

CONNECTING INTO HS2

For the next decade at least, public transport spending in and around the conurbation will be dominated by connectivity to HS2. The ITA envisages almost £1.6 billion, with £780 million of it on two metro schemes. Out of its 20 schemes, the Number 1 transport priority is a metro line along the Bordesley Green / Chelmsley Wood corridor from the central Birmingham HS2 station [Curzon] to the HS2 station near the airport, UK Central Interchange. At £410 million, it has a Benefit to Cost Ratio [BCR] of 2.4.

The other metro scheme, at number 4 in the priority list, is Wednesbury to Brierley Hill, costing £310 million with a BCR of >2. How this relates to the Dudley/University of Warwick very light rail plans is unclear.

Heavy rail accounts for £460.7 million, more than half of which [£240m] is the Camp Hill Chords. It is suggested they will allow direct trains into Moor Street, adjacent to Curzon, from Cardiff, Bristol, Hereford, Tamworth and Leicester – a strange collection of services. This is Priority Number 2 and claims a BCR of 4.7. The rest of the heavy rail proposals are an odd assortment. At Number 3 is £103m to increase capacity through the bottleneck at Water Orton.

At 9, it's reclaiming Platform 4 at Snow Hill after the metro extension opens and providing a bay platform at Rowley Regis for short workings from the Stourbridge Line [£20.5m, BCR 1.6 – 1.8]. A new station at Aldridge and electrification from Walsall is Number 13, costing £23.2m – no BCR given. Then at 17, speed improvements on the Chase Line is listed at £14m [BCR >2] and, 18 is



electrification from Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury, suggested at £60m. Curiously, it assumes the Snow Hill lines, the Chiltern route to London and Bristol to Derby will all have wired before Shrewsbury but does not propose or cost any of them.

Most of the rest of the spending [£341.85m] is allocated to SPRINT, bendibuses with cladding to make them look like trams. They have been tried in York, Leeds and Swansea, where each scheme has failed. Our first run will be along Birmingham's Hagley Road, with the intention of eventually reaching Halesowen. Will Birmingham somehow succeed or will it be money that should have been spent on light rail instead?

Words and photo: Keith Flinders