

£53 million line upgrade to help make midlands railways fit for the future

- Rail Minister Andrew Jones sees £53.3 million of Market Harborough station improvements including longer platforms, creating more seats and improved journey times
- investment forms part of the government's £1.5 billion Midland Main Line upgrade – the biggest upgrade of the line since it was completed in 1870
- Rail Minister also meets Midlands Connect to receive Business Case for Midlands Rail Hub, targeted at boosting economy and delivering better journeys

Rail Minister Andrew Jones today (27 June 2019) celebrated significant progress towards delivering better journeys for rail passengers across the Midlands, as he visited upgrades worth more than £53 million at Market Harborough Station.

Passengers are already benefitting from improved accessibility thanks to the instillation of a new footbridge and new lifts. The station also now boasts 300 new car parking spaces, set to be extended to 500 by the end of the year.

The minister also saw progress being made on two extended platforms, enabling new, longer trains to run through the station and provide passengers with more seats. This follows the replacement and straightening of 4km of curved tracks, improving speeds and journey times.

The Rail Minister also met with Midlands Connect, the sub-national transport body for the region, to receive their strategic outline business case for the Midlands Rail Hub. Supported by £5 million of funding from the Department for Transport, the proposal aims to enable more East-West train services across the region, creating space for 6 million more journeys a year and supporting an extra £649 million of growth.

Rail Minister Andrew Jones, said:

The transformative upgrade of the Midland Line is coming to life, focused on delivering significantly better journeys for rail passengers right across the region.

Through key upgrades at stations like Market Harborough, the arrival of a new fleet with more seats, and trials of innovative hydrogen-fuelled trains, we are creating a railway that is fit for the future.

The Midlands Rail Hub also has huge potential to future proof the region's railway by significantly increasing capacity on the network. I am delighted to receive these proposals, which we will

now consider closely.

Midlands Connect Chair Sir John Peace, said:

The Midlands Rail Hub is a cost-effective, evidence-led plan to upgrade our infrastructure to meet the demands of the future. These proposals capture the enormous economic potential of the Midlands, with 320,000 new jobs estimated by 2030, mainly in professional services firms who depend on good rail connectivity to attract skilled workers.

This investment must happen alongside delivering HS2 in its entirety, from the West Midlands to the East Midlands and on to the north of England, and I look forward to working with the government as they consider our proposals.

Gavin Crook, Principal Programme Sponsor for Network Rail, said:

The work at Market Harborough is a vital stage of the Midland Main Line Upgrade, which will improve journeys for all passengers using the route.

The project has seen the line through the station straightened, which will enable trains to travel at higher speeds. Work has also taken place to install a new accessible footbridge, which will open up travel opportunities for more passengers. We are also lengthening platforms at the station which will allow longer trains with more seats to call there.

We continue to work at Market Harborough station on the creation of 200 additional car parking spaces and to complete the platform lengthening work, which will bring further benefits.

The upgrades at Market Harborough form part of a £1.5 billion investment into the Midland Main Line, targeted at creating more seats and reducing environmental impacts between Sheffield, Nottingham and London – opening new opportunities for businesses, jobs, education and housing.

The improvements to Market Harborough station follow a recent £200 million upgrade to Derby station in 2018 to improve signalling and infrastructure, and a brand new accessible station delivered in Ikeston. Two further stations – Retford and Alfreton Parkway in the East Midlands – are also set to receive station improvements in the next 5 years.

The government also recently announced that Abellio will operate the next East Midlands Railway franchise, entirely replacing the existing intercity fleet with more reliable and comfortable trains.

Passengers will see an 80% increase in the number of peak morning seats into Nottingham, Lincoln and St Pancras, improved delay repay compensation and trials of hydrogen fuel cell trains.