

Karen Heppenstall, Head of Rail, Midlands Connect

- **Overview of the Midlands Rail Hub:** Opened the presentation by emphasising the importance of ensuring support for the project through political advocacy. Explained that the Rail Hub was seeking up to £2bn of investment, and that though this was a large sum, it was significantly less than the cost of the Northern Powerhouse project. Then stated that it would initially focus on Birmingham, before incorporating a larger number of towns and cities in the region. Said that this would include vastly improving journey times and train frequency between Worcester, Bristol, Wolverhampton, Stoke, and other urban hubs. Further explained that the Rail Hub project aimed to ensure that the benefits of HS2 could be accessed by as many residents as possible, and that it would strengthen east-west connectivity. Therefore, reducing travel time and doubling services between Birmingham and Leicester would be a key deliverable. Underlined that the project had been a collaborative effort between Midlands Connect, Network Rail and the Department for Transport (DfT), and that this would come through in the Outline Business Case (OBC).
- **Importance of the Rail Hub:** Explained that with HS2 set to pass through a small number of stations in the Midlands, including Birmingham Curzon Street, it was important to ensure ease of access to those stations from other locations across the region. A second key benefit would be to improve east-west connectivity, which would drive productivity and economic growth, and help to connect people to job opportunities. Moreover, she said that the project was aligned with the objectives of Levelling Up, specifically in terms of helping residents without a car to access higher and further education opportunities in nearby cities, as well as to provide better access to healthcare via improved hospital connectivity. There were also green benefits to the project, as it would help to decarbonise the regional economy by encouraging people to take trains rather than polluting cars.
- **Funding allocation:** Explained that half of the total allocation sought would be spent on the Bordesley Chords, which would connect the Camp Hill Line and the Chiltern Main Line. Added that the two lines currently cross over, and that connecting them could unlock greater rail capacity in Birmingham. Stated that this was key to resolving the present issue of congestion at Birmingham New Street, for which there was currently no alternative for freeing up capacity. The project would also bring platform 4 at Snow Hill Station back into

operation, which would be important as the surrounding area is a major hub for offices in Birmingham.

- **Integrated rail plan:** Acknowledged that the Integrated Rail Plan had thrown a spanner in the works for the Rail Hub, as it could no longer count on the benefits of the Birmingham to Nottingham connection, which would now be included as part of HS2. Nonetheless, noted that HS2 East Midlands would not be delivered until 2040 at the earliest, and said that Midlands Connect had been working closely with DfT and Network Rail since the plan was published to make a case for the East Chord of the Midlands Rail Hub project, so that its full benefits could be accessed by residents in the East Midlands.
- **Submission of proposals:** Explained that the OBC for the Midlands Rail Hub, including the strategic case for the East Cord to Leicester, will be submitted by the end of October 2022. Said that evidence for the OBC would be split into three smaller packages: MRH West, linking Birmingham to the Southwest (including Worcester, Cardiff and Bristol); MRH Central, focused on expanding services from local hubs to central Birmingham (including Wolverhampton, Stoke and Leitchfield); MRH East, linking Birmingham to Leicester. For the upcoming submission, explained that Midlands Connect was only seeking a 'decision to design' on MRH West and Central; the submission for MRH East would come in 2023, once engineering detail had been finalised.
- **Timeline:** Explained that the project was currently in the middle of the development stage, and was now looking for a decision to design, having originally received funding to complete the OBC in July 2020. If successful, it will then proceed to a full business case, after which further funds can be accessed. Said that a decision for MRH West and Central would be imminent, following the submission in late October; a business case for MRH East would be made in August 2023, according to Network Rail estimates. Following this, a Full Business Case would be submitted between 2023 and 2027, and that they were aiming to deliver the full scheme between 2025 and 2030. Within this proposed timeline, they hoped to have both chords built by the time HS2 reached Birmingham in 2029-30. Concluded by thanking the group for their time and stated that full details of the plans were available upon request.

Questions

Lord Taylor: Remarked on the difficulty of East-West travel, noting that Birmingham had surprisingly weak rail connections for such an important city. Also expressed his hope that plans can be extended so that rail can be integrated more widely.

Lord Coaker: Also noted the importance of East-West connectivity and said that the full benefits of HS2 could not be realised when local hubs were so hard to reach. Explained that there was significant cynicism from people in these areas, who view their region as being low down the list of Government priorities.

- **Karen Heppenstall:** Explained that the Midlands Rail Hub is not all of the answer to these problems, and that other projects were in the pipeline. Said that Midlands Connect are pitching the Midlands Rail Hub and rail chords as key building blocks for other programmes, as they will unlock the rest of the Midlands Connect rail programme by resolving key capacity issues. Emphasised that it is vital to get both the East and West chords built at the same time, as all else will cascade from this.

Lord Waverly: Commented that it was vital to accommodate all regions equally, as to void a 'black hole circumstance'. Explained that he is currently engaged in a review of UK freight and logistics and will write to everyone to highlight the review.

Tim Sansom (office of Dr Luke Evans MP): Expressed concern that intermediate stations between Leicester and Birmingham would not benefit from the scheme, and that this could cause friction with local residents, particularly around messaging. Also suggested that a conflict between the local and national could put people off getting behind Midlands Connect.

- **Karen Heppenstall:** Responded by explaining that doubling the number of trains would mean more seats for residents on local trains. Though it was not possible to provide a direct service to Birmingham from all towns in the region, it would ensure that local trains are more reliable. Said that she had explained these benefits to local representatives already and would take the feedback on board.

Lord Waverly: Said that he planned to write to every Chief Executive around the country in order to set up a national database of infrastructure requirements, as to identify which areas needed the investment. Noted that there was a strong interest from Dubai residents in investing in the UK.

Lord Ravensdale: Asked what the work programme for the other schemes would look like?

- **Karen Heppenstall:** Responded that the Rail Hub was at the core of Midlands Connect's plans, and that if it was done right then it would open up other doors.

Lord Ravensdale: Asked for more detail on the funding application process for the Midlands Rail Hub.

- **Martin Bano:** Explained that no funding was set aside for the Midlands Rail Hub within the Integrated Rail Plan, and that it must go through the system and fight for its own funding. Stated that though the MRH was known about within DfT, and thus not starting from zero, but it was not a done deal.

Lord Ravensdale: Requested more specifics for the proposed timeline of MRH West and Central.

- **Martin Bano:** Responded by stating that following the submission of the OBC at the end of October, Government processes would take place up to the end of November, and the OBC would be launched on 5 December. Said that he expected a decision to be made around March or April 2023.

- **Karen Heppenstall:** Clarified that this date would be for the decision on developing the full business case, for which £120 to £140 million were being sought, rather than the total £1.5 to 2 billion. Explained that Midlands Connect are eager to make a full business case on the whole programme, to avoid parts being cut out later.

Baroness Burt: Asked what the appetite is for the Midlands Rail Hub within the DfT?

- **Martin Bano:** Said that the decision would be made on the basis of the business case alone, which the DfT will look at once it has been put in front of them.

Baroness Burt: Questioned whether the timeline set out by Midlands Connect was appropriate in the view of the DfT?

- **Martin Bano:** Said that the timeline seemed optimistic and ambitious, and that concerns around the East Chord could cause delays.
- **Karen Heppenstall:** Explained that Midlands Connect would be seeking acceleration opportunities in order to keep disruption to the timeline to a minimum, with a finish date of 2029-30 in mind.

Baroness Burt: Asked for clarification as to whether the weakness in the East Chord was because HS2 was already going through Nottingham?

- **Martin Bano:** Confirmed that this was indeed the case.

Lord Waverley: Asked what can be done to better understand the DfT's criteria for funding allocation?

- **Martin Bano:** Responded by explaining that it seemed as though there was a healthier business case for the Western Chord, though that there was also a strong strategic case for the Eastern Chord.

Concluding Remarks

Lord Waverley: Emphasised that it was important to pull together as a team to engage with the Government. Hoped the Government would engage actively with both Midlands Connect and the APPG. Stated that he would be in touch with Lucy Frazer MP, the relevant minister at DfT, regarding the project.

Lord Ravensdale: Thanked the representatives from Midlands Connect for their outstanding presentation, as well as Martin for his input. Noted that the presentation had given him a lot of ideas to take to future meetings with DfT ministers.