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Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury: a corridor for growth



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The Wolverhampton – Shrewsbury corridor forms a critical link across the Midlands – connecting communities, unlocking economic potential and shaping the everyday journeys of thousands. As we look to the future, delivering a better, more integrated transport network can improve lives, drive regional growth, and create a more inclusive and connected future.

At Midlands Connect, we are proud to champion the transport priorities that matter most to people along this corridor and beyond. Through close collaboration with local authorities, businesses, education providers and residents, we’ve listened to the challenges – and identified the opportunities.

This document sets out a shared vision for investment in transport that supports new housing, growing employment hubs, thriving town centres, and greener, more sustainable ways to travel. It builds on what’s already working, aligns with other regional and local plans, but also makes the case for where we must go further.

I would like to thank all our partners who continue to help shape and strengthen this work. Together, we can deliver a corridor that works better for everyone.



**Maria
Machancoses**
CEO, Midlands Connect

Introduction

This vision document sets out the strategic importance of the Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury corridor and outlines a forward-looking agenda for how investment and collaboration can deliver a transport network that works better for everyone.

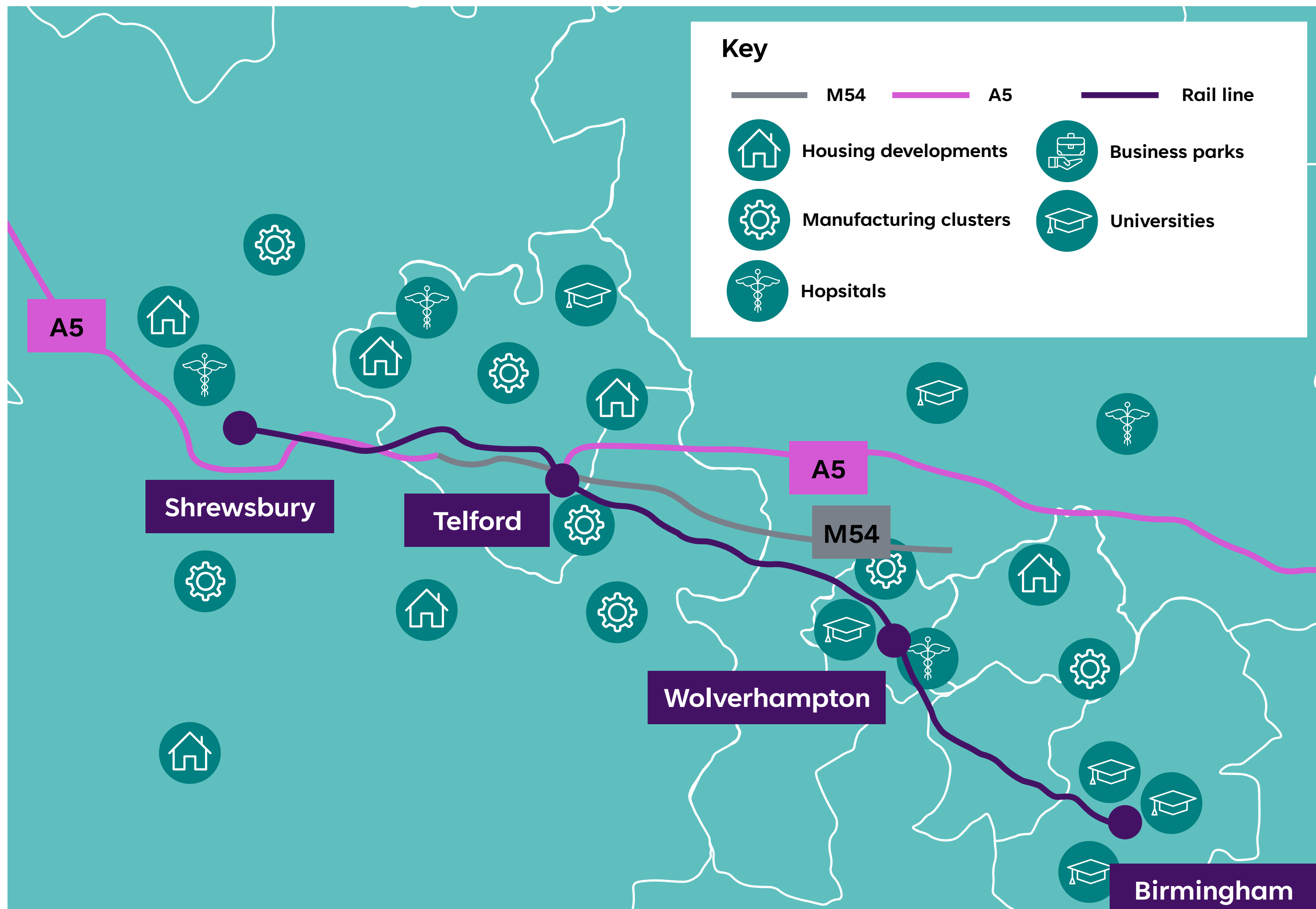
Connecting key urban centres along the route, including Wolverhampton, Telford and Shrewsbury, the Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury corridor, is a vital east-west transport link across the West Midlands, linking the conurbation to Shropshire and beyond into Wales. This corridor also plays a role in rural areas, supporting regional mobility economic activity, and social inclusion – linking communities, businesses and public services across both the urban and rural areas.

Currently, the corridor faces several transport challenges. Rail services are often limited in frequency and capacity, while road networks can suffer from congestion and delays along the A5 and M54. Public transport in rural areas remains sparse, contributing to social isolation, and more limited access to employment, education, and healthcare.

Enhanced transport infrastructure has the potential to transform how people and goods

can move across this corridor and beyond. Investment in integrated and reliable transport systems would unlock a range of benefits, from improved rail capacity and faster journey times to greater opportunities for inward investment. The corridor presents a significant opportunity to reshape how people move across the region.

Several major transport investments, already underway or planned in the wider area, offer opportunities to align and amplify benefits for this transport corridor. Recent timetable changes, potential released capacity from HS2 and the recently announced conformation of the M54-M6 Link Road will help accessibility – although this is just the start. The people, the businesses and the visitors to the region need the connectivity – and to make the region a success we need to provide that facility. Whether it be passenger or freight, rural or urban, road or rail – we must ensure that we give our people (both those using the corridor already and those in the



Introduction

The Wolverhampton – Shrewsbury corridor has the potential to drive growth across various areas and sectors. It is also a potential catalyst for regional regeneration, investment and place-making. Strengthening transport connections will not only boost productivity but also promote inclusive growth and celebrate local identity, and open new opportunities for residents, businesses, and visitors.

The corridor connects major employment sites and key public services such as hospitals and universities. This underpins sub-regional economic growth, with sectors like manufacturing and tourism relying on efficient transport links.

The corridor needs better connectivity across the region, and to achieve this we must take advantage of clear opportunities for improved capacity, reliability, resilience and integration. Current transport links include:

- **Rail:** The line is served by West Midlands Railway and Transport for Wales, providing direct connections between Birmingham International, Wolverhampton, Telford, Wellington, Shrewsbury, Albrighton, Cosford, Shifnal and into Wales.

- **Road:** The M54, A5 and A458 run parallel to the rail line and are key routes for freight toward Holyhead and car users.
- **Bus networks:** Local bus services interlink communities along the corridor with rail hubs and business parks, services also connect rural areas, north and south of the corridor.
- **Active travel:** Investment in walking and cycling infrastructure along the corridor enhances sustainable connectivity between homes and workplaces, allowing better accessibility onto the public transport network.

What is the Potential?

- **Drive regional growth:** The corridor can act as a catalyst for regeneration, inward investment, and place-making.
- **Boost productivity:** Efficient rail and road access improves supply chain reliability and productivity, particularly for freight and high-value logistics.
- **Support key employment sectors:** Manufacturing, tourism and public services will benefit from improved transport infrastructure. For examples, neighbouring universities will see wider participation from those in rural areas, who currently face transport challenges.
- **Regional connectivity:** Improved connectivity will enhance links across, road, rail, bus, and active travel – creating a multimodal network.



Economic Growth: Employment

This corridor currently supports major employment locations such as the i54 Enterprise Zone, Battlefield Business Park, Shrewsbury Business Park and future developments in Shifnal and Telford. These sites alone support over 4,000 jobs and require improved access to rail, bus, and active travel infrastructure to continue to grow and maximise their economic potential.

Other major employment sites include:

- **Stafford Park:** A major employment area with excellent access to J5 of the M54 and proximity to Telford Central.
- **T54:** A key employment and development site with a strong focus on automotive and advanced manufacturing. Many suppliers to i54 Enterprise Zone are located here.

- **Hortonwood:** A large industrial and employment area. A recent £35m project has delivered 350,000 square foot of new employment space.
- **Halesfield:** Large scale warehouses with access to the A442 and M54.
- **Donnington Wood:** A small employment area that benefits from close links to the A5 and M54.

Economic Growth: Housing

Telford is one of the fastest growing towns in the Midlands, with a population of over 180,000 (Office for National Statistics, 2021). With ongoing housing developments, including 5,000 new homes on sites such as the former Ironbridge Power Station (Shropshire) site, Redhill and Priorslee (Telford & Wrekin), residents will require well-coordinated transport plans to prevent car dependent communities in the future.

Opportunity 1

Improving the Wolverhampton – Shrewsbury rail line would reduce journey times, increase reliability, and support more frequent services to more destinations. This would make the corridor more attractive to employers, developers, and commuters alike, as well as improving regional and national connectivity via Birmingham and beyond. Small and independent businesses will also benefit from increased footfall through improved infrastructure along the corridor.

Freight and Logistics

The corridor hosts key distribution and freight hubs, including i54 Business Park (Wolverhampton), and Battlefield Enterprise Park (Shrewsbury). These sites are dependent on seamless connectivity to major highways, regional links, and rail freight terminals. In Telford alone there are over 200 freight and logistics companies, which are crucial to the town's success. However, freight access across parts of this corridor can be inconsistent, constrained by congestion and lack of dedicated infrastructure.

Opportunity 2

The corridor holds untapped potential for growth in freight and logistics. Making better use of existing highway infrastructure, improving junction layouts, freight routes, and connections to key roads can ensure growth and allow the organisations to maintain competitiveness and supply chain resilience. Rail freight access could also shift from roads to the rail network, supporting both decarbonation and network efficiency. This would attract inward investment and support job creation across the transport and manufacturing sectors along this corridor, into Wales and beyond.



Access to Wales

Enhancing the Wolverhampton – Shrewsbury transport corridor delivers significant benefits for not only the West Midlands, but also for Mid and North Wales, which rely on this route as a strategic cross-border gateway. This corridor plays a vital role in supporting economic, social, and freight connections between England and Wales.

Growth in this area aligns with priorities on the other side of the border, highlighting the corridor’s national strategic value. Chancellor Rachel Reeves’s latest Statements allocated £445m over 10 years specifically for transport infrastructure across Wales – highlighting the importance of major investment in cross-border rail activity.

This supports shared priorities including:

- Cross-border connectivity, linking businesses and workers.
- Tourism growth, with improved rail access encouraging two-way travel and longer stays in both regions.
- Freight efficiency, enabling smoother east-west logistic routes between Welsh ports and the Midlands.
- Environmental goals, with modal shift from road to rail.

Improved rail journey times and reliability between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury will enhance onward connections to Welsh destinations such as Wrexham and Aberystwyth. This will help boost passenger and freight movement across the border and align with wider UK-Wales connectivity priorities.

Opportunity 3

Enhancing the corridor presents a major opportunity to strengthen cross-border economic links between the Midlands and Wales. Improved road and rail connectivity can boost tourism and support workforce mobility, as well as enabling smoother east-west freight movements between Welsh ports and the Midlands logistics hubs.

Education and Health Hubs

Institutions such as Shrewsbury College, Telford College, the University of Wolverhampton, and Harper Adams University play a crucial role in the economic and social development of the region. Additionally, several NHS facilities depend on accessible and affordable transport for staff, students, and patients.

At present, fragmented public transport services and limited active travel infrastructure makes it harder for people – particularly from rural or lower-income communities – to reach these vital destinations. This can lead to missed appointments, lower participation in education, and increasing reliance on private vehicles, especially for those for rural communities

or those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Further investment in education infrastructure is also taking shape:

- The Quad: Telford’s newest hub for innovation and education, linked to Telford College and Harper Adams University, including a new Sixth Form Centre which is set to open in September 2026.
- Telford College: Located in Wellington, the college provides vital further education and skills development opportunities.

Opportunity 4

There is a clear opportunity to improve access to education and health hubs. Enhancing public transport connections and introducing new walking and cycling would help reduce car reliance, boost inclusion, and support wider social mobility. This will benefit not only students and patients, but also the reliance of the NHS workforce and the development of regional skills pipelines – making it easier for people to reach the education and health services they depend on.

Tourism and Heritage

The corridor connects visitors to iconic heritage sites such as the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site, Shrewsbury Castle, the Cosford RAF Museum and their annual air show. Weston Park's annual events also draw a large number of visitors. In 2023, Wolverhampton's visitor economy was valued at £458m, while tourism across Telford & Shropshire generated over £1bn.

However, poor connectivity – particularly between rail stations and attractions – limits access and visitor experience. Improved transport links and wayfinding can enhance the appeal of these destinations, supporting sustainable tourism, reducing congestion, and enabling wider access for families, elderly visitors, and those without cars.

Opportunity 5

Midlands Connect's work to improve rail journey times and strengthen cross-regional connections will help unlock the corridor's full tourism potential – encouraging longer and repeat visits, alongside greater local spend. Integrating transport, whether it be cycling, walking or use of public transport, will encourage greater outdoor exploration.



Social Inclusion and Accessibility

Despite its strategic importance, parts of the corridor – particularly in rural areas – continue to suffer from poor connectivity and limited public transport. This creates barriers to education, employment and healthcare, particularly for young people, older adults, and low-income households without access to a car.

Opportunity 6

By addressing transport poverty, better infrastructure would enable:

- Easier access to training, jobs, and services across Wolverhampton, Telford, other larger settlements on the corridor and into Wales.
- Safer and more inclusive travel for those with limited mobility.
- Reduce reliance on private vehicles, helping households save on costs.



Sustainable Communities and Wellbeing

To secure a healthier future for communities along the corridor, transport solutions must be sustainable, active, and community driven. There is opportunity to support local sustainable communities by encouraging shift to walking, cycling, and enhanced public transport, reducing congestion and improving air quality across the corridor. Midlands Connect is actively supporting this transition through initiatives such as Midlands EV Infrastructure Consortium, which has secured over £40 million in funding to deliver more than 16,000 electric vehicle charge points across the region – particularly targeting rural areas and communities with limited off-street parking.

Opportunity 7

By supporting sustainable communities and wellbeing, our vision supports:

- Modal shift to walking cycling, and enhanced public transport.
- EV charging infrastructure to reduce harmful car emissions.
- Cleaner air through reduced congestion and better network design.
- Increased accessible links to healthcare, enabling improved patient access and staff travel.

Working with Partners

Working closely with local partners is essential to deliver a joined-up vision for the corridor. Councils and other stakeholders already have ambitious transport plans in place for the corridor and aligning with these will maximise impact and unlock shared benefits for communities along the route.

Shropshire Council, in partnership with Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership, published ‘Shrewsbury Moves’, a ten-year plan that sets out a vision to create more accessible, sustainable, and a people-friendly town centre – focused on improved walking, cycling, public transport and reduced car dominance. It supports interventions to boost economic vitality, improved air quality, and enhanced overall experience throughout Shrewsbury.

Wolverhampton is a key member of the West Midlands Combined Authority, aligning with its ‘Movement for Growth’ and ‘Delivery Plan for Transport’ up to 2026. This strategy includes a mix of tram extensions, new suburban rail services and cycle route expansion. This plan combines active travel infrastructure with integrated public transport, facilitating easier access for commuters, students, and business traffic.

Telford & Wrekin Council’s Local Transport Plan sets out a comprehensive strategy covering all modes of travel – from walking and cycling to busses, EV infrastructure, and road maintenance.

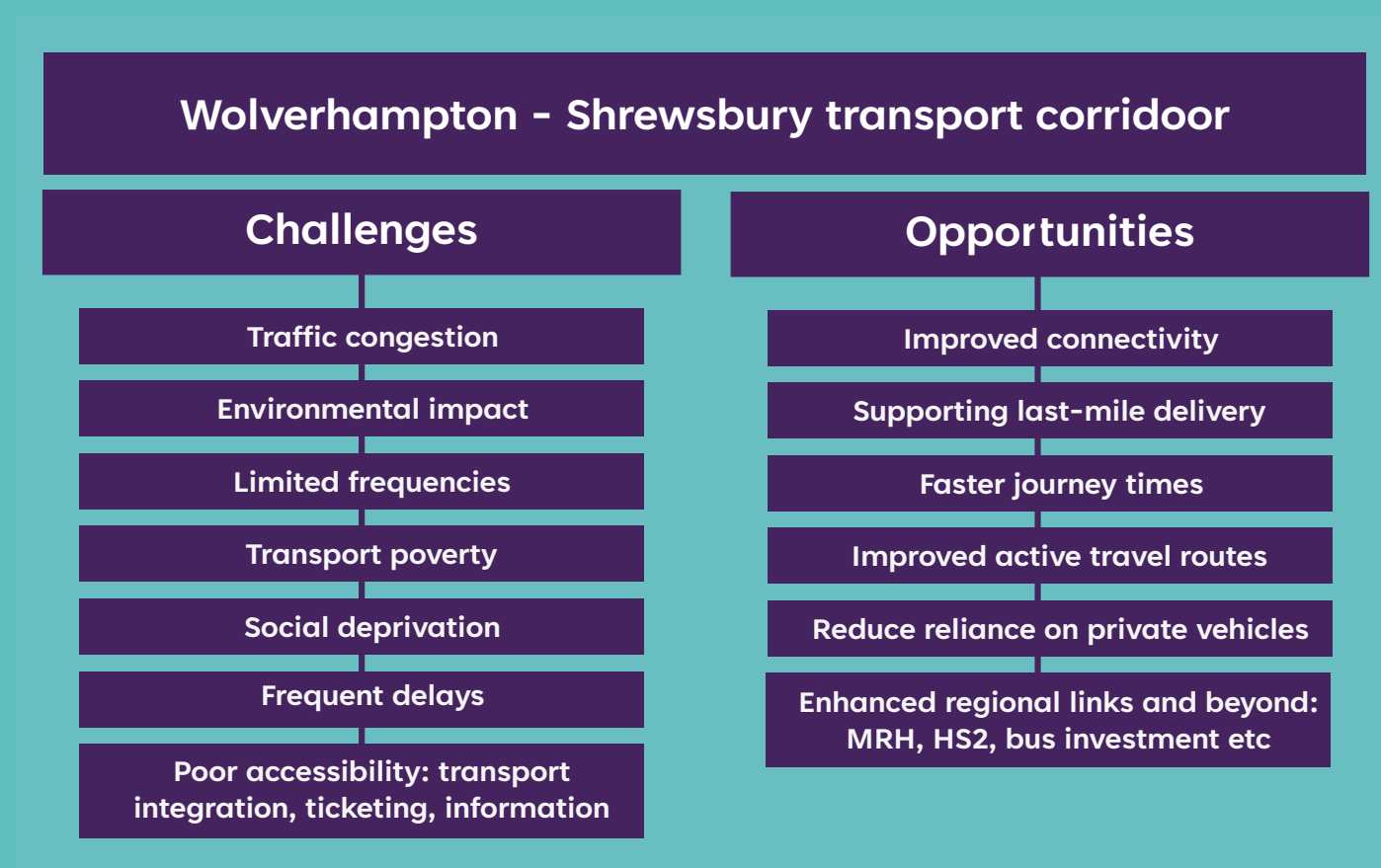
These strategies align closely with regional ambitions to encourage active and low-carbon travel choices across key corridors such as Wolverhampton – Shrewsbury.



Identifying challenges and opportunities

To ensure that future investment along the corridor is effective, sustainable and inclusive, it is essential to understand key transport challenges and opportunities. The mind map below captures a high-level summary of these themes.

These insights have directly informed transport priorities in the next section – which sets out the strategic focus areas where intervention can make a real difference to communities, the economy, and the environment.



Turning these opportunities into transport priorities

To unlock the full potential of the Wolverhampton-Shrewsbury corridor, we have identified a set of clear priorities that reflect the needs of local communities, businesses, and visitors. These priorities are rooted in our vision for a more inclusive, better connected, and sustainable transport system – one that supports economic growth, improves quality of life, and meet the region's future needs:

1. Integrated transport networks: Create a seamless, multimodal transport system that supports efficient movement of people and goods across the corridor.
2. Line speed and capacity improvements: Upgrade rail infrastructure to improve journey times, reliability, and future connectivity along the corridor.
3. Simplified ticketing and travel Information: Introduce integrated ticketing alongside clear wayfinding and travel information to make public transport more user-friendly.
4. Electric Vehicle infrastructure: Expand EV charging facilities to support transition to cleaner and quieter low-emission travel.
5. Enhanced freight connectivity: Improve freight access and routing to strengthen supply chains and support economic growth.
6. Smarter use of highway infrastructure: maximise the efficiency of key road networks through updates and integration with wider transport links.
7. Reduced congestion and cleaner air: Encourage sustainable travel to cut emissions, and improve air quality for communities along the corridor.
8. Active and sustainable travel: Linking to more sustainable longer distance modes.

Next steps

To turn this vision into reality, the next steps will require cooperation from Local Authorities, agencies and government bodies.

Delivering a transformative transport vision between Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury and beyond, will require collaboration and various funding approaches, drawing on both local and national sources. While some improvements may be delivered through existing programmes, others will require promotion, long-term investment, and joined up thinking through:

1. Case development
2. Stakeholder engagement
3. Funding strategy
4. Pilot and demonstrate projects
5. Public consultations and communications



