
Rail North Committee Minutes

Monday 15 July

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

56 Oxford Street Manchester

Present:

Attendee

Cllr Rupert Swarbrick
Cllr Steve Foulkes

Cllr Martin Gannon
Cllr Mark Ieronimo
Cllr Karen Shore
Cllr Tom Hunt

Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe (Chair)
Mayor David Skaith

Local Authority

Lakeland;
Liverpool City Region Combined
Authority
North East Combined Authority
North of Humber;
Potteries;
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined
Authority;
West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
York and North Yorkshire Combined
Authority;

Partners in Attendance:

Jo Bird
Andy Mellors
David Horne
Edward Rowlandson
Jake Kelly
Tricia Willaims
Richard Harper
Chris Jackson

Avanti West Coast Mainline
Avanti West Coast Mainline
LNER
LNER
Network Rail
Northern
Steer
TPE

Officers in Attendance:

Name

Lord McLoughlin
Martin Tugwell
Gary Rich
Katie Day
David Hoggarth
Julie Openshaw
Adam Timewell
Caroline Young
Gary Bogan
David Worsley

Job Title

Chair of Transport for the North
Chief Executive
Democratic Services Officer
Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Strategic Rail
Head of Legal
Head of Programmes Northern
Partnership and Programme Manager
Rail North Partnership Director
Rail Strategy Manager

**Item Item
No:**

1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 The Chief Executive welcomed Members to the meeting and gave a special welcome to new Member Mayor Skaith who introduced himself. The new Deputy Mayor of the North East Combined Authority was also invited to speak.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from Mayor Burnham (Chair), Cllr Mitchell and Cllr Jackson.

2. Appointment of Committee Chair and Vice Chairs

- 2.1 The Chief Executive invited nominations for the Chair and Majority Group Vice Chair of the Rail North Committee.
- 2.2 Mayor Skaith proposed Mayor Burnham as Chair and Cllr Hinchcliffe as Vice Chair and this was seconded by Cllr Foulkes.
- 2.3 The Chief Executive then invited nominations for the role of Minority Groups Vice Chair.
- 2.4 Cllr Swarbrick proposed Cllr Ieronimo and this was seconded by Cllr Foulkes.

Resolved:

- 1) That Mayor Burnham be appointed Chair of the Rail North Committee for the 2024-25 Municipal Year
- 2) That Cllr Hinchcliffe be appointed Majority Group Vice Chair of the Rail North Committee for the 2024-25 Municipal Year
- 3) That Cllr Ieronimo be appointed Minority Groups Vice Chair for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

As the meeting was inquorate on the weighted vote criteria for quoracy until the arrival of Cllr Hinchcliffe the Monitoring Officer recommended that this element of quoracy be suspended to allow the meeting to continue until her arrival.

Cllr Gannon moved the recommendation which was seconded by Cllr Swarbrick; and it was so resolved without opposition.

3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 4.1 The minutes of the Consultation Call held on 21 February 2024 were considered for their accuracy.
- 4.2 On matters arising the Chief Executive invited the Head of Strategic Rail to provide an update on network resilience.
- 4.3 The Head of Strategic Rail stated that a more substantive item on infrastructure will be brought to the September meeting. He further informed the Committee that discussions are ongoing with train operators and Network Rail on resilience issues that are affecting the network.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Consultation Call held on 21 February 2024 be approved.

5. Rail Accessibility Task and Finish Group

- 5.1 Members received the report of the Rail Strategy Manager who highlighted the key points of his report.
- 5.2 The Chair (Cllr Hinchcliffe) highlighted the £1.3 billion figure for bringing the North's stations up to a desirable standard and stated that currently "the surface is just being scraped."
- 5.3 Cllr Swarbrick recognised the input into the working group of former North of Tyne Mayor Jamie Driscoll.
- 5.4 He suggested that funding for work on these projects should be sought from other less traditional sources in order to reduce the £1.3 billion figure of public money required.
- 5.5 Cllr Foulkes stated that Liverpool City Region is seen as an area of best practice on this matter and outlined the difficulties encountered in bidding for the money, which is being spent on an asset that they do not own or control. He suggested that devolving or simplifying the process needs to be examined so that a single organisation is responsible for delivery. He added that TfN could be a powerful voice to obtain more funding.
- 5.6 The Chair stressed the importance of working in partnership, allowing for information and best practice to be shared between authorities across the North.
- 5.7 In response the Chief Executive emphasised the importance of working with the operators who make investments in their assets annually. Additionally, he stated that TfN will be working with the Committee to review the for Northern and TPE. This will provide Members with an opportunity to set out their requirements for services and accessibility, so that this data can then be used to shape the specification.
- 5.8 The Chief Executive was also supportive of Cllr Foulkes and Cllr Swarbrick's suggestion on devolving the access for all funding directly to the North and its partners, so that this money can then be used alongside money from the private sector.
- 5.9 The Chair requested that the DfT's accessibility audit be shared.
- 5.10 Cllr Hunt stated that this work now needs to be translated into deliverable schemes and work will be required with the Mayoral Combined Authorities to provide opportunities to link up with their growth plans.
- 5.11 Cllr Ieronimo requested that consideration be given to how improvements to accessibility are communicated to those who require the information. He added that once the priorities have been identified there needs to be geographical spread so that not only the most densely populated areas benefit.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

- 1) Endorses the work of the Task & Finish Group, including the indicative 10-year programme

2) Endorses the following key messages from the Accessibility Task and Finish Group:

- An updated analysis of the status of station facilities has indicated that the estimate of the overall cost for bringing the North's stations up to a desirable standard (including step-free access at all stations) remains circa £1.3 billion.
- The proposed programme of work required now includes additional enhancements (e.g. Braille maps, high contrast stair nosing, Smart Beacons) which will further improve accessibility for passengers, whilst also including enhanced CCTV or lighting at the majority of stations in order to improve confidence in travel safety for all social groups
- Reassessment of the scope of the programme has indicated that a much higher proportion of the overall costs would fall within the "quick wins" category of works, which could be implemented without significant disruption to passengers, and thus may be possible to commence within the current Control Period (i.e. before March 2029). This will allow increased flexibility in devising a programme of work which could realistically be completed within 10 years;
- Partners involved in the Accessibility Task & Finish Group have provided updated cost data and suggested additional means of strengthening the business case;
- Additional information regarding the passenger experience was gathered through our Accessibility Survey, which closed on 7 June 2024.

3) Agrees the proposals for taking forward work to accelerate the delivery of station accessibility improvements

4) Endorses the 'quick wins' programme.

6. Rail North Partnership Operational Update

6.1 Members received the report of the Rail North Partnership Director and Head of Strategic Rail. The train operating companies were then invited to update the Committee.

6.2 David Horne provided an update from LNER which included an overview of the company. He explained that since being put into public ownership in 2018, it has been on a mission to improve and transform services on the East Coast Mainline in order to contribute to a successful and thriving North of England. LNER services alone have generated approximately £2.8 billion to the economy.

6.3 He explained that the company works in partnership with industry partners including Network Rail, suppliers and local authorities along the route, and investment is being made in a number of stations across the North.

6.4 The company has taken a long term view of the business and business plans have been developed with the needs of the business and

customers at their heart. This approach has enabled them to get to a place where they are carrying 24 million passengers a year; however, he recognised that opportunities exist and acknowledged issues with overcrowding.

- 6.5 Addressing performance, he informed the Committee that a joint strategy is in place with Network Rail East Coast Route where plans are in place for CP7 (Industry 5-year funding period) that focus on investment in infrastructure and making the infrastructure assets more reliable and the network more resilient. The company is working in collaboration with Hitachi to improve the reliability of its train fleet.
- 6.6 He explained that the implementation of the new East Coast timetable has been delayed but the company is working with industry partners on the final stages of development, and once in place it will provide extra capacity, as well as faster and more frequent services and more jobs.
- 6.7 The Chair highlighted the importance of this line for the North and the Northern economies.
- 6.8 Lord McLoughlin asked about the amount of freight being used on it and the implications of this. He also asked about the new ticket pricing being piloted.
- 6.9 Mr Horne highlighted the importance of this route for freight stating that it amounts to around 80 million tonnes. Investment on the line over the last decade has been centred on providing additional capacity for freight along the East Coast Corridor and the new timetable designed with freight services in mind.
- 6.10 He outlined their fares and ticketing work, highlighting the introduction of single leg pricing and simpler fares which is currently on trial with initial signs being positive and thousands of people choosing the "Flex" option. He recognised that more work needs to be done with those who use third party websites to buy tickets.
- 6.11 Cllr Gannon raised the issue of lack of capacity on LNER.
- 6.12 Mr Horne explained that there has been 30% growth since the last timetable change and the Azuma Trains have been introduced, adding an extra 100 seats to every service, these have been filled.
- 6.13 Mr Mellors updated on Avanti West Coast. He informed the Committee that the company is working hard to address the fundamental issues that have been driving poor performance and whilst believing that significant improvements have been made, he acknowledged that these need to continue and that investment is needed to deliver consistently.
- 6.14 He explained that the company is working closely with Network Rail to address the performance challenges, and a performance improvement strategy is in place. The strategy also addresses asset reliability, the need for a more resilient railway and improvements to service recovery.
- 6.15 He reported a reduction in operator cancellations in the previous 12 weeks, whilst recruitment activity has continued there has also been an increase in the number of productive drivers available. He believes that

they are on track to deliver more services with extra services being run in the June timetable and more planned by the end of 2025.

- 6.16 He acknowledged that there are some residual issues that need to be resolved in order to consistently deliver a reliable railway and whilst the company has been able to negotiate changes to rostering and annual leave arrangements, it does not have a mandate to negotiate with the Trade Unions to seek rest day working pay awards and substantive changes to terms and conditions. He emphasised Avanti's desire to work with Government to resolve these issues.
- 6.17 The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that following the last meeting in February and the subsequent Board meeting in March the Chair of the TfN Board together with the Chair of Rail North Committee wrote to the Secretary of State providing advice on Avanti; however, due to the election no substantive response was received and TfN had been invited to resubmit the letter following the general election. He advised that the advice of officers remained unchanged from March and recommended that the letter should be resubmitted following the meeting, in advance of the Secretary of State's meeting with Avanti later in the week. He believed that she should be aware of TfN's view on this matter and recommended the letter should also include reference to the deterioration in infrastructure performance and operation.
- 6.18 Members agreed the Chief Executive's recommendation.
- 6.19 Ms Williams provided an update on Northern. She apologised for their recent poor performance and particularly for performance on Sundays in the North West. She explained that this is because Sundays are not included in the working week for their train crews in the North West. Additionally, she advised that there has been 'action short of strike' by ASLEF drivers. She stated that in the short term the company wants to stabilise the situation by resolving the 'action short of strike' with ASLEF and whilst resolving this will help to solve the short term issues she advised that in the long term more action is required. The company is working with the Rail North Partnership to examine reform so that a resilient service can be run on a Sunday and in the short term services that cannot run are being taken out of the Sunday timetable.
- 6.20 The Head of Programmes for Northern confirmed that a contractual breach notice has been issued to Northern as they had reached the limits on self-cancellations and the Rail North Partnership will work with them on a remedial plan.
- 6.21 Cllr Hunt stated that the results of the recovery plan are not being seen in South Yorkshire and noted that a whole network approach is required as the issue is not only impacting the North West; other areas are also experiencing cancellations. He also raised the issues of sickness and training backlogs.
- 6.22 Ms Williams advised that progress is being made on training highlighting the high levels in both Sheffield and Liverpool Lime Street. Training throughput is being protected despite the high sickness levels and the lack of rest day working available. Additionally, there is a robust sickness

- plan in place which includes switching occupational health advisors and this is beginning to deliver positive results.
- 6.23 Cllr Faulkes expressed concern at the current situation in the Liverpool City Region and offered assistance to help improving matters.
- 6.24 Ms Williams explained that initially crew were spread too thinly on Sundays. However, this was not working so the company opted for a more targeted approach and is now protecting routes with higher footfall.
- 6.25 Cllr Gannon emphasised that it is the responsibility of the companies to plan ahead to address the issues of industrial relations, sickness and training.
- 6.26 The Head of Strategic Rail stated the breach notice places matters on a more formal level and allows members to see the plan in full. The plan will be shared, and the Committee briefed in the next four weeks.
- 6.27 The Rail North Partnership Director acknowledged that Northern has tried everything possible to return to an acceptable figure but there is difficulty in tracking what initiatives and investments will bring improved service. The plan will allow them to track each initiative on a monthly basis.
- 6.28 The Chair requested that any decisions that are made on or options for specific routes also be included in the plan.
- 6.29 Mr Chris Jackson provided an update on TPE. He informed the Committee that the business is in a better and different place to last year with colleague engagement and stakeholder satisfaction both up by 40%, the operation stabilised, cancellations reduced and "P codes" now almost non-existent. He advised that excellent progress has been made in reducing driver training backlog allowing for the re-introduction of some services in June and more in December giving a 12% increase in seats across the network.
- 6.30 The Chair asked if there can be an acceleration in reinstating other services before December.
- 6.31 Mr Jackson answered that it is not possible for extra services to be added before December, but late night additional services are being run to support the late night economies and big music events across the North.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

- 1) Notes the information in the report and supports the actions that Rail North Partnership (RNP) is taking to ensure operators focus on delivering the services passengers need.
- 2) Notes the updates from train operators and the business update from LNER
- 3) Agrees to resubmit its advice to the Secretary of State in respect of the future of the West Coast operator
- 4) Agrees, subject to amendments made by the Committee, the response to the Open Access applications.

7. Train Operating Companies Annual Business Plans 2025/26

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- 7.1 Members received the report of the Partnership and Programme Manager who highlighted the key points of the report.
- 7.2 The Chair enquired as to when the plans will come back to the Committee and when the Combined Authorities will become involved in this.
- 7.3 The Partnership and Programme Manager answered that it will be reported to the February Rail North Committee following a January member working group. She informed the Committee that there had been a workshop in June where the Regional Business Units and partners were involved in this process.
- 7.4 The Chair asked about a joint strategy on rolling stock across the North.
- 7.5 The Chief Executive informed the Committee that this can be approached through the rebasing of the outline service specification which will include reference to rolling stock.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

- 1) Approves the strategic priorities as TfN's input into the train operator business plans for 2025/26
- 2) Recommends to the Secretary of State that operators should be required to set their annual business plans in the context of their 5-year strategic plans and in the context of the 10-year service specification that it is under development.

8. Date and time of next meeting

Tuesday 3 September 2024

9. Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Items 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 [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.

10. Private Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 10.1 The private minutes of the Consultation Call held on 21 February 2024 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the private minutes of the Consultation Call held on 21 February 2024 be approved.

