

BRTA - British Regional Transport Association

Sustainable Britain Needs Re-Railing

HEADLINE POSSIBILITIES

“Local MPs support plan to relink Northampton, Kettering and Market Harborough by rail.”

“Slash journey times, congestion and pollution by reopening railway, say campaigners.”

“MPs get behind plan to connect Northampton and Kettering in under 18 minutes.”

Fast, direct and regular trains should once again link Northampton with Leicestershire and the East Midlands, according to a growing group of supporters and campaigners. By reopening the stretch of railway between Market Harborough and Northampton, known as N2MH, journeys would be made speedier, cleaner and greener, taking vehicles off the area’s congested roads.

“The change to people’s journeys would be huge,” says Professor Andrew Williams, who is leading the campaign. “Imagine going from Northampton to Leicester in under 34 minutes. At the moment it takes more than 100 minutes by rail and passengers need to change twice. The journey by road is hardly any better, especially during rush hour. Frankly, it’s unacceptable for a journey of only 31 miles between major urban centres. Northampton loses out economically, socially and environmentally.”

The team of campaigners reference a report made by Network Rail in 2020 on reopening the line.

Professor Williams states, “It was hugely encouraging - with a full reopening being possible and a 34 minute Northampton to Leicester journey time given. N2MH aligns with so many regional and national aims and policies, such as Invest 2035. Unfortunately, there were many omissions and a more in-depth study is needed to move the scheme forward.”

The team are demanding a full economic analysis of the economic benefits to Northamptonshire, East Midlands region and nationally and a complete assessment of

environmental and wellbeing benefits for Market Harborough, Kettering and Northampton.

Regional MPs have joined sustainable transport campaigners in calling for a full investigation into the reopening of the link, which was in use until 1981. Mike Reader, MP for Northampton South, said: "I support the campaign for an updated and completed assessment to reopening N2MH. If we are to unlock growth and opportunity in Northampton, every avenue must be explored, including the N2MH development."

The railway's route is largely intact having been saved from development thanks to the Brampton Valley Way cycle and walking path, which makes use of the course of the closed line. Enthusiast-run Northampton and Lamport Heritage Railway have also restored a short section of the track to run trains for visitors. Professor Williams commented: "We want to see a new and complete environmental, ecological and engineering study, making sure these important local amenities can coexist, and even be enhanced, alongside a reopened transport link fit for the 21st century."

The rerailing scheme will rely on a new junction with the Midland Main Line, just south-east of Market Harborough, where trains from Northampton will be able to go north into Leicestershire or turn south towards Kettering and Corby.

"Travellers within Northamptonshire would benefit hugely from N2MH," adds Professor Williams. "Everything points to a Northampton to Kettering journey taking less than 18 minutes - currently it's nearly 2 hours by rail and an hour-and-a-quarter by bus. They're only 14 miles apart! I foresee additional health benefits too -by linking Leicester, Northampton and Kettering, whose hospitals are under a single Trust, Northamptonshire patients without access to cars will no longer be so socially disadvantaged and inconvenienced in attending hospital appointments."

Campaigners for the reopening of the line have created a short video to explain the scheme in more detail. It's being shared on social media and at: brtarail.com/n2mh

New proposals made in February by government advisers England's Economic Heartlands for a new railway from west London's Old Oak Common to Northampton mean that N2MH's potential benefits could be even greater, say campaigners.

Organising the campaign is the British Regional Transport Association, who advocate for sustainable transport. They're urging local people to get involved. Mr Richard Pill, leading BRTA emphasised, "we need our MPs and councillors to hear how this rail link would transform people's lives - the potential impacts on location, employment, leisure and education choices - how it would inspire less reliance on road travel."

The team have created a simple guide to writing to MPs and councillors at brtarail.com/n2mh

END OF RELEASE

Information for Editors:

PUBLIC CONTACTS and LINKS:

brtarail.com/n2mh

brtarail.com/team-contact/

N2MH explainer video: youtu.be/qk242P5luTs

www.facebook.com/RebuildNorthampton2MarketHarboroughRailLink

For enquiries about membership and volunteer opportunities with BRTA see:

brtarail.com/become-a-member

membership@brtarail.com

DOWNLOAD IMAGES FOR PRESS / SOCIAL MEDIA:

Neil O'Brien with N2MH campaign T shirt

<https://brtarail.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Neil-O'Brien-MP-for-Harborough-Oadby-Wigston-with-his-Rebuild-Northampton-MH-Rail-Link-N2MH-t-shirt-1.jpeg>

Mike Reader MP and Dr Andrew Williams with N2MH campaign T shirts

<https://brtarail.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/MP-Mike-Reader-for-Northampton-South-admires-his-Rebuild-Northampton-MH-Rail-Link-N2MH-t-shirt-right-with-N2MH-campaigner-Dr-Andrew-Williams-left-2-e1740493307581.jpg>

PRESS CONTACT ONLY:

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For more detailed briefing document:

<https://brtarail.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/N2MH-Campaign-notes-to-interested-parties.pdf>

About BRTA

The British Regional Transport Association (BRTA) is a voluntary, membership-based public transport improvement association.

INFORMATION ENDS

N2MH REFERENCE DOCUMENT FOR EDITORS

BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- Enables economic growth
- Enhances accessibility and inclusion
- Promotes quality of life and environment

THE REGIONAL PROBLEM

- The distance between Northampton and Leicester is 31 miles or 50 km.
- Currently that journey takes over 100 minutes by rail with two changes in Rugby and Nuneaton.
- The same journey is over 90 minutes by bus.

Rail connectivity from Northamptonshire is London-centric. Rail connectivity between the West Coast Mainline and the Midland Mainline in the Northamptonshire area is very poor, with very few options to travel from one to the other, without various interchanges.

This makes the rail network an unattractive mode of travel for the region, specifically for those from Northampton and surrounding areas whose only options involve long, complicated journeys and various interchanges to travel to the East Midlands via rail.

East West Rail is offering a connection 20 miles south of this proposed route, so does not offer a realistic alternative for those travelling from Northampton and would still mean multiple interchanges for rail users accessing locations such as Leicester and Loughborough.

A journey by rail within the county of Northamptonshire:

- Northampton to Kettering: 14 miles / 22.5km
- Currently by rail: 1hr 57 mins, 2 changes via Bletchley and Bedford
- Peak-time bus: 1hr 16 mins

HOUSING AND POPULATION GROWTH

“...to support development in Northamptonshire of higher quality, value and density”

Planned development in the Northamptonshire area: to make it a more attractive place to work and live must be supported by improved transport links in and out of Northampton and from the surrounding areas.

Kettering is one of the fastest growing areas of the UK, with a growing population and a local plan that supports the provision of c.16,200 new jobs by 2031, the connectivity to this area is critical for its success.

Corby is set to be one of the fastest growing populations in the UK, with the potential for additional housing in the area, it could set the population of North Northamptonshire to grow even more, with a 24.5% increase by 2031.

ROAD: NO ALTERNATIVE

The roads in the region are proving to be unreliable and offer little resilience, and there is an expectation that they will be operating over capacity in the future years (by 2041).

Due to the predominance of North-South connections, and lack of East-West connections in rail travel, the road network across the region is a more attractive mode of travel for those travelling between key economic areas in the region and those in the East Midlands.

Although travelling by road is in theory quicker and, in most cases, easier than rail due to poor journey opportunities and the need to interchange, congestion causes road journey times in the peak to be at least 15-35 minutes longer compared to non-peak times, depending on the origin and destination.

This suggests that, at peak times, there is no “easy option” for those travelling between the regions and improvements are required to make the journeys more attractive.

The road network is already heavily congested and doesn't offer an easy journey from areas in the region to the East Midlands. Although the region has a number of proposals for road upgrades and new road connections, this is only taking the pressure off an already congested road network and offers better East to West road journeys. The road proposals are primarily to support the housing growth planned for the area, however the increase in housing will continue to add pressure to the roads and the wider transport network, and in the long term this is not sustainable or compatible with the 2050 carbon requirements.

THE IMPACT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

Northampton is the region's main hub for employment and retail, it has a population of over 210,000 and is home to various large businesses such as Carlsberg, Avon, Barclaycard and Panasonic, as well as the University of Northampton and Northampton General Hospital

The North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (NNJCS) has identified that a significant deficiency in the employment, services and facilities available for an area with a population of over 318,000 (forecast to grow to at least 382,000 by 2031) has resulted in North Northamptonshire losing significant wealth and skilled people. According to the 2011 census, 31% of the area's labour force was commuting to centres outside North Northamptonshire, with a high dependency on car use to get them to their places of work.

This is only set to increase, if the housing growth is not matched with better transport links to the key economic centres outside the area. Car use dominates as a transport mode, being used for 69% of trips to work (Census, 2011), which is heavily contributing to the congestive problems on the strategic road network in and out of Northampton and surrounding areas.

Doing nothing to support travel in the area will increase the impact of the housing and population growth that is planned and projected for the area on the current transport network. In order to boost the economy and improve the productivity of the area, transport modes must be improved to serve the city.

THE POTENTIAL OF N2MH

- A reopened N2MH railway would create a Northampton to Market Harborough journey of under 18 minutes.
- It would create a Northampton to Leicester journey of 34 minutes or less.
- A reopened N2MH railway would transform commuting and provide cleaner air in Northampton and Market Harborough and decarbonised journeys.
- It would produce greater economic opportunity and reduce transport inequality.
- A reopened N2MH railway would provide fast connections to Leicester, Loughborough, Derby, Nottingham and Sheffield and an opportunity for London to Edinburgh services via Northampton and Leicester.
- After the reopening of the Milton Keynes to Oxford line in 2025, N2MH would offer fast links from Nottingham to Oxford via Northampton.
- N2MH would transform journeys between Northampton, Kettering and Corby.
- A journey from Northampton to Kettering could be achieved in under 18 minutes when, presently, by rail it is 1 hour 57 minutes.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The amended Climate Change Act 2019 sets out the legal duty to cut greenhouse gas emissions to “net zero” by 2050. With transport accounting for a quarter of emissions in 2016, there is a need to support the role that heavy rail can play in decarbonisation.

Electrification will take diesel trains off the network and replace them with environmentally friendly alternatives, but there is growing recognition that decarbonisation includes other methods such as modal shift to public transport away from single passenger car use, that can contribute massively to support the targets of the UK Government’s Industrial Strategy.

Further rail links outside of Northampton town centre may encourage Park and Ride users to drive to out-of-town centre stations, further reducing congestion and emissions in an already road congested area.

Strategies must be in line with the environmental targets set by the UK government to tackle climate change.

Emphasis on the role public transport will play in driving the economy, accelerating productivity, creating opportunities and shaping sustainable growth in a way that supports environmental net gain.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO GROWTH

Continued success of their regions has to be supported by removing barriers to growth, addressed by aligning transport investment with the delivery of planned economic and housing growth.

HEALTH / SOCIAL

Poor air quality is amongst the greatest health threats in West Northamptonshire.

The British Heart Foundation attributed 1 in 20 deaths in Northampton to air pollution in 2017 and predicted air pollution would cause 1,700 deaths in Northamptonshire before 2030.

Further research is urgently required to determine for Northampton the health benefits through reduced air pollution, increased economic activity and reduced poverty that would occur with N2MH reopening.

HOW RAIL FITS IN THE PICTURE

Midlands Connect Strategy “Powering the Midlands Engine”, published in March 2017:

To drive economic growth, we want to see that our rail network provides:

- Direct and fast links between our key economic centres, national and international destinations
- Sufficient capacity to accommodate the volumes of freight and passengers needed to support our growing economy
- Reliable journey times for people and freight
- Capacity to carry all the freight and people that we want to – off peak everyone gets a seat, no more than 20 minutes standing in peak and sufficient rail freight capacity

N2MH: THE 2020 REPORT

A 2020 Network rail report on reopening N2MH was incomplete. Reduction in private care usage was not given. A study into estimated reductions in CO₂ emissions was not undertaken.

Passenger and freight estimates were calculated but not included in the 2020 report. Freedom of Information Act requests for this information have been refused on commercial grounds, even though the railway track was removed in the early 1980s.

The British Regional Transport Association (BRTA) projects that 4 million passengers would use the N2MH service annually.

All UK rail reopenings so far have exceeded their most optimistic estimates.

[To download the report, click here.](#)

N2MH: INVESTMENT

N2MH is an ideal candidate for Invest 2035: the UK's modern industrial strategy. As well as furthering decarbonisation, N2MH would bring high quality infrastructure and connectivity to the region.

As invest 2035 states, "a resilient safe and secure transport network provides access to social and economic opportunity and is fundamental to business investment and location decisions."

N2MH: THE ROUTE

The Northampton to Market Harborough line was in active use until August 1981.

The project would need to ensure that:

- the Brampton Valley Way and its linear park can be preserved and, indeed, enhanced alongside the railway.
- the future of the Northampton and Lamport Heritage Railway is preserved.
- a full economic and health assessment is conducted.
- carbon capture opportunities are maximised.

The 2020 Network Rail Feasibility report specifically omitted commenting on the Brampton Valley Way. A fully civil engineered solution is required so that it is not only preserved as a continuous path between Northampton and Market Harborough but is, indeed, enhanced.

Concerning the Northampton and Lamport Heritage railway - this was also deliberately omitted from the 2020 Network Rail Report. The popular attraction and project must be preserved.

N2MH: THE NEXT STEPS

What a new report into N2MH must consider:

- Reduction in pollution
- Estimated health benefits for Northampton and Market Harborough
- Estimated freight and passenger usage
- Carbon offset calculations
- Brampton Valley Way protection and enhancement
- Northampton and Lamport Steam Railway preservation
- Full economic analysis of economic benefits to Northamptonshire, East Midlands region and nationally.

N2MH: THE POSITIVE VOICE

The key argument that is being deployed against N2MH is that it is 'not something that Northamptonshire politicians, businesses or people want'.

However there is not one piece of demonstrable evidence that this is the case. The BRTA challenges that this evidence can be found and presented.

The British Regional Transport Association (BRTA) merely seeks that, for the first time, a complete and updated assessment on reopening N2MH is undertaken and that it is all made public.

The BRTA believes that the reduction of Northampton to Leicester journey time from over 100 minutes to 34 minutes, as well as offering a Northampton to Kettering journey time from 1 hour 57 minutes to under 18 minutes, would be transformative for Northampton and the health and wider economy of Northamptonshire.

Canvassing members of the public since 2022, the BRTA has encountered almost universal support for N2MH when these travel times have been mentioned and disappointment that the opportunity of making a fully comprehensive report was not taken earlier.

N2MH: BRTA CONTACTS

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