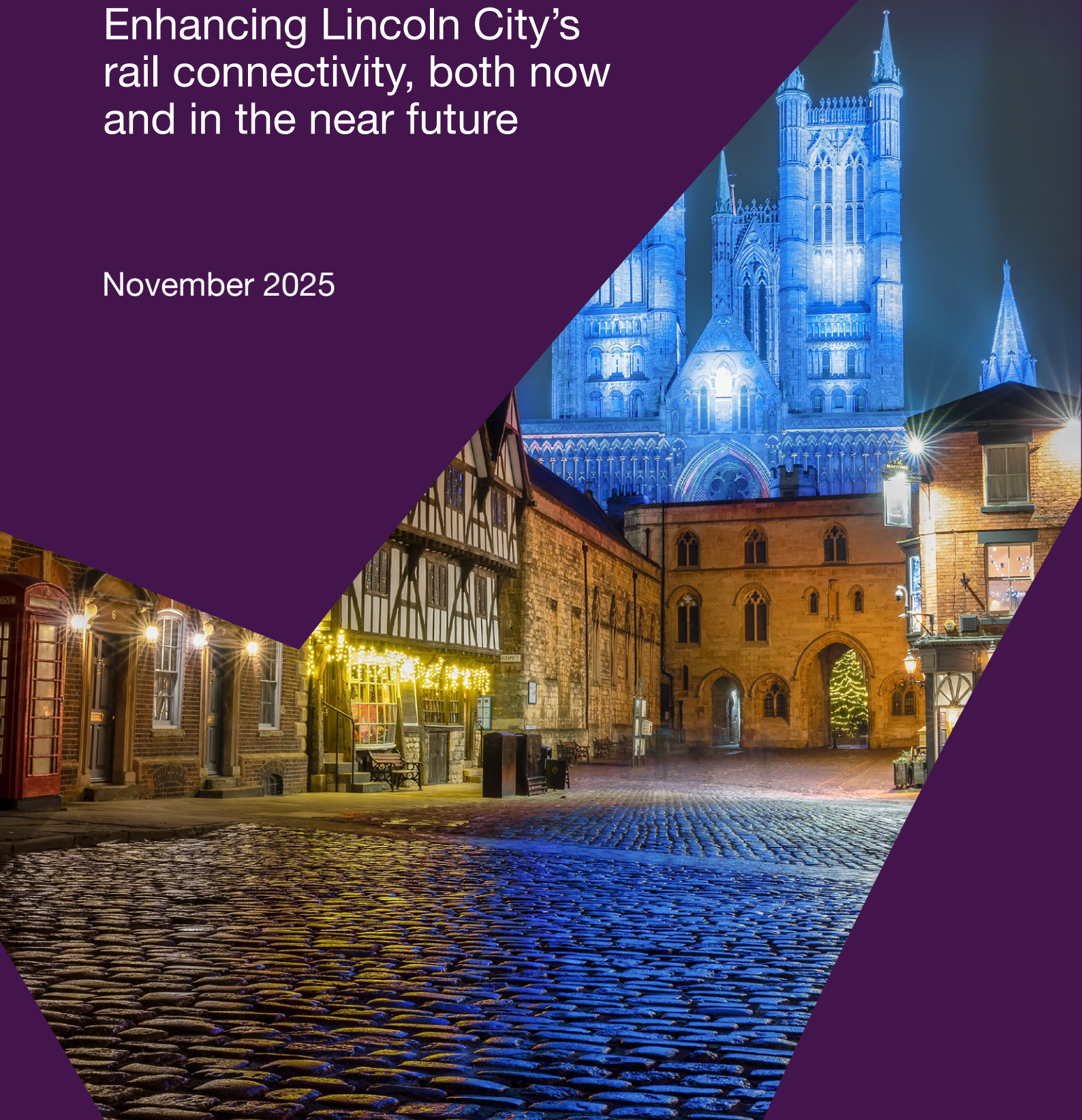


KEEPING PACE:

Enhancing Lincoln City's
rail connectivity, both now
and in the near future

November 2025



FOREWORD: Keeping Pace with Growth

Lincoln is an ambitious city with a young and rapidly growing population. Lincoln's diverse economy spans agrifood, tourism, logistics and manufacturing, and its cultural and historic offer attracts millions of visitors each year. New homes and jobs are being created at pace, and the city is already home to two universities with a combined student population of over 20,000¹.

But while Lincoln has moved forward, its rail services have not kept pace. Councils and local partners have long campaigned for better connections, recognising both the importance of frequent services to Nottingham and direct links to London.

That persistence is starting to pay off. From December 2025, services between Lincoln and Nottingham will double from hourly to half-hourly, a long-awaited breakthrough that will strengthen the city's role within the wider East Midlands economy. Together with the two hourly daily direct London services, this timetable should now be seen as the baseline level of connectivity that Lincoln requires.

As Lincoln grows, further investment in infrastructure and trains will be essential. Regional links made more convenient and resilient for passengers, faster journey times, and the removal of capacity constraints are all needed to match the scale of Lincoln's growth and ambition.

Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM) and the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority (GLCCA) have a shared vision that sees a better-connected Lincoln City as a priority for the East Midlands transport network and the East Midlands economy.

Mayor
Sir Peter Soulsby:
Chair Transport for
the East Midlands



Dame Andrea Jenkyns:
Mayor of Greater
Lincolnshire
Combined County
Authority



Cllr Sean Matthews:
Chair of GLCCA
Transport Board,
Chair East Midlands
Councils and Leader
Lincolnshire County
Council



Lincoln City: In Profile



100,000+
population and one of
the fastest-growing
cities in the East
Midlands



12,000
new jobs by 2036



3 million
visitors a year



31,000
new homes expected
by 2045



£264
million
of economic activity



A young,
ambitious city whose
future success depends
on reliable, frequent,
and fast rail services

As Lincolnshire's only city - and its principal economic and administrative centre - Lincoln plays a critical role in driving the county's future. Regional partners see stronger transport links with Lincoln as essential to unlocking both the city and the county's full potential.

Lincoln's population increased by 11%² between 2011 and 2021 to more than 100,000 people, making it among the top five fastest-growing local authorities in the East Midlands. It has a young demographic, with 13% of residents classed as young adults, including over 20,000 students³ studying at the University of Lincoln and Lincoln Bishop University.

The city's economy is diverse, with strengths in agrifood, tourism, logistics, and manufacturing, and employment opportunities are on the rise; a projected 12,000 new jobs⁴ are planned by 2036, with a Government expectation of 31,000 new homes in the Lincoln housing area by 2045. These are particularly focused around Charterholme, an intensive growth corridor to the west of the city centre, close to the Castle Line, which links Lincoln with Newark and Nottingham.

Despite these positive trends, Lincoln faces challenges related to transport and productivity. More than a quarter (28.38%⁵) of its households do not have access to a car or van, creating clear transport disadvantages. Those who do, remain heavily reliant on car travel due to limited rail connectivity, contributing to high emissions and limiting progress on decarbonisation.

Rail has not kept pace with the city's growth, leaving tourism and business at a disadvantage. As a historic cathedral city with a strong independent retail scene,

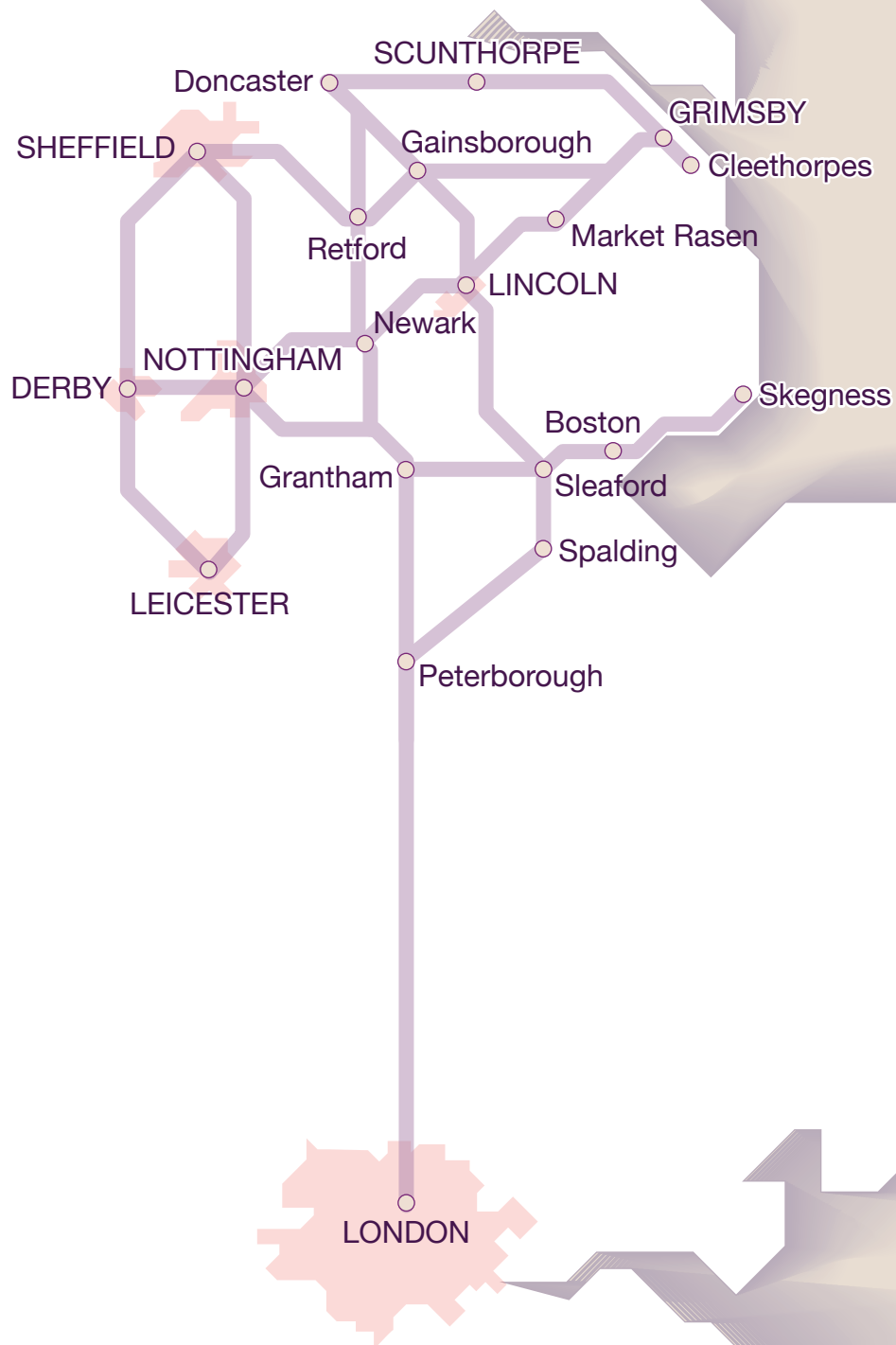
Lincoln attracts over 3 million visitors annually, generating £264 million for the local economy⁶. Yet it competes with better-connected cathedral cities such as Durham and York who, in the case of York, enjoy around 40 trains per day to London and a fastest journey time of under two hours.

Furthermore, the city's relative isolation has resulted in lower-than-average productivity and economic growth, as measured by GDP and GVA⁷, even as new initiatives like the Lincoln Science and Innovation Park point to its potential. Some important labour market opportunities also remain limited: Lincolnshire sits among the lowest third of local authorities for opportunities for 16-29-year-olds, and the bottom quarter in terms of promising prospects for 25-44-year-olds⁸.

With the right transport investment, Lincoln has the opportunity to change this trajectory and strengthen its role as a dynamic regional hub.



[By Isaac Newton Building, University of Lincoln by Oliver Mills, CC BY-SA 2.0](#)



A Steep Hill: Lincoln's Rail Ambitions

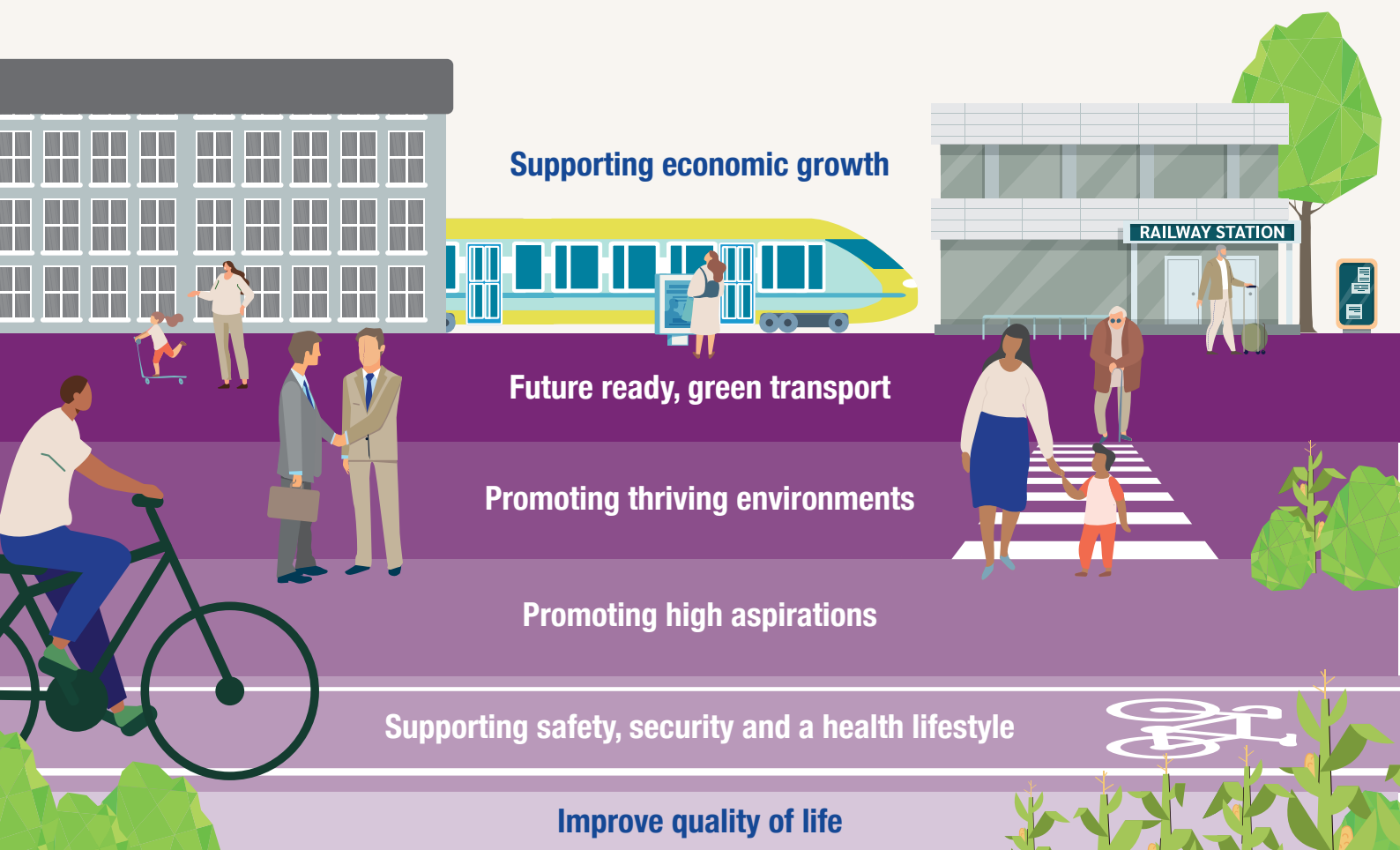
A Regional Priority

Right now, train services from Lincoln to most major destinations are simply not good enough - they're too infrequent, too slow, and too often overcrowded, making driving the default choice for many.

This has direct consequences for the A46 corridor towards Nottingham and Leicester, with around 19,000 car and van trips daily creating unreliable journey times, and the corridor predicted to be approaching capacity at key junctions by 2035⁹. Commuters and leisure travellers are forced to compete with freight and agricultural traffic, compounding delays and unreliability. Improving the Lincoln-Nottingham rail corridor is a priority identified for both TfEM and Midlands Connect¹⁰.

Investing in better rail doesn't just mean faster and more reliable trains - it means connecting more people to jobs, education, and leisure across the region - making Lincoln a vibrant, accessible place to live and work within the wider region.

Upgrading Lincoln's rail links directly supports the goals of the Lincolnshire Local Transport Plan¹¹:



Slow Progress

Yet, with some market shares stuck below 10%¹², meaningful progress has been slow. The East Midlands as a whole has seen less government investment in rail than most other regions for nearly two decades¹³, and this reality is reflected in the rail service quality at Lincoln - slow journey times and a poor frequency of direct services. Trying to secure real improvements to rail for the city and wider region has often felt like a struggle against long-standing underinvestment.

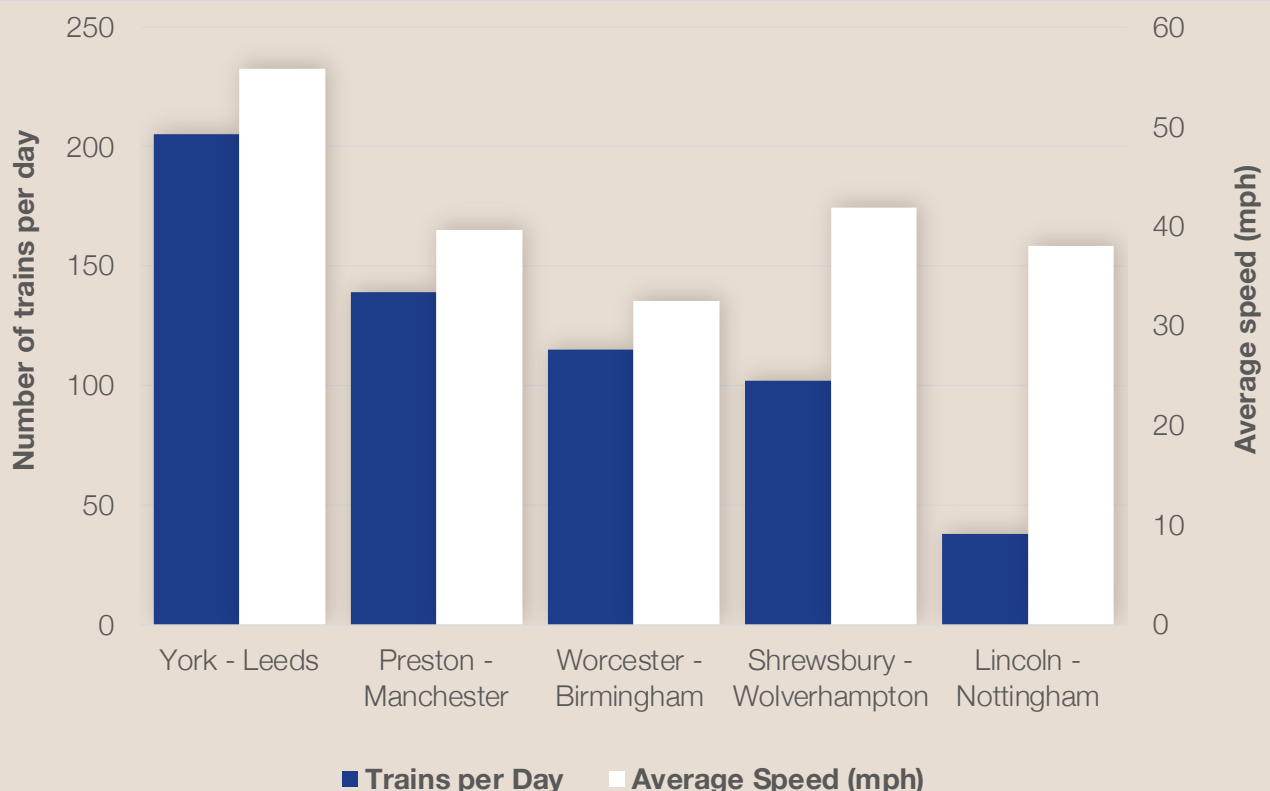
Setbacks

Lincoln's rail service has at times lost ground, losing direct trains to key economic centres in the Midlands like Birmingham, and also its faster regional services to places such as Sheffield. Many promised regional link improvements for Lincoln from previous rail franchises, like those in the East

Midlands operators' 2019 agreement, have never materialised. In the years following the pandemic a number of Lincoln's rail services were also chosen to be paused for extended periods before being only partially reinstated¹⁴. Even this year, a scarce and economically significant direct London Sunday service is being cut from December 2025. These setbacks indicate that the true potential of Lincoln's growing market continues to be underestimated and underserved by the rail industry - a missed opportunity both for the industry and for the city's economy.

An example of how Lincoln is underserved is demonstrated in the graph¹⁵ below, illustrating that Lincoln-Nottingham services, as an example, have lagged behind other regional city pairings for both service levels and average speeds.

Figure 1 Number of trains per day and average speed (mph) between comparable inter-city locations





Jayne Wingad: Lincolnshire County Council

Building From a Low Base

Despite these challenges and low modal share, Lincoln has shown resilience. While rail passenger numbers across the UK between 2019/20 and 2023/24 dropped by 6%, demand at Lincoln actually grew, climbing 4.7% from 1.96 million to 2.05 million¹⁶.

Councils and local partners, such as the Nottingham to Lincoln Stakeholder Board, did secure some important service improvements between 2015-2018 that stepped up the timetable between Nottingham and Lincoln and at weekends, which led to a sustained increase in use.

The Castle Line is now seeing strong growth again, with over 1.1 million customer journeys in 2024, a rise of 21% compared with 2023. By 2030, passenger growth at Lincoln station is forecast to have increased by 11% compared to 2019¹⁷. This underlines the strength of local demand and signals to latent demand to be unlocked. Lincoln is well-positioned to capture further growth in leisure travel and tourism by rail¹⁸, but this potential can only be realised if the current gaps in connectivity are addressed and services are brought up to modern standards.

Closing the Gap

Breakthrough

The East Coast Main Line crossing at Newark-On-Trent has been a long-standing constraint to the East Midlands regional network to Lincoln. Now, planned changes to the East Coast Main Line this year have created a window of opportunity for local operators to be able to in-tandem rethink the Lincoln-Nottingham corridor. From December 2025, the hourly service will double to half-hourly, Monday to Saturday. With Nottingham being the largest economic hub of the East Midlands, and Lincoln ranking as the region's fifth largest city, these stronger rail links can promise to contribute to connectivity and economic opportunity at a regional scale.

Improvements on Track

This uplift of the service will add 12 additional daily services in each direction between Nottingham and Lincoln and more than 2,000 extra weekday seats. It will make turn-up-and-go travel more attractive, reduce waiting times, and ease overcrowding. More frequent calls at route stations and new direct links, including to Derby, will also make many longer onward trips via one change more readily accessible. Analysis for TfEM conservatively estimates £8.4 million in economic benefit directly for users and 1 million additional passengers over 15 years for journeys from Lincoln, with other parties indicating the opportunity is even higher still.¹⁹

Coupled with the investment for the A46 announced in the 2025 Spending Review, this provides the basis for a transport

future that will finally bring this key regional corridor up to speed.

Capital Gains

The transformation of Lincoln's London services shows what targeted investment can achieve. Until recently, Lincoln was one of the only English cities with a population over 100,000 without regular direct trains to the capital. Introducing six daily direct services led to a 51% surge in travellers to London, compared to just a 4% rise at many other East Coast Main Line destinations in the same period. London is now Lincoln's foremost, and fastest growing, rail destination²⁰.

For Lincoln, direct London links are more than convenient; they're essential for growth and opportunity. Sustaining and developing Lincoln-London connectivity is vital as new East Coast Main Line demands emerge. Recent evidence for TfEM shows that for Lincoln, further improving connectivity to London remains its top opportunity for rail to further contribute to Lincoln's economic prosperity²¹.



Keeping Pace

For Lincoln's rail services to keep up with the city's momentum, the recent promises for better rail services mustn't be just initially delivered; they need to become lasting improvements. Local partners may still need to play an active role in the coming years to ensure that the changes are made to stick.



TfEM's ambition is to see Lincoln City's rail services improved further still, such as faster journey times and improved frequencies.

It is clear that these can only be achieved by building on the foundation of the service levels in place from December 2025.

Fragile

The planned doubling of services between Lincoln and Nottingham is welcome, but these valuable service commitments could yet be threatened. The uplift coincides with a complex and long-awaited restructure of the timetable on the East Coast Main Line. The concern is that previous major timetable changes have led to subsequent disruption and triggered immediate operational trade-offs, ultimately to scale-back committed plans. If tough decisions have to be made on how the network is performing overall, it could be all too easy for Lincoln's improvements to be vulnerable to cutbacks, such as the decision to cut the direct London Sunday service from December 2025.

There are wider risks too. The cancellation of HS2 to the Midlands and the north could threaten existing services over the longer term, including Lincoln's direct trains to London. This is because the rail industry still has the ambition to improve its long-distance rail services between London and the North; but is now forced to plan these using largely existing congested rail infrastructure. Ambitions to improve long-distance services from London to alternative destinations further north using the East Coast Main Line, could see Lincoln's direct London service made vulnerable to being eroded by a reallocation of the East Coast Main Line's constrained capacity.

Unlike other ECML cities like Bradford, Harrogate, or Middlesbrough, alternative routes to London from Lincoln are unattractive - adding extra time, cost, and complexity. Cutting Lincoln's direct link would be a disproportionate blow to its connectivity, as demonstrated by the alternatives currently available to passengers in Table 1.

Table 1 Existing journey options to Lincoln from London (December 2024 timetable)

Route	Frequency	Time (average)	Distance
Direct service on the ECML to Lincoln via Newark Northgate	Six trains per day	1 hr 48 mins	137 miles
Interchange at Newark Northgate	Four pre-1200 and one late evening service	2 hr 03 mins	137 miles
ECML to Newark Northgate, then walk to Newark Castle¹ for service to Lincoln	Hourly	3hr 0mins	138 miles
Interchange at Peterborough for service to Lincoln via GNGE	Hourly	2 hr 15 mins ²	131 miles
MML London St Pancras service to Nottingham, interchange onto train to Lincoln	Two direct southbound AM services followed by hourly Nottingham-Lincoln ³	2 hr 42 mins	160 miles

1 Interchange walking allowance of 23 minutes.

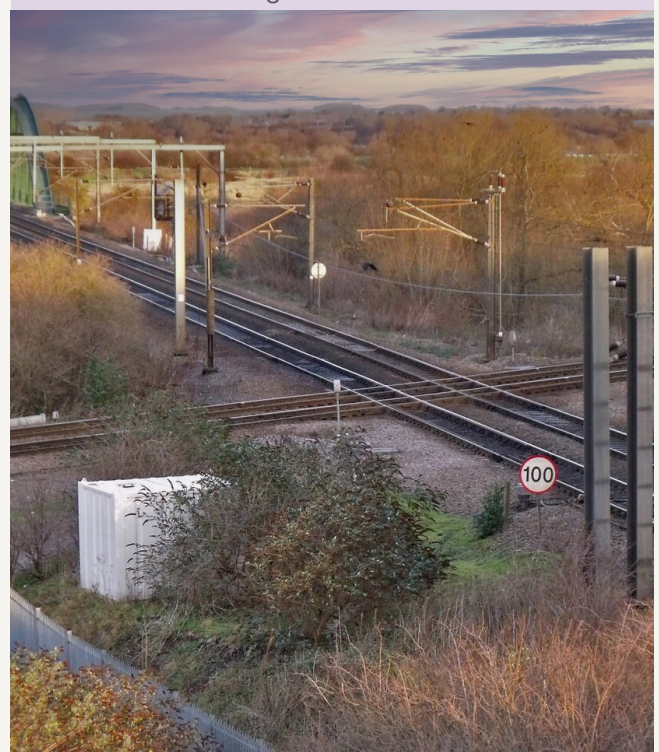
2 Journey opportunities not available in every hour.

3 Planned to rise to two trains per hour from December 2025.

Crossed lines

Lincoln needs industry drive towards a bold, long-term solution; one that tackles the real barriers holding rail services back. Chief among these is the Newark Flat Crossing - where the East Coast Main Line crosses the Castle Line at ground level. This outdated piece of infrastructure continues to limit trains on both lines, stifling Lincoln's existing low-frequency links (e.g to Newark Northgate to access the ECML in the hours that the direct London service does not operate), and constraining the potential of future direct services. Relieving the crossing would have resilience benefits that would ripple across the whole ECML to places far afield that are nationally significant. Investing in 'grade separation' (aligning a junction of two or more lines at different heights) at this junction would transform what is possible on the network and enable trains to operate across both lines unimpeded.

Newark Flat Crossing



J.Hannan-Briggs

Full speed ahead

The trains that will operate between Lincoln and Nottingham will be refurbished over the next couple of years. These trains are capable of sustaining up to 100mph speeds where the infrastructure allows; yet stretches of the track are restricted to just 50mph. Boosting the line speeds in these sections between Lincoln and Nottingham is a further long-overdue improvement.

In part, the outdated Signalling has held progress back. Network Rail has already mapped out a plan to increase the speed provision of the Signalling system to 75mph; but delivery has been delayed. The commitment remains to deliver this awaited Signalling renewal this decade within Network Rail's current Control Period.

With an additional £18 million investment (a modest sum in rail terms), Midlands Connect has shown some journey times could be cut by up to five minutes, with a benefit-cost ratio up to 2.0²², reflecting a 'high' value for money. This is an affordable, deliverable

scheme that could bring immediate benefits if Network Rail is given the tools to finish the job.

Line speed improvements would offer both the passenger service and existing freight services improved resilience. The measurable benefits that arise from the investment could also now be forecast to increase. This is because both more trains and passengers are to be positively impacted than when the speed benefits were modelled under previous lower-frequency assumptions.

Another key Lincoln inter-urban service that is prime for speed or journey time improvements is the Lincoln - Sheffield link, which averages just 35mph. Some welcome progress was achieved in 2018 through the delivery of an express service, but this was removed during the pandemic with no sign of return. Restoring and improving this connection should be a clear priority.

Class 170 in EMR livery



Unattractive

“Stakeholders do not seek metropolitan frequencies, just hourly trains that inter-connect.”

(Modern Railways, 2016, with reference to Lincoln's rail network during the East Midlands Franchise Tender process)

“The new Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority is committed to working with the rail industry to improve rail services across the area. For Lincoln, rail services need to be more frequent and attractive to tourists, visitors and businesses alike. Despite promises made nearly ten years ago during the last rail franchise planning - such as better Sunday services - Lincoln's regional rail connections still fall short of providing hourly service every day and lack proper integration across the network.”

Dame Andrea Jenkyns DBE, Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire

Despite progress on some corridors, many regional services through Lincoln will remain patchy. The current regional timetable is sparse through Lincoln to places such as Peterborough, Sleaford, Doncaster or Grimsby, and is not yet in any industry plan to be enhanced to hourly all day - every day. Until it is, it's tough for people to see rail as a real alternative to driving.

Reliability on these lines, although exhibiting amongst some of the stronger metrics for local routes, is also a challenge when set against what customers should expect from their transport fare. Punctuality on lines in the East Midlands is weaker than the experiences enjoyed on rail in most other English regions, compounding the challenge to passengers posed by the infrequent

service timetables, and undermining confidence in rail to its prospective passengers.

Some frequency improvements for these regional links were committed to as part of the last East Midlands franchise in 2019, such as to Sunday services, but these plans have not progressed. Other than the welcomed Nottingham improvements, there is no delivery plan for bringing Lincoln's wider regional rail links up to even these modest service level aspirations, which are seen as a minimum for rail to be more consistently viewed as an attractive choice.

A New Agenda

But there's hope for change. In the next few years, new organisations such as the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority (GLCCA), and Great British Railways (GBR), and new collaborative frameworks for joined-up thinking on the railways, will all potentially bring a fresh approach.

In the coming years, Lincoln's case should consistently be heard at the highest level. The local plan for rail should be more tangible and integrated with interfacing national programmes, meaning integrated plans for the future, targeting: longer trains, traction decarbonisation and improved accessibility - such as renewal of the current Lincoln station platform footbridge, which is overdue for modernisation.

Also, new enthusiasm in planning 'beyond the horizon', such as enhancing the direct London service (including extending these trains to Cleethorpes), restoring Lincoln's direct links with Birmingham, and even creating new connections to York and Cambridge could all be properly reviewed by GBR hand-in-hand with the Local Authorities.

A Shared Vision for Lincoln and the East Midlands

Transport for the East Midlands and the Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority have a shared vision that sees better connecting Lincoln City as a priority for the East Midlands transport network and the East Midlands economy.

Lincoln has changed and now stands as a dynamic and even more regionally important city, and it should be well-connected for economic links - not just with Nottingham and London, but with more surrounding regional hubs. After years of watching other cities move ahead, Lincoln's time has come to be prioritised for rail improvement.

The upgrades coming in December 2025 are a welcome example of what's possible when 'can-do' thinking by industry drives real change, also reflecting the tireless advocacy of Councils and local partners. But this must be just the beginning. These gains cannot be allowed to slip away - they need to be protected and serve as the foundation for future improvements.

Strong local organisations will be around the table with newly integrated industry decision makers as they make early strides to ensure this year is just the first chapter. Authorities



Transport for the
East Midlands

Greater Lincolnshire
Combined County Authority

will use new devolved arrangements to lead on advocating for rail improvements to Lincoln, whilst still leveraging strong collaboration across the whole East Midlands region.

We're making sure Lincoln's case is amplified. To **keep pace** with Lincoln's growth, it now needs further investment in infrastructure and rolling stock: faster lines, longer trains, and more frequent services, to make the railway a true match for the city it serves.



Endnotes

- 1 [Lincoln City Profile – City of Lincoln Council](#)
- 2 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E07000138/>
- 3 <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/council/lincoln-city-profile>
- 4 Lincoln Transport Strategy 2020-2036
- 5 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/housing/number-of-cars-or-vans/number-of-cars-3a/no-cars-or-vans-in-household>
- 6 <https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/downloads/file/1984/vision-2030>
- 7 Office for National Statistics, 2021 (GDP) and 2017 (GVA)
- 8 Social Mobility Index, 2023, <https://social-mobility.data.gov.uk/>
- 9 Midlands Connect, A46 Corridor Study, 2020
- 10 <https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/TfEM-Shared-Vision-2024.pdf>
- 11 <https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/7200/local-transport-plan-5>
- 12 Midlands Connect, 2025, 'The Castle Line: Connecting Commuters between Nottingham, Newark and Lincoln'
- 13 <https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/official-statistics-show-10-8-billion-funding-deficit-in-east-midlands/>
- 14 Examples across: Lincoln<>Newark North Gate reductions, Sheffield<>Gainsborough Central - withdrawn, Sheffield<>Cleethorpes via Brigg route: Now only Saturday, SHF<>LCN reductions
- 15 Data extracted from the September 2025 Wednesday service pattern using National Rail Enquiries and Realtime Trains (including impact of current Transpennine Route Upgrade works). Services to/from Worcester include Worcestershire Parkway.
- 16 ORR station usage data, 2019/20 and 2023/24 (<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage>)
- 17 https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/EM_Rail_and_Growth_Study.pdf
- 18 TEMPro estimates the growth in leisure-related rail trips in Lincoln to be up to 5% over the next 10 years.
- 19 East Midlands Railway estimate the economic benefit of the improvements to be £2.4 million per annum.
- 20 Source: ORR Origin-Destination Matrix 2018/19 and 2023/24
- 21 SYSTRA city connectivity modelling with Miranda 2025 for TfEM
- 22 Midlands Connect, 2023, Nottingham-Lincoln Strategic Outline Business Case

