

Why Jeremy Hunt must commit to electrifying Midland Mainline and decent rail links between Coventry, Leicester and Nottingham

The new Government must not drop a promise of electrifying the Midland Mainline and commit to improving east-west rail links across the Midlands.

That is the call from campaigners who are urging Jeremy Hunt not to take his eye off a string of big projects that could cut congestion and CO2 emissions and bring vital business into the region. The new Chancellor will reveal his economic plan on November 17.

Transport for the East Midlands, which brings together nine councils across the region, and Midlands Connect – a division of the Midlands Engine – have drawn up a wish list of eight schemes they say help prop up the regional economy as the country faces one of the toughest economic periods ever.

They claim the region has [missed out on billions of investment](#) under both Labour and Tory governments since the turn of the century – which has seen transport spending drop from around 80 per cent of the UK average per person in 2001/2 to around 65 per cent today.

Their list include funding the on-then-off-the-on-again plans to [electrify the Midland Mainline](#) north of Market Harborough.

After pausing the plans in 2015, then cancelling them in 2017, the Government's 2021 Integrated Rail Plan re-committed to electrify the line up to Leicester, Derby, Nottingham and

Sheffield by the early 2030s.

The investment will enable East Midlands's Rail's new Aurora Class intercity trains to run in electric mode – providing the wires south of Bedford are upgraded from 100mph to 125mph.

The campaigners are also calling for improvements to the [poor rail services linking Coventry with Leicester and Nottingham](#). There has been no direct link between Coventry and the two East Midlands cities for almost two decades.

Midlands Connect recently put forward plans that would see direct services brought back with a new route through Nuneaton.

Once in place, the changes would allow a direct, twice hourly service between Coventry and Leicester, cutting journey times from 54 to just 38 minutes. It will also create new links from Coventry to Loughborough, East Midlands Parkway and Nottingham.

Journey times from Coventry to Nottingham would also be cut from 108 minutes to 70 minutes – a 35 per cent reduction.

Other priorities included enhancements to the A46 Growth Corridor, improving safety and reliability on the A1, and improvements to the 56 mile A50/A500 Corridor running from Derby to Stoke.

Campaigners also want to see money spent on the A5 Growth Corridor, [the delivery of HS2 to the East Midlands and Leeds](#) and improving connectivity across EMDevCo and East Midlands Freeport areas.

Leicester Mayor and TfEM chairman Sir Peter Soulsby said investment in transport would support the Government's the Levelling Up agenda among other things.

He said: "There is uncertainty around the impact that the upcoming budget will have on public sector spending generally,

but it's imperative that the East Midlands does not fall behind any further when it comes to transport funding.

"At present, if the East Midlands was funded at a level equivalent to the national average, it would have an extra £1.26 billion per year to spend on transport.

"Our priorities set out a clear opportunity for growth and investment in the region, and now is the time for the Chancellor to solidify this Government's commitments laid out in the Integrated Rail Plan almost one year ago, including the continued electrification of the Midland Main Line, the only mainline route yet to be fully electrified."

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