



Cheshire & Warrington Local Transport Body

Date of Meeting: Friday 10 December 2021
Report of: Steve Hunter – Transport for Warrington Service Manager
Subject/Title: Integrated Rail Plan and Union Connectivity Review Update

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 This briefing is intended to summarise the key points for Cheshire and Warrington in the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) published by the Government on Thursday 18th November and the Union Connectivity Review which was published on Friday 25th November.
- 1.2 The TRP can be found via the this link: [Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101424/integrated-rail-plan-for-the-north-and-midlands.pdf) and the Union Connectivity Review can be found at this link: [Union Connectivity Review \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101424/union-connectivity-review.pdf)

2. Summary of the Implications for Cheshire and Warrington

- 2.1 Within the IRP, the Government has set out a plan with an overall spend of £96bn being proposed on strategic rail schemes across the Midlands and North of England. However, this is some £40bn less than the funding sought for the delivery of HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) in full, which has been proposed by Transport for the North – the statutory sub national transport body representing the 20 Local Transport Authorities across the north of England.
- 2.2 It is clear as a result that there is considerable disappointment in the IRP not including full provision of HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail and Transport for the North passed a motion at its recent Board meeting held on Wednesday 24th November to seek urgent discussions with the Government to seek changes to the IRP. In particular this is to address parts of the network where it is proposed to improve existing lines rather than build new lines such as Liverpool to Warrington, Marsden to Leeds via Bradford and that the HS2 Eastern leg is only proposed to directly connect Birmingham with East Midlands Parkway, not extending to Sheffield and Leeds.
- 2.3 However there are a number of positive implications for Cheshire and Warrington of both the IRP and Union Connectivity Review, which are summarised below. In terms of specific points:

A.) HS2 Phase 2B Crewe to Manchester and Golborne Link

- The IRP says, **“We will build High Speed 2 (HS2) from Crewe to Manchester... on the route and line speed as previously planned with new stations at Manchester Airport and Manchester Piccadilly.”**
- It also says that **“Our plans allow the Crewe Hub vision to be realised, with up to 5–7 HS2 trains per hour able to call at Crewe which would also enhance connectivity to much of the West Midlands, Cheshire and North Wales not directly served by HS2.”**
- Further to the above points it also says that **“The Union Connectivity Review is considering the case for alternatives to the Golborne Spur for faster and higher capacity connections from HS2 services to Scotland.”** and

In terms of the impact across the Cheshire and Warrington sub region it is welcomed that the Crewe Hub and Crewe North Connection are included in the IRP (final confirmation of the Crewe North Connection is dependent on the Government publishing its response to the recent Design Refinement Consultation, but the IRP does confirm funding is included for it).

In addition passive provision will be made on the Crewe to Manchester line for the new NPR line to connect to Warrington – see below for more details on this – this should be welcomed also.

With regard to the Golborne Link the Union Connectivity Review makes the following recommendation: **“The UK Government should: Reduce rail journey times and increase rail capacity between Scotland and London, the Midlands and North West England by upgrading the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe and reviewing options for alternative northerly connections between HS2 and the West Coast Main Line.”**

It also states that there is a possibility that an alternative connection could be made south of Preston and also that improvements to the West Coast Main Line north of Crewe to Scotland should be considered. Officers will need to seek further information and clarification on this from Government.

B.) On Northern Powerhouse Rail Serving Cheshire and Warrington

- The IRP states that, **“On Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), we will build a new high speed line between Warrington, Manchester and Yorkshire... finishing east of the Standedge tunnels.”**
- It also states that, **“NPR trains will use fully electrified, expanded and upgraded conventional lines between Liverpool and Warrington, and from the east of Standedge tunnels to Leeds. Trains will run from Manchester to Leeds in 33 minutes, 22 minutes faster than now.**
- The IRP states that this new line will connect HS2 with the centre of Warrington with the **“reinstatement of Warrington Bank Quay low level station; upgrading and electrifying existing lines between Warrington and Liverpool; and enhancing Liverpool Lime Street station”**.
- This would involve the use of the Fiddlers Ferry Freight line from Warrington Bank Quay to the Ditton area with the route to Liverpool then using the west coast main line to Lime Street station.

This is positive news for Cheshire and Warrington – this means for example trains could connect Warrington to Leeds in 45 minutes – half the current journey time.

It would also mean the London to Liverpool HS2 services would route via Warrington Bank Quay low level station and NPR services across the north of England would all serve Warrington. Indeed the IRP states that **“there is a strong business case for serving Warrington, in terms of both conventional transport appraisal and supporting economic growth.”**

However it would not provide new line from Warrington to Liverpool and it also makes clear that it would involve improvements to the existing Lime Street Station and that if a new station is built in Liverpool it would have to be funded locally – this is an area where we must recognise that the overall package offered by Government is less than sought – i.e. the IRP proposals advocate using existing lines from Warrington to Liverpool rather than a new line and using the existing Lime Street Station rather than a new station.

Further to the above the IRP also states that:

“Subject to final decisions, and future anticipated route consultation, the Government therefore considers that development work should focus on:

- **Reinstating the low level platforms at Warrington Bank Quay station in Warrington town centre, which would allow passengers to interchange with WCML services on the High Level platforms, and better align with regeneration plans compared with alternative options**
- **Electrifying and upgrading the Fiddlers Ferry route to Liverpool; and**
- **Altering the existing Lime Street station and approaches. Any proposals for a new station being considered by Liverpool City Region would need to be locally funded.”**

In terms of what route the new line will take from Warrington to Marsden the IRP states that **“The Government is asking HS2 Ltd to take forward route selection for the section of new line from the existing HS2 route to Warrington, for inclusion in a future hybrid Bill.”**

This section of route will connect the ‘touchpoints on HS2 in the High Legh area with Warrington Bank Quay Low Level Station – the **IRP states that route selection work will need to take place to confirm the precise route of this line.**

It is recommended that officers press for this route selection work to be started as quickly as possible and that that full consultation and engagement with the public and stakeholders forms part of this process.

And further to the above it is also important to note that the potential would exist with a new Warrington Bank Quay Low Level Station that it could be designed in such a way as to facilitate NPR services connecting

with Chester via the Warrington to Chester line – it is recommended this is taken into account in the design work for the station.

C.) On Timescales and Programme of Delivery of the IRP

The IRP does not on a first read contain much in the way of information on the precise phasing and delivery dates for the above proposals.

What is clear is that a Hybrid Bill is to be deposited for HS2 Phase 2B from Crewe to Manchester early in 2022. Assuming this Bill takes a typical 3 years from submission to Royal Assent – this could be achieved by 2025 – construction would then depend on progress on Phase 1 and Phase 2A of HS2.

What the IRP states is this will be the first of 3 Hybrid Bills – The IRP states that:

“Also indicatively, the programme for introducing future hybrid Bills in Parliament could be:

- **Western Leg [from Crewe] to Manchester;**
- **High speed line to East Midlands (HS2 East);**
- **NPR connections to Warrington and the Transpennine route to Huddersfield.”**

Therefore potentially the new NPR route from Warrington to the Yorkshire border could be delivered as a later phase – although the IRP does say that HS2’s executive team has been strengthened to deal with this workload of Hybrid Bills.

As a result, there is **currently uncertainty as to the potential timeline for the delivery of the NPR route from Warrington to the Transpennine route to Huddersfield** and further clarity is being sought on this – an early indication was given at a Transport for the North Board meeting is that this could be delivered in line with Transport for the North’s aspirations during the mid to late 2030s, though this is subject to confirmation.

Attached to this briefing as Appendix A is a copy of the Core Network diagram taken from the Integrated Rail Plan document – to which a link is provided at the start of this briefing.

3. Union Connectivity Review

- 3.1 The implications of this review on connections to Scotland were set out in section 2 of this report, with the further investigations to take place examining potential alternatives to the Golborne Link and improvements to the West Coast Main Line from Crewe to Scotland.
- 3.2 What is equally significant for Cheshire and Warrington is what the review says about connections to Wales. Recommendation 7 states that **“the UK Government should: Work with the Welsh Government to undertake a multimodal review of the North Wales transport corridor, and develop a package of improvements focused on the North Wales Main Line (including better connectivity with HS2, and electrification), the A55, the M53, M56, and onward travel to and from the island of Ireland.”**

- 3.3 It will be important for officers to seek further information into the detail of this recommendation, in particular the statement in the report where it states that multi modal solutions should be pursued. There certainly seems to be potential to look to pursue electrification and line speed improvements from Crewe to Holyhead and the substantial improvements which are needed at Chester Station – with this facilitating HS2 services to be able to directly serve Chester and North Wales.
- 3.4 Further to the above, of equal relevance to Cheshire and Warrington is within a section entitled Welsh Marches Corridor, Recommendation 9 states that **“The UK Government should: Develop a package of railway improvements to increase connectivity and reduce journey times between Cardiff, Birmingham and beyond, which could include better rolling stock, timetable changes and enhanced infrastructure.”**
- 3.5 Despite the figure showing connections further north from Shrewsbury and Crewe to Liverpool and Manchester the report makes no specific reference to increasing connectivity (or capacity, including for rail freight) and reducing rail journey times between Cardiff, Shrewsbury, Wrexham, Chester and Liverpool / Wirral. It is recommended that officers will need to seek further information and clarification on this from Government in collaboration with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 That the CWLTB notes the publication and content of the Integrated Rail Plan and Union Connectivity Review and their implications for Cheshire and Warrington and across the North of England and the Midlands and also for wider connectivity between the sub region and Wales and Scotland.
- 4.2 That officers will be seeking further clarity on these implications as set out in this report and also feeding into discussions between Transport for the North and the Department for Transport regarding them.
- 4.3 That updates on both of these matters will be provided at future meetings of the CWLTB providing proposals for further engagement with Government to unlock further substantial opportunities.

Appendix A

Integrated Rail Plan Core Network