

Rail North Committee Minutes

**31 May 2022
Virtual**

Present:

Attendee

Cllr Liam Robinson (Chair)
Cllr Craig Browne
Mayor Andy Burnham

Cllr Richard Hannigan
Cllr Charles Edwards
Cllr Keith Little
Mayor Jamie Driscoll
Mayor Oliver Coppard

Cllr Heather Scott
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe

Local Authority

Liverpool City Region
Cheshire & The Potteries;
Greater Manchester Combined
Authority;
South of Humber;
Lakeland;
Lakeland;
North East Combined Authority;
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined
Authority;
Tees Valley;
West Yorkshire Combined Authority
and York;

Also in Attendance:

Matthew Rice
Tricia Williams
Matt Golton
Mark Livock
Richard Harper

Network Rail
Northern
Transpennine Express

Officers in Attendance:

Name
Martin Tugwell
Gary Rich
Julie Openshaw
Chris Mason
Gary Bogan
David Hoggarth

Job Title
Chief Executive
Democratic Services Officer
Head of Legal
Interim Head of Investment
Rail North Partnership Director
Strategic Rail Director

**Item Item
No:**

1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and no apologies were received. He then specifically extended a welcome to new Committee Members Mayor Coppard and Cllr Ieronimo.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the Consultation Call held on 9 March 2022 were considered for their accuracy.
- 3.2 Cllr Scott stated that she had sent apologies for the meeting, and these had not been recorded.

Resolved:

That subject to the recording of Cllr Scott's apologies that the minutes of the Consultation Call held on 9 March 2022 be noted.

4. Strategic Transport Plan Update

- 4.1 Members received the report from the Strategic Rail Director who outlined the key points of his report.
- 4.2 Addressing the issue of short term or long-term Mayor Burnham stated the need for a short term focus if it is going to be meaningful. He expressed concern about investment in the railway in the North until the end of the decade. He informed the Committee that it is his understanding that no significant capacity enhancements are planned for Central Manchester until the end of the decade. He further stated that in order for the plan to be meaningful it has to set out what the Committee needs as a minimum basic level of service.

Mayor Burnham believes that a plan is needed which should include a timeline outlining minimum expectations and providing completion dates.

- 4.3 Cllr Hinchcliffe requested an additional point be included on levelling up. She explained that some decisions made regarding the railway are bad for disadvantaged places and she wants to ensure that there is more local understanding on these decisions. She suggested that the point include consulting with local stakeholders when making decisions.
- 4.4 Cllr Browne suggested that a mix of short, medium and long-term deliverables need to be included in order to hold decision makers to account. He also stated that the documents need to reference putting passengers first and not customers.

- 4.5 The Chair agreed with the comments of Members. He explained that the document needs to be a visionary and targeted document focussing on the short, medium and long term with a particular focus on the tangibles setting out what the Committee wants the achievements to be for the next decade and beyond.

Resolved:

That the Committee supports the approach to the rail elements of the Strategic Transport Plan outlined in the report.

5. RNP Operational Update

- 5.1 Members received the report from the Rail North Partnership Director who explained that this had continued to be a difficult period for rail including for the two operators in the North. This is because of high level of staff absence, Industrial Relations issues and the absence of Rest Day Working which had been used to help clear the driver training backlog.

He highlighted a letter that had been received from ASLEF about an error in his previous report to the Committee on the issue of Industrial relations and explained that he will write to Mr. Whelan to clarify his point following the meeting.

- 5.2 Ms. Tricia Williams explained that there is a recovery on rail but demand is suppressed. She stated that the industry is working within financial constraints and is beginning to see some inflationary pressures on costs, and this coupled with industrial relations issues is beginning to impact on service delivery. /She explained that the May timetable has now been introduced with the focus on reliability and certainty for customers including reducing short term cancellations.

She then outlined Northern's progress during the recovery. She explained that demand is now at 88% of pre covid, with commuter demand beginning to improve, and leisure and weekends being the strongest areas of recovery.

She updated the committee on the current situation regarding industrial relations. Members were updated on training which is being impacted by having no Rest Day Agreement. It was highlighted that there were a total of 9000 days to be completed.

- 5.3 Mr. Matt Golton provided an update on TPE's recovery with demand currently 75% of pre covid levels but revenue at 85%.

He then addressed current performance levels and the impact these are having on customers, communities and colleagues. He stated that current performance levels are not acceptable and wants to get back to pre winter performance levels. He outlined the challenges they are facing which include higher than usual sickness levels, loss of driver Rest Day working, the RMT dispute and driver training backlogs.

- 5.4 Mr. Matthew Rice explained that the single biggest impact on performance is the actions of external people, this includes trespassing and theft of copper cable with these having a detrimental impact on services. He informed the Committee that good progress is being made on the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) and on East Coast Main Line enhancements.
- 5.5 Members raised with the operators a number of issues relevant to their areas.
- 5.6 Mayor Driscoll explained that it is the job of Committee Members to develop economic prosperity for their areas and a key element to enabling them to do so is having a functioning transport system which the current situation with the transport system across the North is making this difficult to do. He appealed for there to be adequate investment in the rail industry and urged the Government to fix this because a modern levelled up Northern economy can't be achieved without adequate investment in the rail system.
- 5.7 Cllr Hinchcliffe raised the issue that short term cancellations and reliability issues on TPE are having on people. She also looked for assurances from Northern that the full timetable will be restored by December without any changes or cancellations from existing services and without Covid being used as an excuse. She explained that many people living in the North need to travel into work and therefore time needs to be given for these services to build up their patronage and help local economies to thrive.

In response, Mr. Golton recognised that TPE's performance has been unacceptable. He stated that major reasons for the issues being experienced is due to the loss of flexibility as a result of the dispute with RMT colleagues and the loss of rest day working. He assured the committee that they are working as hard as possible to try and achieve a breakthrough with unions on the industrial relations.

Ms. Tricia Williams stated Northern's commitment to re-instating services, but that they may need be utilised differently [post-covid].

- 5.8 Cllr Browne brought to the attention of the Committee that disabled passengers are being left on platforms at Poynton, he stated that he had received a number of e-mails from residents on this issue. He believes that this is occurring due to a lack of capacity on the trains by the time it arrives in his area.

Ms. Williams stated that she will look into this and get back to him.

Mayor Burnham expressed frustration that the same conversations are being repeated and that the people of the North don't have a reliable railway. He stated that the current issues have been going on for a while

and questioned who is taking responsibility for sorting the situation so that the people of the North can have a reliable rail service.

He further stated the need for consistent performance levels and not one where there are patches of good performance followed by a collapse.

Whilst sympathising with operators that some of the issues being experienced are out of their control he added many aren't. He highlighted the lack of infrastructure and how they are unable to support the timetable ambitions of the Committee. He also questioned what the industry is doing to create a more reliable railway for the North when they are struggling to run reliable services on a reduced timetable.

In response to Mayor Burnham Ms. Williams stated that she is unable to put a timescale on improvements but explained that they are working hard to ensure that there is a focus on training as they believe this is the key to enabling them to work more flexibly and allow them to deploy resources where required in order to restore services.

On the issue of industrial relations she stated this is not in their power but they are working hard to find resolutions to the issues.

- 5.9 Mr. Golton stated that they need to recreate the stability that they had during the summer of 2021 where their performance was excellent. He offered the Committee assurances that they are doing everything they can to achieve this.
- 5.10 On the issue of infrastructure Mr. Rice stated that this is one part of the jigsaw and everyone needs to work together and continue to push for sensible targeted investment and growth.
- 5.11 Cllr Edwards stated that it is the most disadvantaged that are most likely to suffer from cancelled services as they have no other form of transport to use. He highlighted the impact of the industrial action on passengers and requested that the Committee and TfN adopt a robust position on the industrial action that gets all parties around the negotiating table and encourages a way forward that doesn't require industrial action.

The Chair stated that he wants all parties to get around the table to resolve the issues urgently without placing blame on specific people in order to find a speedy solution.

- 5.12 The Chair highlighted the importance of a strong focus being put on the build back from Covid. On the issue of industrial relations he further stated that it is imperative that the Government steps in, in order to avoid a national strike. He then highlighted the need for the DfT to give to operators more flexibility to negotiate on more local issues. The Committee were informed that the Chair of TfN is due to meet with the Rail Minister and he will be asked to take the messages of the Committee with him in order that these issues can be resolved.

- 5.13 The Chief Executive stated that there is a strong and clear message to give when the Chair meets with the Rail Minister. He explained that Officers continue to have dialogue with DfT and the messages from the Committee would also be relayed to them. This item will also be included on the 30 June Board agenda.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6. ECML Services and Infrastructure

- 6.1 Members received the report from the Interim Head of Investment and Planning who highlighted the key elements of the report.
- 6.2 The Chair explained that the Committee are awaiting Government proposals on this issue and once these have been agreed briefings will be held for Officers and Members so that actions can be taken forward quickly.
- 6.3 Mayor Driscoll stated that within the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) there are a number of mentions of schemes that will increase capacity on the East Coast Mainline to a potential seventh or eighth path however, in order for this to happen all the trains would need to run at the same speed and stop at the same places.
- He further explained that leaders across the area are working on a cross party basis and requested that the Committee endorse the creation of the East Coast Mainline Programme Board.
- 6.4 Cllr Scott stressed the importance of reinstating the timetable following the last consultation as well as the urgency of the upgrade of the line from York.
- 6.5 Cllr Hinchcliffe welcomed the progress that had been made on the proposals to improve capacity on the northern approach to York Station she also welcomed the joint work to develop the joint proposals in Bradford and Shipley to help the commitment for additional services between Bradford and London.
- She requested an update on the publication of RNEP.
- The Strategic Rail Director stated that he has been informed that this will be published soon but has not been given a date.
- 6.6 Mayor Coppard enquired about the Leeds Area study and asked if a deadline had been set. The Interim Head of Investment Planning stated that this should be issued soon however DfT have not published the Terms of Reference.

- 6.7 Mayor Burnham stated that the conversation needs to change and get back to a railway that supports economic growth in all cities and regions in the North. He stated that Ministers need to start re-attending TfN meetings.
- 6.8 The Chair requested that an item on this needs including on the next Board agenda and asked that a Minister or the Secretary of State be in attendance.
- 6.9 The Chief Executive echoed Members comments on the importance of receiving the Terms of Reference for the Leeds Area study. He stated that in order to move this work forward quickly TfN's role on the co-sponsorship Board can be used to make these key points to the DfT.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee notes the update on industry work to introduce a revised timetable on the East Coast Main Line.
- 2) That the Committee notes the work to develop a Blueprint to restore connectivity to and from the north of the East Coast Main Line on the same model as that being successfully applied to the Manchester congestion hotspot and the need to develop appropriate member and officer level governance arrangements
- 3) That the Committee notes the update on the Leeds Area Study.

7. Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of items 8,9 and 10 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 Consultation Call held on 9 March 2022 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the private minutes of the Consultation Call held on 9 March 2022 be noted.

9. Manchester Recovery Task Force Update

- 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.

10. Train Operator Business Planning

- 10.1 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.