

Rail North Committee Minutes

MeetingDate
MeetingLocation

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Councillor Liam Robinson(Chair)	(Liverpool City Region)
Mayor Andy Burnham	Greater Manchester Combined Authority;
Cllr Daren Hale	Hull;
Cllr Charles Edwards	Lancashire;
Mayor Jamie Driscoll	North of Tyne Combined Authority;
Cllr Don Mackenzie	North Yorkshire;

Partners in Attendance:

Richard Harper	
Nick Donovan	Northern
Matthew Golton	Transpennine Express

Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Chris Roberts	Commercial Manager - TPE Franchise
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Julie Openshaw	Head of Legal
Adam Timewell	Head of Rail Service Outputs
Rosemary Lyon	Legal and Democratic Services Officer
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
David Hoggarth	Strategic Rail Director

Item Item No:

1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and the public to the meeting and apologies were received from Mayor Jarvis, Cllr Hinchcliffe Cllr Browne and Cllr Scott.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The notes of the Consultation Call held on 15 December 2021 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the notes of the meeting held on 15 December 2021 be noted.

4. Rail Reform Next Steps

- 4.1 Members received the report from the Strategic Rail Director who highlighted the key points within the report.
- 4.2 Mayor Driscoll expressed his support and the North East's keenness to be involved. He also highlighted the importance of the priorities outlined in the report.
- 4.3 The Chair stated that the Strategic Rail Director will arrange for e-mails to be sent out requesting volunteers for the working group.

Resolved:

- 1) That progress on developing a proposition for implementing rail reform in the North be noted;
- 2) That the Committee agrees to establish a Working Group to act as a sounding board for the officer Programme Board and advise the Committee as appropriate;
- 3) That the main points of the Transport for the North submission made to the Whole Industry Strategic Plan consultation which had closed on 4 February 2022 be noted.

5. Manchester Blueprint for Services and Infrastructure

- 5.1 Members received the report from the Strategic Rail Director who highlighted the key points within the report. Members also received an update from Mr. Richard Harper on the current situation with the Blueprint.
- 5.2 Mr. Harper explained that the Taskforce is working towards three objectives; the improvement and recovery of performance, ensuring that performance levels remain high and exploring opportunities to improve capacity and connectivity. He highlighted the December 2022 timetable as fundamental to achieving these goals.

He further explained that the December timetable will look to balance the needs of recovery and performance against the needs of passengers. He recognised that difficult compromises have been made and stated that

the timetable will form a solid basis and build on the good performance delivered during Covid.

On the issue of service changes, he explained that there are many options on the table and that difficult choices will need to be made.

- 5.3 Mayor Burnham stated that the Blueprint is a step forward and that having visibility into the 2040s is important. However, he raised a number of concerns including the vagueness of the Blueprint with regard to timings and funding, downgraded timetables and lack of investment in infrastructure. He believed that this represents a managed decline of the railway post pandemic which will lead to a car-led recovery from the pandemic./He highlighted the fact that the all the stations in Manchester are in need of modernisation.

The Chair agreed with Mayor Burnham, stating that the Blueprint is a step forward but is still not good enough. He highlighted the “bounce back” in the North for train travel and explained that services need to be expanded and the infrastructure that is required put in place.

In response the Strategic Rail Director stated that the message from the Committee was a strong one that will be taken back to the Taskforce. He explained that the vision needs to come out clearly regarding Manchester’s railways and the plan for them.

- 5.4 Mr. Harper re-assured the Committee that the Blueprint is not operating towards a managed decline scenario. He explained that there is a range of propositions being considered across the network to take place over a number of years which are locked into a number of other major schemes. He further explained that the Blueprint is helping to lay the foundations in readiness for NPR.

He highlighted that the vagueness on ongoing projects is due to further work being required in order to turn the development work and propositions into a programme of work. The industry is working with DfT on this.

- 5.5 The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that the Castlefield Corridor has been formally identified as a congested corridor; this, he explained, has regulatory implications and acts as driver for partners working together. He outlined the importance of the Blueprint being a living document allowing the ambitions of the North to be used to shape work going forward and is keen for TfN not to lose these ambitions.
- 5.6 Mayor Burnham requested that the Blueprint should include a date as to when this designation on congested infrastructure should end as a result of the relevant infrastructure being in place.
- 5.7 The Chair supported this and requested that this be a standing item on the Committee’s agenda.

- 5.8 On behalf of Cllr Hinchcliffe the Chair asked for clarification on the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) publication process.
- 5.9 The Chief Executive was unable to provide a date as to when the RNEP will be published as it is a Government document, but confirmed that officers are working with partners to make the case for the various investments.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee notes the Blueprint linking future service changes to infrastructure, showing how the December 2022 timetable change is a milestone in the process that also includes enhancements that will support reliability and connectivity improvements and that the Blueprint highlights that the Committee will have an ongoing role in the development and prioritisation of proposals;
- 2) That the Committee notes the progress on working with the Department for Transport and industry colleagues on developing a pipeline of infrastructure improvements which will be reflected at each stage of development and delivery in the Blueprint;
- 3) That the Committee notes the outcome of the second stage of the consultation process on the December 2022 timetable and the steps that the industry is taking to ensure it successfully implemented.

6. RNP Operational Update

- 6.1 Members received the report from the Director of the Rail North Partnership. Before inviting the operators to update the Committee he explained that at the last meeting operators were able to report on positive “bounce back”, however this has been affected by Covid-19, staffing and training issues and significant weather events.
- 6.2 Mr. Nick Donovan provided the Committee with an update on progress for Northern. He explained that whilst there is a recovery there is continued suppressed demand on the network. He also highlighted the impact of financial restraints and the current industrial relations within the industry. He emphasised the importance of the need for Northern to modernise behind the scenes.

Mr Donovan highlighted demand patterns which were 26% below pre-Covid levels with commuter demand suppressed to 38% demand recovery; however the recovery is strongest within the leisure market.

The Committee was also provided with an update on timetabling changes and driver training.

- 6.3 Mr. Matthew Golton updated the Committee on demand patterns for TPE. He explained that customer demand is currently two thirds of where it was pre-pandemic and that pre bookings have increased as Covid restrictions have been lifted. He highlighted that the leisure market is at

or above pre Covid demand levels whilst the commuter market is below pre Covid market levels.

He explained that from June 2021 and through the Autumn, TPE had its best performance levels, but increased Covid cases and winter sickness amongst staff, industrial relations and poor weather made service delivery difficult during the winter months. He highlighted the current training drive and new recruitment within TPE and updated Members on the current position with regards to the industrial relations, as well as timetable planning. The Committee were also updated on fleet changes for the future.

6.4 Members raised issues relevant to their own Constituent Authorities.

6.5 Cllr Hale highlighted the importance of reliability and resilience on the network and explained that limited capacity will not encourage casual users to consider modal shift. He enquired as to whether the timetable changes will be returning or whether Covid will impact on the plans.

Mr. Donovan stressed the importance to Northern of providing certainty on the delivery of the customer promise and ensuring that timetabled trains be delivered. He further explained the need for them as operators to have confidence in the delivery of the timetable with an important factor being the resolution of the industrial relations issues.

Mr. Donovan explained that the reduction in Covid measures had improved matters particularly in relation to driver training.

Regarding the relationship between suppressed demand and trains not running he explained that for Northern, routes have got the same frequency of service as pre- Covid and some of these have suppressed levels of demand on these routes.

Mr. Golton explained that they are beginning to make progress with driver training although there is a significant backlog.

6.6 Cllr Edwards questioned the decision-making process on which services to withdraw first when trains need to be cancelled on the day. He requested a commitment for decent rail replacement services when this happens.

Mr. Donovan explained that these decisions are made by the control team who consider a number of criteria before making a decision.

6.7 The Chair thanked Mr. Donovan and Mr. Golton and asked that they passed on the thanks of the Committee to their teams.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7. Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Items 8 & 9 on the grounds that:

- (1) It is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during such item(s), confidential information as defined in S100A(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) would be disclosed to them in breach of the obligation of confidence; and/or
- (2) it / they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the Paragraphs [where necessary listed below] of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

8. Private Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 8.1 The private minutes of the meetings held on 15 December 2021 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 15 December 2021 be noted.

9. Train Operator Business Plans

- 9.1 The report was received by Members who were then invited to ask questions and make comments.

Resolved:

That the report of the Rail North Partnership Director be noted.