

WHERE HS2 MEETS WCML



The media often, incorrectly, refer to Phase 1 of HS2 as London to Birmingham. Birmingham though will be at the end of a branch from Coleshill. Phase 1 however ends here, four miles north west of Lichfield Trent Valley near Handsacre. Phase 2 continues towards Manchester from a junction with Phase 1 two miles before Handsacre Junction is reached, so this most northerly part of Phase 1 will become 'The Handsacre Link'. It is due to open in 2026 and Phase 2 was to open in 2033 but a sensible decision was to speed up construction of the section to Crewe [Phase 2a] now due for opening in 2027.

If this timetable is met, the Handsacre Link will be busy with about eleven trains an hour each way in a day for only one year. Then it will become a very expensive line for one train an hour so that Stafford can be served by an HS2 train!

The photo is looking north towards Handsacre where the HS2 tracks will come in from the right. The Pendolino is on the Down WCML Fast line and the 350 is on the Up Slow. Tracks here are signalled for bidirectional working which will be very useful during construction. The plan is to build new Up WCML Fast and Slow lines 30 metres to the right of the existing tracks. HS2 will cross these by a bridge 14 metres high and 150 metres long, dropping down into the space between Up and Down WCML tracks, to connect to the existing Fast lines 400 metres further on. Junction points will be for 125 mph each way, the speed on the HS2 lines being 225 mph.

Bourn Brook which flows across the middle of the photo will be bridged by HS2 on a viaduct 200 metres long and the land to the right of the Class 350 will be a balancing lake to reduce flood risk to a once in 200 year risk.

Words and photo: Keith Flinders