

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

28 November 2024

Cheshire East Council Support for Proposed Future Rail Schemes

Report of: Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director of Place

Report Reference No: CPC/48/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards

For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 To update the Committee on the work to date to establish a Cheshire East Council position on two emerging rail proposals impacting the borough, namely:
 - (a) the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway section of Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) project, and
 - (b) the High Speed 2 (HS2) alternative Midlands-North West Rail Link.
- 2 To seek recommendations from Committee to Council on any conditional support to each of the proposals and on the future membership of the Liverpool to Manchester Partner Board.
- 3 To seek Committee approval on the next steps to make the case for investment in Crewe railway station as part of any major Government rail improvements.

Executive Summary

- 4 Following the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham in 2023, Government announced its intention to reallocate the funds to other transport projects across the North and Midlands.
- 5 Despite representations from the Council to Government regarding the substantial impact of the loss of HS2 to Cheshire East, to date no

mitigations or significant reallocation of funding has directly benefited transport infrastructure in Crewe or the wider Cheshire East area

- 6 One of the projects the Government announced was its commitment to the acceleration of the Liverpool to Manchester section of NPR and to use the HS2 Phase 2b hybrid bill to secure the powers for the section of the route that was proposed to be shared with HS2.
- 7 The proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway would pass through Cheshire East, with a section of the scheme, between High Legh and Manchester, following the same alignment as the previous HS2 Phase 2b scheme.
- 8 It was always envisaged that progression of NPR would follow the delivery of HS2, and therefore build on the connectivity benefits of HS2, via Crewe Station. As such, the Council's position of support for NPR was always predicated on HS2 being delivered in full prior to NPR.
- 9 As a standalone Scheme, and without the opportunities from an HS2 hub at Crewe, the benefits vs impacts of NPR to Cheshire East are now different. It is therefore considered appropriate that the Council revisits its position on NPR under the current context.
- 10 In addition, following the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham, the Greater Manchester and West Midlands mayors (the Mayors) have been working alongside a private sector consortium to look at alternative options to improving rail connectivity between Birmingham and Manchester.
- 11 The Council has previously welcomed this work and advocated that any alternative north-south rail link to HS2 should fully connect through Crewe to capitalise on the stations 360 degree connectivity.
- 12 In September 2024, a report was published by the consortium to summarise the work undertaken and presented a recommended alternative option, referred to as the Midlands – North West Rail Link, which can be found in Appendix 1. The report recommended a new rail line following the alignment of HS2 phases 2a and 2b, which the Mayors will present to Government.
- 13 The recommended option being proposed does not provide the investment and connectivity benefits to Crewe that HS2 offered and does not include any improvements or capacity upgrades to Crewe station. It also proposed a north-south tunnel under central Crewe that could effectively allow new services to bypass the station.
- 14 As the proposed new railway, would follow the alignment of HS2 phases 2a and 2b, there is a possibility that Cheshire East could see the same

impacts in terms of disruption, environmental impacts, community severance and landscape impacts as HS2. However, the exclusion of Crewe station improvements and connectivity enhancements within the recommended option, means it is unlikely to provide the investment, growth and regeneration opportunities for Crewe and the wider borough that HS2 would have unlocked.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee agrees to recommend to Full Council that:

1. The Council provisionally support:
 - a. the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway section of NPR; and
 - b. the use of the High Speed Rail (Crewe – Manchester) Bill to deliver the Liverpool to Manchester Railwayprovided that the conditions set out in paragraph 31 of this report are met.
2. The Council remains a member of the Liverpool to Manchester Partner Board, acting at all times, under the agreed positions set out above.
3. The Council welcomes the progression of alternative options to HS2, to improve rail connectivity and capacity between the Midlands and the North West, but the Council would only lend its support to schemes that put Crewe at the heart of the solution and deliver:
 - a. Enhanced connectivity from Crewe with improved direct services to key conurbations including London, Birmingham and Manchester;
 - b. Enables, facilitates and delivers the necessary capacity, upgrades and rationalisation at Crewe Station to enable any new services on an alternative north-south link to call at Crewe;
 - c. Supports and enables investment and growth in Crewe including the regeneration of Crewe Town Centre and provision of high quality links to the Crewe Station, and
 - d. Provides appropriate and sufficient mitigation against the negative impacts of the scheme, and its construction, on the borough, its residents and business and on the local environment.

4. The Council only support the use of existing powers secured via the HS2 phase 2a hybrid bill to deliver part of any alternative north-south rail link if the scheme delivers the conditions set out above.
5. The HS2 Member Reference Group be re-established and refocussed to support the Council's strategic rail priorities and positions.
6. Approve the revised Terms of Reference and membership changes for the Member Reference Group as proposed in Appendix 2.

Background

Liverpool - Manchester Railway Board

- 15 The Liverpool-Manchester Railway Board (LMRB) is a newly established body aimed at transforming rail connectivity between the Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester and maximising the social and economic benefits linked to the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway.
- 16 The LMRB was launched on May 22, 2024, by the Mayors of Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region with proposed membership from the following organisations:
 - (i) Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
 - (ii) Greater Manchester Combined Authority
 - (iii) Manchester City Council
 - (iv) Liverpool City Council
 - (v) Warrington Borough Council
 - (vi) Cheshire East Council
 - (vii) Cheshire West and Chester Council
 - (viii) St Helens Borough Council
 - (ix) Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
 - (x) Manchester Airport Group
 - (xi) Port of Liverpool
 - (xii) HMG Rail Minister (invited to be a member)
- 17 It is intended that the Board work collaboratively with Government to help shape the Scheme.
- 18 Given the direct impact of the proposed Scheme on the Borough, it is important that the Council is represented on this Board and the views and considerations for Cheshire East are fairly presented in future discussions on the proposals, especially those with Government.

- 19 Having a clearly defined Cheshire East position on the Liverpool to Manchester Railway will be important for the Cheshire East representative on the Board to ensure the interests of the Borough are fully considered by the Board.

Liverpool to Manchester Railway

- 20 The Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) project aims to transform the economic landscape of the North by improving connectivity, fostering growth, and enhancing the lives of residents.
- 21 Cheshire East Council has previously expressed conditional support for NPR, contingent on the prior delivery of HS2 Phases 2a and 2b and the necessary investment at Crewe railway station to support 5-7 HS2 trains per hour calling at Crewe, in each direction.
- 22 In October 2023, the then Prime Minister, announced the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham and that the funding for the Scheme would be reallocated to fund the Network North programme, identified as local transport schemes across the North and Midlands.
- 23 The Network North proposals, at that point, included a commitment to deliver the Liverpool to Manchester section of the proposed Northern Powerhouse Rail Scheme. This section would be routed via Warrington Bank Quay and Manchester Airport, with several miles of the railway passing through the Borough.
- 24 The Liverpool to Manchester railway, as currently proposed, does not include any direct connectivity benefit for the borough or any of its railway stations, despite Cheshire East expected to accommodate a significant proportion of the proposed railway and associated infrastructure.
- 25 The cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham has significantly impacted Cheshire East, particularly Crewe, which was poised to benefit from the HS2 project. These benefits are not achievable with the Liverpool to Manchester Railway, as proposed.
- 26 To date the Council has invested substantial resources into supporting HS2 and the Crewe Hub programme, and it is crucial that these efforts are not overlooked in future rail plans.
- 27 Crewe is a critical hub in the national rail network, offering 360-degree connectivity with direct services to London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Scotland, and Wales. It is one of the busiest rail junctions in the UK and serves as a key interchange hub for passengers and a strategic location for rail freight movements. Crewe's role is essential in supporting Union Connectivity and it has a rich history as one of the earliest railway towns

- 28 In March 2024, the then Secretary of State for Transport announced Government's intention to continue to promote the High Speed Rail (Crewe-Manchester) Bill as the route to consenting the section between Millington, in Cheshire East, and Manchester where previously, HS2 and NPR would have shared the same infrastructure.
- 29 As Cheshire East will continue to be directly and specifically affected by the Bill, the Council will continue to have the right to petition any future additional provisions to the Bill.
- 30 Given the expected change in scope of the Bill to now promote the Liverpool to Manchester Railway rather than Phase 2b of HS2, it is recommended that the Council looks to re-establish its overarching position and support to the Bill.
- 31 The Council should consider agreeing a set of conditions upon which provisional support to the Liverpool to Manchester Corridor would be based. These should include:
- (a) North-South connectivity: The Liverpool to Manchester Railway and wider Northern Powerhouse Rail programme must support future north-south connectivity improvements via Crewe station, solidifying its role as the Northwest regional hub and enhancing rail connections from Crewe to the North West, Midlands, West and North Wales.
 - (b) Commitment to the delivery of the required investments in Crewe station: Continued government collaboration and funding commitments to secure recommended investments in Crewe prior to, or alongside, the delivery of Liverpool to Manchester Railway, ensuring the town's future development, prosperity and economic growth.
 - (c) Provision of a Mid-Cheshire Line connection: Inclusion of a connection between the Liverpool to Manchester Railway and the Mid-Cheshire Rail Line to allow services on the Mid-Cheshire Line to travel on the Liverpool to Manchester Railway to access Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly. In addition, a commitment to at least doubling services along the Mid-Cheshire Line to improve local transport and connectivity for local stations on the route, in particular with Manchester and Manchester Airport.
 - (d) That an updated Integrated Rail Plan is published ahead of any commitments to major rail improvements: Commitment from the government to collaborate with Local Transport Authorities, including Cheshire East Council, on identifying and understanding the future rail priorities for the North and Midlands. In addition, a commitment publish an updated Integrated Rail Plan ahead of full commitment to the Liverpool

to Manchester Railway, to provide transparency and certainty of long-term rail investments.

- (e) That the benefits growth in the borough linked to the Liverpool Manchester Railway is retained by Cheshire East: A commitment from Government and Partners to a fair and equitable growth sharing mechanism such that returns generated from the Liverpool to Manchester Railway within Cheshire East are retained by the Council for reinvestment in infrastructure enhancements within the borough.
 - (f) Equal treatment: Cheshire East Council should be treated as an equal partner to other Local Authorities and Mayoral Combined Authorities along the Liverpool to Manchester Railway with parity in communication, information sharing and consultation.
 - (g) Environmental and Community Mitigations: Assurance of appropriate mitigations to address environmental and community impacts within Cheshire East and the ability to re-define petitioning points, previously raised on the Hybrid Bill to account for the significant change in benefits vs impacts for Cheshire East.
 - (h) Community Engagement: Commitment to a robust community engagement strategy, including regular consultations with local stakeholders across Cheshire East.
- 32 Establishing a clear position on the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway now, along with any conditions required to secure the Council's in principle support for the Scheme, will provide a clear and up to date reference point for members and officers moving forwards.
- 33 The Council should also consider whether it wishes to oppose the use of the former HS2 Phase 2b 'High Speed Rail (Crewe – Manchester) Bill as the consenting route for the section of Liverpool to Manchester Railway between Millington and Manchester.

Midlands-North West Rail Link – HS2 Alternative

- 34 Following the cancellation of HS2, north of Birmingham, in October 2023, the Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham, and the then West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street, (the Mayors) teamed up with a private sector consortium, including engineers, construction firms, and finance experts, led by former HS2 chairman Sir David Higgins, to develop alternative options for improved rail connectivity between the West Midlands and Manchester.
- 35 In February 2024, the mayors outlined three potential alternatives to improve rail connectivity between the Midlands and the North West, that the consortium were looking at as part of this work:

- (i) Enhancing the existing West Coast Main Line.
- (ii) Building major bypasses and upgrading the existing line.
- (iii) Constructing a completely new, segregated line at lower speeds than the original HS2

36 In September 2024, the private sector consortium, backed by the Greater Manchester Mayor and the recently elected West Midlands Mayor, Richard Parker, published a report titled ‘Opportunity through connectivity - Catalysing economic growth through a Midlands-North West Rail Link’ which set out the work that had been undertaken by the consortium and the recommendations that they will be putting forward to Government. This is included in Appendix 1 of this report.

37 In summary, the report states that the consortium has “concluded that the best path forward is a new rail line, approximately 80km in length connecting Lichfield to High Legh (and thereby linking HS2 with Northern Powerhouse Rail) – the Midlands-North West Rail Link (MNWRL)”.

38 The report claims that the “MNWRL has the potential to deliver roughly 85% of the benefits of HS2 Phase 2, at a fraction of the costs (c.60-75%)”.

39 The recommended option in the report, and the option being promoted by the consortium and the mayors is Option C.

40 Option C would introduce:

- (i) A new Staffordshire Connector between the HS2 Handsacre Junction at Lichfield and a point to the South of Crewe Station where there would be a connection back to the West Coast Main Line. The Staffordshire Connector would follow the broad alignment of HS2 Phase 2a, with several kilometres of the route passing through the south of the Borough.
- (ii) A new Cheshire Connector between a point to the north of Crewe Station and High Legh, where there would be a new connection between the Cheshire Connector and the proposed NPR Liverpool to Manchester Railway and is expected to follow the broad alignment of the HS2 Phase 2b Scheme. The majority of the proposed Cheshire Connector will be within the Borough, the remaining may fall within the boundaries of Cheshire West and Chester.
- (iii) A north-south tunnel under Crewe which is assumed to connect the northern terminus of the Staffordshire

connector with the southern terminus of the Cheshire Connector.

- 41 Option C does not include any improvements or investment at Crewe Station and the infrastructure proposals outlined above strongly indicate that the proposed route, and services, would bypass Crewe Station, with the borough unlikely to receive any direct connectivity benefit from these proposals, and in turn inhibit the potential opportunities for Cheshire East from the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway.
- 42 As such, if Government were to support these proposals as they stand, Cheshire East would likely need to endure most of the pain of these proposals, with negligible or no gain.
- 43 Whilst these proposals only appear to be in early stages of development, it is important for the Council to present a strong and clear stance regarding any HS2 alternative north-south scheme at the outset.
- 44 Similarly, the Council should consider the conditions required for the Council to support any alternative scheme to HS2 phases 2a and 2b and subsequently the use of the former HS2 Phase 2a hybrid bill powers to deliver the proposed Staffordshire Connector.

HS2 Member Reference Group

- 45 In February 2022, Full Council approved the creation of an HS2 Member Reference Group to act as a sounding board in the preparation and progression of the Council's petition against the HS2 Phase 2b hybrid bill.
- 46 Re-establishing and repurposing the Member Reference Group would provide Member input and provide input into the Council's response to the Liverpool-Manchester Railway and the alternative north-south rail link and continue to ensure the interests of Cheshire East are prioritised.
- 47 The Member Reference Group would provide a steer to officers on the priority issues that on these emerging proposals and any subsequent schemes that may affect the Borough and delivering an appropriate and timely Council response.
- 48 It is proposed that the membership and terms of reference of the Member Reference Group are amended to reflect the updated scope of the Group and the recent changes in roles within the Council administration.
- 49 A revised Terms of Reference for the Group is included in Appendix 2 to this report.

Consultation and Engagement

- 50 Consultation has not been required for the recommendations in this report.
- 51 At this early stage of the Liverpool to Manchester Railway and alternative Midlands-North West Rail Link and it is proposed that engagement relating to the recommendations in this report will primarily be undertaken through the Member Reference Group.
- 52 As further information regarding the details of the schemes and impacts on the borough are published and understood, further engagement with local ward members and town and parish councils, directly impacted by the schemes, will be undertaken which will follow the approach used when petitioning the HS2 Phase 2b hybrid bill.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 53 As was the case with the (now cancelled) HS2 Scheme, a clear Cheshire East position on both the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway and the alternative Midlands-North West Rail Link, endorsed by Full Council will be beneficial to the Council by:
- (a) Providing a clear remit for Members or Officers representing the Council on Boards, working groups and meetings relating to these schemes.
 - (b) Providing a basis in which future consultation responses and further potential petitioning will be built upon.
 - (c) Ensures Government, stakeholders and neighbouring authorities are aware of the conditions which must be met before the Council can consider offering its support to the delivery of these Schemes.
 - (d) Provides a commitment to local communities that the Council will not support the borough accepting the pain from these Schemes without a suitable gain.

Other Options Considered

- 54 The Council could not propose setting a clear and up to date position regarding the level of support to the two proposed Schemes.
- 55 In this case, the Council would have a greatly reduced voice in seeking to influence the future development of the Scheme and negotiating any future petitions.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

56 There are no direct legal implications of this report. However, the Council's legal team will be engaged throughout the negotiations and legal advice should be sought where necessary.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

57 There are no direct financial implications with this report. However, if further work is needed to support the Council's position or promote the investments needed at Crewe Station will be funded from the existing Rail and Transport Integration budget.

Policy

58 There are no direct policy implications with this report.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

59 There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications with this report.

Human Resources

60 There are no direct human resource implications with this report with work to support the Member Reference Group will be undertaken using existing resources.

Risk Management

61 There are no direct risk management implications with this report.

Rural Communities

62 Having an updated position regarding the two proposed Schemes following the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham will ensure the Council is in a much stronger position to seek to minimise the impacts of the Schemes, should they be delivered, on impacted rural communities.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

63 There are no direct implications with this report.

Public Health

64 There are no direct implications with this report.

Climate Change

65 There are no direct implications with this report.

Access to Information

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Appendices:	Appendix 1: Opportunity through connectivity - Catalysing economic growth through a Midlands-North West Rail Link Appendix 2: Revised Member Reference Group Terms of Reference
Background Papers:	None.