

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Integrated rail plan](#), HC 974

Wednesday 9 March 2022

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Huw Merriman (Chair); Mr Ben Bradshaw; Simon Jupp; Chris Loder; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 95–140

Witnesses

[I](#): Andy Street, Mayor of West Midlands.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [West Midlands Rail Executive](#)

Examination of witness

Witness: Andy Street.

Q95 **Chair:** This is the Transport Select Committee's second oral evidence session in our inquiry on the integrated rail plan. Our previous evidence session focused on the benefits that the plan aims to bring to the north. In our first session today, we will be looking at the midlands. For our second session, we will have a panel of academics and some further focus on the midlands. In addition to these two sessions, as part of our regular HS2 inquiry, a couple of weeks ago, we visited Leeds and Bradford, where we explored what the integrated rail plan would do for the northern region.

I am delighted to ask the first witness on our first panel to introduce himself.

Andy Street: Good morning, Chair. I am Andy Street, the Mayor of the West Midlands.

Q96 **Chair:** Mayor Street, thank you very much for being with us between 9 and 10 o'clock this morning. It is great to have you back.

We have a number of sections to go through. First, we want to go through the breakdown of the integrated rail plan. I have the question that I put to Mayor Burnham of Manchester, but I will replace the words "Manchester" and "the north" with "Birmingham" and "the midlands". As your opener, what is your assessment of the likely impact of the integrated rail plan on Birmingham and, indeed, the west midlands? Is it a good deal for the people and businesses of the region that you represent?

Andy Street: The answer in the case of Birmingham and the west midlands is categorically yes. Fundamentally, the Government have stood by the commitment to build the huge majority of HS2. The two stations here—Interchange in Solihull and Curzon Street in the city centre—will go ahead on plan. Of course, all of the western link will go ahead, so the part of the benefits that comes from the Birmingham-Manchester link and, critically, for the rest of the west coast main line will be sustained.

Then we come to the eastern leg, which, as everyone knows, is more controversial. From our point of view, the commitment to a high-speed link to Nottingham is extremely beneficial because it addresses the long-standing issue of east-west midlands connectivity, which I know you have heard a lot about from Midlands Connect and others. Of course, it also has the advantage of a connection to East Midlands Parkway. We think that the east-west midlands connectivity is arguably better in this proposal than in the previous proposal.

What we have to acknowledge, of course, is that the journey time reductions from Birmingham to Sheffield and Leeds are less than they would have been with the full Y. The debate is whether the lack of full



advantage that is reflected there is appropriate, given the considerable cost saving from not building the second half of the right-hand side of the Y. My own judgment—this is a political judgment, and, of course, I have not been privy to all the Treasury information—is that, given the challenge of public finances, an acceptable trade-off has been made.

Q97 Chair: To summarise, you would say that it is better than expected with regard to the connection to Nottingham—I remember that you talked about that a lot when we came to see you in Birmingham for our HS2 inquiry—but less than you expected with regard to Leeds-Sheffield.

Andy Street: It depends on when you make your expectation. Obviously, it is less than when the Oakervee review was done. You will remember that I was a member of that review and that we argued that the full Y was required. However, given the public finances and the challenges, it was no less than was expected in terms of the expectation management before the IRP was released.

Q98 Chair: We have talked before about the boost that HS2 and the IRP will give to the Birmingham economy. Which sections of the Birmingham economy will benefit particularly from the IRP?

Andy Street: We have done what we call our HS2 growth strategy, which we submitted to you during your earlier visit to Birmingham. A huge body of that still stands. If you wish us to resubmit that as a new piece of evidence, we will certainly do so. The critical point made in it was that, following the announcement of HS2 for the west midlands in 2015, when the first parliamentary Act went through, we could see the benefits of that to the west midlands economy straight away.

The professional services sector—the biggest sector for us here—of the economy was probably the biggest beneficiary, because the whole question of Birmingham being incredibly well connected to London, the north-west and, to a lesser extent now, the north-east, was driving firms' relocation decisions. For example, just this year, we have had the big news of Goldman Sachs choosing Birmingham as its second headquarters. This central position—this really good connectivity—was one of the key factors in its decision. From an inward investor point of view, where we are selling the benefits of Birmingham and the west midlands as a location around the world, there is absolutely no question but that HS2 has had a positive catalytic effect.

Q99 Chair: Before Covid impacted, when people were using the trains a lot more and were not working from home and doing Zooms, as we are right now, a new, faster railway would obviously have been a huge boost to the economy. Have you detected any peeling away of that enthusiasm, given that it is perhaps not as essential to travel by rail to conduct business, as we are doing today, or are all of the businesses that said, "We are coming to Birmingham because of HS2 and the connectivity," remaining true to their word?



Andy Street: The categoric answer to that is yes. Our inward investment inquiries are actually stronger now than pre-Covid. There is no question but that the economy here has taken a horrible hit—we all know that. However, in terms of what the prospects are like currently, we are still enjoying a much-strengthened pipeline of inward investment inquiries.

Q100 **Chair:** I know that you are very ambitious for your region, so I hope that you will not mind my asking whether you feel that the IRP is capable of improvement and where it could have gone further.

Andy Street: This takes us to another part of it that I hope we will have time to discuss properly this morning—the consequence for the midlands rail hub.

As I said right at the beginning, essentially, we feel very supportive of the HS2 decision. It would be fair to say that that is not just my view—it is the general view of the west midlands business community. Indeed, even journalistic reaction on the day of the IRP was pretty favourable here.

The bit the IRP did not say enough on—although we can live with this and make it work—was the midlands rail hub. We have always argued that HS2 was the first major investment. The next piece is how every part of our wider region gets connected to the HS2 terminal stations. That brings in the whole debate about connectivity in the south-west—the Bristol line. It also brings in a lot of questions about a regional network. Of course, not all east-west midlands connectivity is done.

There is also the question of the Derby connections and the Leicester connections. All those require investment in the midlands rail hub. What the IRP said about that was that there would be funding for it to be developed. It specifically called out the western chord. I would have liked it to have been clear that there was still a case for both chords. However, given that the paper said, “Go ahead and produce your business cases for this,” we have agreed with Network Rail that that is exactly what we are going to do. That will include making the cases for both hubs. The straight answer is that it would have been helpful if that had been that bit clearer in the IRP itself, but it is not going to hold us back.

Chair: Great. I will come back to that, because I remember you telling us how much the shorter distances could connect the whole region and the huge impact that that would have.

You mentioned the south-west. On that note, I will hand over to Simon Jupp.

Q101 **Simon Jupp:** Good morning, Andy. I hope that you are well. Previously, we had industrial strategies. Now we are levelling up across the United Kingdom, to quote the Government. In your view, what contribution will the IRP make to levelling up the midlands?

Andy Street: It will probably make an absolutely fundamental contribution. As I said earlier, it is probably already beginning to make it.



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One of the ways in which we have to do the levelling up is by securing a vibrant private sector in each area of the country. That is very clear. As I said earlier, the HS2 decision in 2015 was the catalyst for our inward investment offer. In each of the past five years, we have been the top-performing region on inward investment. The fact that the HS2 decision was reconfirmed enables us to continue with that very positive pitch for international footloose investment. It was critical that it was reconfirmed.

Q102 Simon Jupp: Are we seeing that investment concentrated around the Birmingham area or in the wider region? How much is it intertwined with, and does it depend on, Birmingham's success?

Andy Street: It depends on which sector we are talking about. In the professional services sector—earlier I mentioned Goldman Sachs, which is just one standout—investment is focused on Birmingham. However, if you look at another very hot area for inward investment, the whole question of electric vehicle technology, investment is concentrated more on Coventry. Some of the pieces around new techniques for housing build development, where we also have a good inward investment pipeline, are concentrated more in the Black Country. It is sector-specific by location. It makes sense intuitively why certain sectors are in certain parts of the region.

Q103 Simon Jupp: Clearly, multimillion-pound amounts of money are being given to improvement to rail—the IRP and HS2. I take the point that you just made to the Chair about the midlands rail hub and the lack of impact that that will now have. Is all this investment a sound investment for the entire United Kingdom, including regions like mine in the south-west?

Andy Street: I am probably biased, aren't I? My answer is yes. This was very clear in the Oakervee review. As I said, I have not seen the national maths since then, so I cannot comment on that. You will have people in front of you from the Treasury and DFT to do that. However, as a member of the Oakervee committee, I am absolutely clear that there was a sound business case for the nation, not just for the region, on the back of this.

My presumption is that, with a reduction of £22 billion for the scaling back of the eastern leg, there is still a very sound total national case for the reduced Y, as you may call it now. I am sorry to say that, in a sense, I am not equipped to answer the question because I have not seen those calculations—neither would I expect to. However, from what I know, it seems very reasonable.

Q104 Simon Jupp: If you could convince the Treasury to come in front of us, we would love you for ever, Mr Mayor.

When you were answering questions from the Chair, you mentioned the midlands rail hub. That has been watered down somewhat. You mentioned the implications for the south-west. What do you think those implications are more widely? Can you explain and contextualise what you mean by the proposition now?



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Andy Street: To be really clear, it has not yet been watered down. It is more accurately described in this way. It was not clearly reaffirmed in its entirety, so in a sense it is left unresolved. What we are now going to do, with the chair and chief exec of Network Rail, is make the business cases for the full midlands rail hub. We met them recently to do that, so it is not just my hope—it is an agreed position. I am quite relaxed about this because, although the IRP did not say, “Here is the full cash for all of the midlands rail hub,” it gives us the opportunity now to make those cases. We are supremely confident of our case that they are good value for money.

Shall I explain what is in it, as that would be helpful? The long-standing issue with rail in the west midlands is the capacity and performance of Birmingham New Street. Anyone who has used the rail network will know very well, without understanding the technical drawings of train paths and all that, that New Street runs at full capacity and, if anything goes wrong, the whole system falls over, which has consequences across almost the whole country, given how everything is fed through New Street.

There is no additional capacity in terms of new train paths to be put in. Even if we wanted to increase the frequency of certain services, we cannot. There was very clear evidence before the pandemic that, in a sense, Birmingham had become a rail-dependent city. As I said when I first gave evidence, it is the only city outside London where rail is the predominant form of commuting. Rail was a success story here, but we had this constraint that meant that we could not grow.

HS2 is part of the solution to that because it takes some of the services on to dedicated new tracks and provides different regional services, but the real solution comes with the midlands rail hub, through the upgrading into Moor Street, which is our second central station at the moment but does not physically have the connections into other parts of the network. For example, services from Bristol currently come into New Street. If we upgrade the link from Bristol through a new chord or junction into Moor Street and then, similarly, out to the north-east—the services to Derby, to Sheffield and on to Newcastle—it will mean that those services come out of New Street, which will give us more capacity and reliability. For the first time in decades, it will solve the capacity and reliability issues around New Street and allow us to build a network to grow with demand. That is the principle we are still hanging on to.

Q105 **Simon Jupp:** You have the argument. You have the case. You will put that forward very powerfully to the Treasury, DFT and everybody else. Are you expecting back-up from other regions, such as the south-west, that are expecting and, as you say, will benefit from this investment? Do you expect them to back you up and say, “This is a good idea”?

Andy Street: The answer to that is yes. One of the key arguments around HS2 was that regions that are not directly on the line will be advantaged through the connections. Let us take residents of



Cheltenham, Gloucester and Bristol. Obviously, they are some way away from HS2, but they would be able to come into Moor Street on the new midlands rail hub, to take a pedestrian link to Curzon Street and then to take a train north from there, rather than have the current difficulties around New Street. I am expecting us to be able to make a case that the midlands rail hub complements HS2 and—although this is more marginal—achieves some of the final advantages that were seen in the original business case for HS2.

Q106 Chair: Mayor Street, I come back to the issue around HS2 phase 2b. We had an interesting discussion with the chief executive of HS2 when we were in Leeds. He said, "It is not a cancellation. It is a modification," but obviously it is not as some had hoped. It is certainly not what those we spoke to in Leeds and Bradford had hoped for. We will go into more detail on that, but what was your top-line assessment of that decision? You talked about the funding implications, but what does that actually mean for your connectivity needs from Birmingham up to Leeds?

Andy Street: You cannot disguise this one. We will not achieve the improvement in journey times to Leeds that were prophesied. We were all keen to achieve that. There is still an improvement in two ways, of course. HS2 will go to East Midland Parkway and connect to the midland main line. However, the best improvement is through Manchester and the new line between Manchester and Leeds.

The honest answer to this is that it was clearly a setback. I understand why it was badly received in Leeds. However, one has to ask about the value-for-money piece. We always knew, right back to the Oakervee review maths, that the eastern leg of 2b was most vulnerable in terms of the business case. Then we find ourselves with a more constrained public finance situation and, as we know, lots of other competing rail interests. As I said, it is regrettable, but I understand why the decision had to be taken.

Q107 Chair: One of the things that struck me when I was taking evidence from the chief exec of HS2—it comes to the cost-benefit ratio—was that he could not tell us how much it would cost to build the new eastern leg because it was modified. I could not understand how a decision could be made as to whether to proceed when you do not actually know the costs to compare them against the benefits. Have you gone into that detail as well?

Andy Street: Again, you are assuming that I have access to all the HS2 technical information.

Q108 Chair: That is why I ask.

Andy Street: I do not have that. To be really clear, I would not expect to have it.

People will say that where I get a lot of my knowledge of this is a little out of date, but the fundamental ratios will not be wrong. We knew what



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the eastern leg cost. We knew what the cost of the western leg was at the time of the review. All those figures will have been updated by HS2. We know broadly the proportion of the cost that is the Birmingham-Nottingham element, as against the Nottingham-north element. That is why earlier I gave you a figure, which my team has deduced from all of that, for the saving. We do not have it as gospel, but our deduction is that the saving on the Nottingham-north piece is roughly £22 billion. That is not certain. I cannot verify that directly from HS2 Ltd. Only HS2 knows that.

Q109 **Chair:** The caveat is well understood.

I come back to the midlands rail hub. I remember that either you or others told us that, arguably, this is even more important than the HS2 investment in terms of what you could do for the whole of the midlands. Is it the case that you need to build this at the same time to get economies of scale, or are you just concerned that if it does not get signed off imminently it may well be forgotten, given that so much more money is being spent—not by you, but by Government?

Andy Street: It does not have to be built at the same time. This is not a construction economies of scale point. There are two points, really. We think that, with a real following wind, we could bring in some of the early stages of the midlands rail hub before HS2 even opens. The rail engineering issues on the western chord are not that complex. There are even some very early bits at Kings Norton junction and Snow Hill. There are advantages sooner.

The big piece is what I will call the total network resilience and capability development piece, with HS2 alongside the midlands rail hub. It is the systems planning of the service across the west midlands that needs the two elements to come together. It is not economies of scale in the construction.

Q110 **Chair:** Can I drill further? Crossrail, for example, is a project that has been somewhat plagued because the plugging-in part has proved more complex. Would you maintain that if we built the midlands rail hub earlier than HS2 it would make for a better project from an engineering perspective, or is that not as linked?

Andy Street: No, I do not think that it is. I am just trying to think about the comparison with Crossrail. However, I am right in what I am about to say. There are those who say that this is a poor call, but it is a fact that one of the advantages of how HS2 is being done in the west midlands is that it is a completely self-contained engineering piece. It crosses the existing structure, but it does not join with it at any point. It is not about that.

That is the really good thing, because it means that there is no disruption to our current services. Obviously, there will be a physical connection between Moor Street and Curzon Street. In a perfect world, we must know that the midlands rail hub is coming so that the capacity that is



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released on the existing fast tracks is used knowing what the total structure will be in the future. That is what this is about, not the efficiency of build.

Chair: Thank you for clarifying that. I will bring in Karl McCartney and then hand over to Grahame Morris.

Q111 **Karl McCartney:** Good morning, Mr Mayor. I want to drill down a bit on some of the facts that you have given us this morning. You mentioned that you and your team looked at the potential savings of not doing HS2 phase 2b. I think that you mentioned £22 billion.

Andy Street: Yes.

Q112 **Karl McCartney:** When you were last in front of us, you kindly gave us your very clear view that HS2 phase 2b was not going to happen. In the intervening time, did you or your team have any conversations with your equivalents in Leeds and Yorkshire with regard to your view that it was not going to happen? I ask the question because, when they spoke to us in Leeds a couple of weeks ago, we were given the distinct impression that, up until the announcement, they still thought that it was going to go ahead, whereas, when you saw us six months ago, I got the very distinct impression that your view was that it definitely was not going to go ahead.

Andy Street: Excuse me for saying this—I am not quite sure when you joined the meeting—but, in response to a question from the Chair about whether it was better or worse than my expectations, I said that it was on my expectation, in terms of the mood music before the IRP. I hate to say it, but what I said to the Committee meeting when it came to Birmingham was basically what came out in the IRP. I think that our expectations were in about the right place.

Q113 **Karl McCartney:** You have every right to say, “I told you so.” I am fine with that. I am just trying to find out whether you or your team had any conversations at all with those further to the north-east of Birmingham, to give them the benefit of your view.

Andy Street: The answer to that is no. We did not. They probably could see it, because it was reported both through your Committee and in a number of press interviews that that was what I expected.

Chair: Ben wants to come in briefly.

Q114 **Mr Bradshaw:** Was that a hunch, or was it based on informal conversations that you had had with politicians at national level?

Andy Street: It was largely a hunch, actually.

Q115 **Mr Bradshaw:** Largely, but not exclusively.

Andy Street: Let me just make sure that I am right about what I say to you. To be absolutely clear—I do not want to mislead here—nobody in Government told me what was going to be in the IRP until literally the



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day before. If you are asking whether I had privileged information, the answer is categorically no. Of course, what I have all the time is discussions with different Ministers—Treasury Ministers, not DFT Ministers, to be really clear—about the pressure that different budgets are under. It was from that that I made my own deduction. That is the best way of describing it.

Chair: Exactly that applies to this Committee as well. I do not think that anyone told us directly, but we could perhaps see where the wind was blowing.

Q116 **Grahame Morris:** Good morning, Mr Street. It is a really interesting point. Unfortunately, I did not participate in the visit to Birmingham. I had Covid at the time, so I could not. However, I was on the recent visit that we made to Leeds and Bradford. There were some very strong views there, not just from the local politicians but from the business community, about the lack of communication, given all the effort that had gone in through the various agencies, including the discussions that had taken place at a higher level in anticipation of realising some of the economic benefits that you have been able to unlock in Birmingham.

The reply that you gave to the Chair about 2015, when the decision was made, being the key date was very interesting. You said that that unlocked a lot of investment. We saw in Leeds and Bradford very large areas—one was the size of 700 football pitches—earmarked for industrial development in anticipation of some of the benefits that you have been able to secure in Birmingham.

Can I ask you specifically about what is happening there and the evidence that you gave to the Committee in Birmingham? You explained then how the west midlands was going to benefit economically from being at the centre of the Y in the HS2 network. What economic effect will the cancellation of HS2 phase 2b have on Birmingham and the wider west midlands? You have answered that to some extent in response to earlier questions. However, the 2021 HS2 growth strategy suggested that HS2 would create 175,000 jobs in the west midlands. Will this latest change have any impact on that forecast, in your opinion?

Andy Street: This is the question that I was expecting. We have not yet redone that growth forecast. As I said earlier, the huge majority of the basis for the benefits still holds after the IRP. If we can combine it with the midlands rail hub and other local improvements, we are very confident of our case. However, the very straight answer to you is that we have not recalculated that 175,000 figure for the part of it that was dependent on trade with Yorkshire and north-east region.

Q117 **Grahame Morris:** In terms of the planned private sector investment, Mr Street, has there been any change there since the announcement was made?

Andy Street: Categorically not. Again, I am not sure when you joined the room—



Grahame Morris: I was here from the very start.

Chair: He made us quorate.

Andy Street: As you heard me say, our pipeline of inquiries, both international and domestic, has actually strengthened. It is so difficult to disaggregate the different things because, of course, the major impact there is the more certain Covid situation.

I think the way to put it as the view of the business community here is that we have factored HS2 into our planning since 2015, and fundamentally that has not changed because we are still at the centre of the network. I hate to say this to a Member of Parliament for Yorkshire, but we still have the two biggest benefits, which is the London connectivity and the north-west connectivity, and the critical fact that it connects to the west coast main line with the Scottish piece. Of course, as we have said before—and the Chair correctly identified this—for us, the east-west midlands connectivity was an absolutely crucial achievement, and arguably that is stronger.

We now have to redo our calculations, but the straight answer is that there has been no diminution. If anything, there has been a strengthening of the business response to it.

Q118 **Grahame Morris:** Thank you, Mr Street. For the sake of the record, I am not a Yorkshire MP; I am a north-east MP, but you can understand, Mr Street, how disappointed the political leaders were in Yorkshire that we met. Their plans, which were well prepared, had been fractured, so they believe. Your evidence is very useful to us, so thank you very much.

Andy Street: I hope I acknowledged that earlier on in saying that I understand why there was huge displeasure in Yorkshire and the north-east. I hope that I acknowledged that because it is an important point.

Grahame Morris: I understand and appreciate that; thank you.

Q119 **Chair:** We put to Mayor Burnham that it feels that Manchester is recognised. I would put it to you that Birmingham appears to be recognised as well. Those are two cities that seem to have done well from this, whereas, as Grahame was saying, those business leaders and the Mayor that we met in Leeds feel that they are being left out. Do you think that is a valid concern for those in Yorkshire?

Andy Street: There is no beating about the bush. They do not get the improvement in the north-south connectivity that HS2 was going to provide—certainly not yet—and I am sure the Government would say that the key word in that sentence is “yet”, but they do get substantially improved east-west connectivity. As I understood it, that was an absolutely critical thing that leaders in Yorkshire had lobbied for.

It is not for me to advise in any way. I understand my patch and my economy, but there is obviously a case for continuing the pressure from



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here. However, I understand, as I said to the previous questioner, why that feeling is there.

I would add one other thing, Chair. I also get how important this is to a region. I think people will know that, when the Government were assessing this again at the beginning of 2020, I literally lay down on the non-existent tracks to make sure the decision came right for the west midlands. I was very conscious that there was only one way we would do it, though, which was to prove the business case. I know that is what happened, with very thorough scrutiny from the Treasury and DFT, which ultimately went to the Prime Minister and led to his announcements on 20 February 2020. That was what we were doing. Of course, I understand how critical it is that the local team lobby and we were, frankly, obsessed with it.

Chair: Thank you. I somewhat strode into Gavin Newlands's questions, so I will hand over now.

Q120 **Gavin Newlands:** I appreciate that, Chair. In fairness, Grahame had already set down the track on a couple of the points that I was going to raise. It will save time, regardless.

Mr Street, how far do the replacement schemes and upgrades in the east midlands and the north set out in the integrated rail plan, irrespective of the fact that the IRP is obviously somewhat diluted from Northern Powerhouse Rail, make up for the loss of the eastern leg?

Andy Street: Again, I am repeating myself but I need to be really clear about the first point in this. The biggest benefit in the eastern leg to the west midlands has been protected. Indeed, as I said in the very first answer, it is actually better than the first programme because this gives direct connection to the centre of Nottingham and obviously onward to the rail network that spans out from the centre of Nottingham. From our point of view, the first objective of the eastern leg is a better solution. Actually, the connection to East Midlands airport is absolutely critical because that is the main freight airport for the midlands as a whole. We think that the rethinking of it is a better outcome than the Toton piece for East Midlands. We do need to do the other bits with a midlands rail hub, which is the Birmingham/Leicester and Birmingham/Derby routes, but, assuming that happens, the connectivity across the midlands is good on the 2b side of it.

The bit that is still to be confirmed is the quality of the upgrade north from East Midlands Parkway. I cannot actually answer that because I do not think we yet know the exact quality and speed advantages that are going to be brought about through that.

Q121 **Gavin Newlands:** That is an entirely fair response. It is the north that has really missed out in terms of the HS2 cuts.

In terms of journey times, you referenced the journey times to Leeds, etc. They will see the benefit, as was. I have just been looking at the



journey times that have been proposed in the integrated rail plan. Do you think that the proposed journey times are reasonable and credible?

Andy Street: The answer is yes. Obviously, the two headline journeys for us—I know some on the Committee will say I am obsessed with these two facts—are maintained. That is the journey time to London. It is 38 minutes from Interchange and 48 from Curzon. That is incredible. For our region that is an absolutely critical economic fact.

The journey time to Manchester is down to 41 minutes. This was always the case. The worst two service link times from Birmingham were Manchester and Nottingham, and that reduction to 41 minutes for Manchester is incredible. To link Britain's second and third cities together in 41 minutes is world class.

Obviously, there is the huge reduction to Nottingham. Again, that will be a completely self-contained route. There are no interplays, as we talked about earlier on. I think 26 minutes is proposed. On the current progress of HS2, technically and construction-wise, that all seems viable.

The bit I am least well able to answer is on the journey time to Leeds. That is now being calculated through Manchester and is dependent therefore on the quality of the Manchester-Leeds link, which I think is still a little uncertain. That must be the one with the question mark by it.

Q122 **Gavin Newlands:** You focus a lot on the journey times, and perhaps understandably—

Andy Street: You asked me about them.

Q123 **Gavin Newlands**—in your contributions thus far. In fairness, I was not necessarily talking about your last answer. It is understandable because, obviously, Birmingham still has all the main advantages of HS2, etc. and a lot of these journey times do sound fantastic.

We visited Leeds and Bradford. We heard time and time again that, to them, the journey times were not anywhere near as important as capacity, both in terms of services and stations in the north, and therefore the robustness of the network.

What is more important to you: capacity and robustness of the network or speed?

Andy Street: No question about this. I have been very clear on this publicly. To be fair, you have just asked me about journey times, so of course that is what I talked about. All the questions at the beginning of the meeting were about the economic outcomes as a result of HS2, and that is the reason that I am a huge believer in this. I believe it is a catalyst for the recovery of the regional economies. That is the biggest point.

One of the ways that that is achieved is by the removal of capacity from the existing network so that we can substantially improve the regional



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services. I always say that London is the best example in the world. If you improve your transport connectivity within a region, it improves the productivity of the region. Our whole plan, right since 2015 when it was confirmed, was that no one in the west midlands should be more than 40 minutes away from either of the two terminal stations. That is what we are getting on busily building, and that is only possible because of the free capacity and some of the new infrastructure that has come in on the back of linking to the stations.

There is absolutely no question that the overall driving fact here is the economic outcome.

Q124 Gavin Newlands: My last question is speed of a different nature—speed of the deliverability of the IRP. Albeit a lesser improvement, certainly for the north in the IRP, it will, touch wood, become operational years before any potential cancelled HS2 scheme would have. What weight do you attach to the relative speed at which the IRP can be delivered compared to HS2? That is in the round and not necessarily just with a midlands hat on.

Andy Street: What I said earlier on about the link to midlands rail hubs gives a clue to my answer on this. To be honest, we just discount this but we need to come back to it. It is critical that the first leg is opened as quickly as possible. The progress at this end of it is good. The progress at Euston is obviously more challenging. I hope the decision will be made to run this as a system from Birmingham to Old Oak Common to begin to get the advantages as early as possible. That is the first decision there is.

The second decision is that as soon as phase 2a is opened—which again we have no reason to believe will not be on the revised timetable—we will begin to get the benefits of it by running trains from central Birmingham through 2a to Manchester and to the whole of the rest of the west coast main line. That, again, is a decision that is pending right now. What will the timetable be? There are some real opportunities to bring forward the advantages to the region through decisions that are coming right now.

The fact that we now have clarity on what is being done in terms of Manchester and Nottingham, if we can then complete that with clarity around the midlands rail hub, will enable us to plan and begin to bring improvements very early on the regional network as well. I actually see a huge advantage of that clarity coming.

Gavin Newlands: Thanks, Mayor.

Chair: We are moving on to the next section, which is construction times and capacity. I am conscious that we have done a little on capacity. I would say it is not repetition but drilling in further. I will hand over to Simon Jupp to do just that.

Q125 Simon Jupp: I think that when we talk about capacity we need to use real life examples. According to data that we have seen, in 2017 around a quarter of passengers were forced to stand when travelling into



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Birmingham train stations. This is during rush hour.

How do you think the IRP will help tackle these capacity problems, or will it exacerbate them?

Andy Street: It will ease them; there is no question about it. Let us just think about the simple point here. At the moment, the busiest rail line across the west midlands is the Coventry-New Street-Wolverhampton corridor, which is of course the route of west coast main line Avanti. Even the London-Scotland trains are going through that, and they are competing with our local commuter services. It is a timetabling genius who works out in either of the Birmingham-Coventry or the Birmingham-Wolverhampton corridors how to use the same tracks. There are only two tracks, remember, that do both.

The simple fact is that, if you move the high-speed service to a dedicated route, first of all it makes it much more reliable. If a local stopping train breaks down, the London-Birmingham service breaks down. There is a huge improvement in reliability through having its own piece.

Equally, taking those services off the local tracks means that the slots can be used either for regional or local services. There is absolutely no question this is going to happen, and it has been confirmed as far as the west midlands is concerned. The other advantage is that we now know there is going to be a high-speed Nottingham service. That will take two of the hourly paths out of New Street, which can be reutilised. If we build midlands rail up on top of it, you actually then take four of the paths per hour out as well, giving six. That obviously gives you more capacity, so that also enables you to address the standing.

Q126 **Simon Jupp:** I am going to sound like someone who spends far too much time at a train station now, but when we visited Leeds last month we recognised and saw that there are severe capacity issues with that train station, and the impact it has on being able to improve services in the future. Is that mirrored in your region at all? Are you going to face any problems with the existing infrastructure you have around railway stations in the west midlands?

Andy Street: Categorically yes. I will give you a very good example of where this bites. I said in an earlier answer that New Street is full. There are no more paths. To be fair, people think that I am obsessed with New Street. We could put more trains through Coventry, Wolverhampton and Solihull, but actually New Street is the big issue.

We literally face trade-offs daily. We have had success in winning funding for a new commuter line from New Street out through the south-west of Birmingham, through Moseley and Kings Heath. We have literally had to take the decision to get those paths to reduce frequency on another service. It is absolutely biting, day after day. We did not have quite the north-west timetable implosion in 2019, but as we tried to improve our services the timetable was too ambitious, and we ended up cutting back. We cannot put any more services into New Street. We face that day to



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day. Yes, is the answer, hence why I come back to midlands rail hub taking some services out of New Street, using underutilised capacity in the Moor Street station. A combination of that and HS2 enables us to really replan and improve regional services into New Street.

Q127 Simon Jupp: Does the midlands rail hub solve all your woes regarding capacity at train stations, or are there interventions needed elsewhere in the region at particular pinch points at different train stations?

Andy Street: Yes; a good question. It hugely solves it. We have talked about New Street, but there are a couple of details as well. There are upgrades at Kings Norton junction and Snow Hill. There are other, what you might call, ancillary pieces, but the New Street capacity is the keystone of it. If we do not solve that, the rest of what we might do is almost irrelevant. We have to solve the overall bottleneck.

Q128 Simon Jupp: And that involves the midlands rail hub, as you have said.

Andy Street: Yes.

Q129 Simon Jupp: You have mentioned places like Snow Hill. Is that investment that you need on the cards, with or without the midlands rail hub being as clear as you would like it to be?

Andy Street: No. The midlands rail hub is what gives us this investment. The Snow Hill investment and Kings Norton are all sub-parts of the midlands rail hub.

Simon Jupp: Thank you.

Q130 Chris Loder: Good morning, Andy. It is nice to see you. I just wanted to ask you further on your capacity point about Birmingham New Street. Given the fairly considerable reduction in rail timetables over the last couple of years, but from a more sustained perspective since the last timetable change, and with the rail industry undertaking a fairly considerable voluntary redundancy programme to reduce its output and costs, does the current situation with the rail service change any of your assumptions and particularly the point on whether Birmingham New Street is actually at full capacity?

Andy Street: No, it does not. Literally, for this December's timetable, we are having to take those trade-off decisions that I just explained to Mr Jupp. Those have not gone away. They are absolutely there. There is a much broader, longer-term point. As I said in one of my other answers earlier, Birmingham has become a rail-dependent city over the last 10 years. It is the only city outside London to have the majority of its commuting through rail, and that is going to come back. We cannot assume otherwise, so that trade-off is still there right now.

Q131 Chris Loder: I am assuming that there has been some sort of remodelling done or reconsideration of projections since Covid has happened. There are very clear changes in demand in lots of different ways. I just wanted to understand whether what you have said is based



on revised assumptions or not.

Andy Street: Yes, it is. That is what I am saying. If you look at the current decision that we are faced with around what services will be run and will not be run—and literally the Rail Minister and the special adviser are all looking at this at the moment—we have been forced into trade-offs even on the assumptions of the capacity that is needed post Covid, absolutely categorically.

If we want to rebuild that, I will have to give you another specific example. We are only running four trains an hour on the cross-city line at the moment. We want to get back to six each way. It is our main connection. It will become even more important from Bromsgrove to Lichfield. We cannot run that on the considerations that we have at the moment. Yes, it has not gone away as a result of Covid, even if I believed the Covid assumptions were going to last.

Q132 **Chris Loder:** Would you be able to share any of that with us, or send it to us, so that we might be able to have a look in terms of the work on the revision of assumptions from your perspective?

Andy Street: You can see the timetable trade-offs that have been made for 2022, yes, with pleasure. That is a very current debate.

Chris Loder: Thank you.

Chair: We would be interested across the board in the asks of the train operators and the regions, in terms of reductions in timetable. Certainly, we are going to take it up with the Rail Minister, so I can see that that would be very helpful, Andy.

Finally, let us go over to Ben Bradshaw. We are going to drill a bit more into the midlands rail hub option that you talked about, and then talk about freight. That will take us up to 10 o'clock, when I know that you have to leave us.

Q133 **Mr Bradshaw:** What is the timetable, Mr Street, for the midlands hub?

Andy Street: Let us be really clear. There are two early, small pieces of this: Kings Norton Junction and Snow Hill. That literally could be within two years. It is relatively simple. Then there are two other pieces that could be taken separately. The first is what we call the western chord that gives the advantage particularly to areas to the south-west. The second is the eastern chord, which gives the advantage to areas to the north-east of Birmingham. Both are connecting through Moor Street, and, obviously, if you have both, you redivert your cross-country services. It can be done in stages. That is why there isn't one answer to it.

What we would like to achieve is that the western chord could be constructed for the same time as HS2 opens. We accept that the eastern chord is probably going to be 2030.

Q134 **Mr Bradshaw:** Are you going to need private money for any of it?



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Andy Street: We do not have the funding package agreed. At the moment we are assembling the business case with Network Rail. We would hope that it would be taken, obviously, from the core rail national budget, so public money.

Q135 **Mr Bradshaw:** But there is no firm commitment on deliverability. This is still all options work, is it?

Andy Street: Correct. To be clear, we are very clear now what configuration we want and what services we would run through it. If you had asked me this question six months ago, I would say we are still deciding what service options we would want. That has been confirmed, but where we are now is assembling the business case. There is an obvious point here, Ben. We needed to know what HS2 was going to be for the east midlands for us to work out the business case for midlands rail hub. Had it not gone to Nottingham city centre, obviously the business case was different. The two hung together. We all understood that. Network Rail understood it. It was a very mature conversation which said, "As soon as we know what HS2 is going to do, we then finalise our business case." That is what is now being done.

Q136 **Mr Bradshaw:** Turning to freight, to what extent does delivering your environmental goals for the west midlands depend on shifting freight from road to rail?

Andy Street: I am going to be very honest here and say that this is a very weak part of our argument and construct thus far. We very much focused in our environmental goals on lots of other stuff in transport—electric energy and, of course, decarbonisation of industry. We do not have an active plan for freight. Of course, the obvious point here is that I think it is very difficult for us to assemble regionally because so much of it is travelling through the region and not in the region. We have not done that piece of work.

Q137 **Mr Bradshaw:** How does that happen? How does some plan get realised?

Andy Street: Because there has to be, I would argue, a national answer to this. We now know what the IRP and the system's capabilities are going to be, so we are then able to examine what freight capacity is available on the network, which has always been one of the driving forces of HS2 freeing up existing capacity anyway. That is there in principle. I may be wrong, but I do not believe that that has actually been worked through to what the consequences of this are in terms of emissions by transfer of freight from road to rail.

Q138 **Mr Bradshaw:** So we need a national plan, and there is not currently a national plan.

Andy Street: I am not aware of it. I may be doing DFT a disservice there, but I am not aware of it.



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Q139 **Mr Bradshaw:** Are you aware of a plan to have one, or an intention to have one?

Andy Street: I am aware of an intention that says that, once we have sorted IRP out, we then have to work through this as one of the opportunities that there now are.

Q140 **Mr Bradshaw:** Going back to your own region, where are the main pinch points in terms of rail freight? Have you done that analysis? Does the IRP tackle any of those at a local level?

Andy Street: Yes. The main pinch point—it is the same answer as before—is the main Wolverhampton-Birmingham-Coventry line. That is the spine of everything. Actually, it is the same point. This will free capacity on that line substantially.

Mr Bradshaw: Thank you.

Chair: Mayor Street, we have given you a few minutes back, so you will be on time for 10 o'clock. I thank you very much for all of the evidence you have given to us on the impact of the IRP on the area that you represent. We look forward to engaging with you again shortly.