

Heidi Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

My Ref: MM/TK 007

Date: 16 January 2026

Dear Heidi

RE: Birmingham to Manchester rail line announcement

I am writing to express my deep concern at the Government's recent announcement regarding the future rail connectivity proposals between Birmingham and Manchester. This announcement was made without prior engagement with the Council, and it follows a concerning pattern in which decisions have been announced with little or no direct dialogue with the County Council, despite our efforts over the past two years to establish effective, meaningful and constructive engagement on this matter.

The Council has repeatedly sought a dialogue with Ministers, officials, and the Mayors of Birmingham and Greater Manchester. However, regrettably, these attempts have been met largely with standardised or holding responses, rather than meaningful dialogue. Whilst we appreciate this is a complex policy matter and analysis and decisions take time, the approach to date has undermined the collaborative working which is essential for nationally significant infrastructure planning and delivery.

The Council remains committed to acting constructively and professionally, but we will not allow Staffordshire to be cut through, cut out or forgotten. Our communities have endured years of disruption and destruction due to the failed and mis handled HS2 programme, and the absence of detail accompanying the latest announcement leaves residents and businesses facing further uncertainty - potentially for the next decade and beyond. This is unacceptable, and clarity is urgently required.

Like you, I want to see growth and new job opportunities, and I agree that investing in our ageing rail infrastructure will be critical to achieving this. However, growth and prosperity cannot come at the expense of Staffordshire.



Staffordshire is a proud, historic, thriving and beautiful county which makes a huge contribution to the national economy, and there is great potential for further growth. However, I am firm that Staffordshire cannot be cut through without substantial material and environmental benefits which appropriately mitigate and compensate communities affected by the project. I will not allow Staffordshire to be the forgotten county again.

As you know, the Council opposed HS2 however it delivered its statutory role in a pragmatic, professional and timely manner. My administration remains firm in this opposition; however, we are committed to working in a constructive manner with all stakeholders towards maximum mitigation and benefit for any future programme.

In light of this, we request immediate, meaningful and ongoing engagement with the Department, beginning with an urgent meeting between to discuss the vision and potential impact and benefits of the scheme for Staffordshire.

In addition, just because the county is not represented by an elected mayor and combined authority does not mean it can be ignored and forgotten. The County Council is supportive of devolution and the benefits it could unlock for the area, and we are seeking a productive dialogue with your government colleagues on this matter; however, I am realistic and appreciate it may take time to be implemented.

Therefore, in the longer term as the project is developed, and given the scale of the potential impact of this project on Staffordshire, I request that the County Council is treated as a key strategic partner in the same way as the mayors of the surrounding combined authorities. This should also include a formal seat for the County Council on the project steering group or equivalent governance body, to ensure our county's interests are properly represented in forward planning.

Full transparency is essential if we are to fulfil our statutory responsibilities and provide appropriate leadership for the communities we represent. The Council remains committed to constructive engagement, but it is now vital that this approach is reciprocated by your department and others.

I would be grateful if you could confirm the Department's next steps and provide proposed dates for an initial meeting at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Murray'.

Martin Murray
Acting Leader
Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills

cc Lord Hendy, Minister of State for Rail