

**Meeting:** Rail North Committee Consultation Call  
**Subject:** Rail North Partnership Operational Update  
**Author:** Gary Bogan, Rail North Partnership Director  
David Hoggarth, Head of Strategic Rail  
**Sponsor:** Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive  
**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, 20 November 2024

## **1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To update the Committee on operational rail matters, including performance, and to ask members to note the information in the report. At the meeting there will be representatives from Northern, to provide an update on its performance recovery plan and CrossCountry (XC) on the reintroduction of its full timetable.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
- a) 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.
  - b) Notes the updates from train operators.

## **3. Overview**

- 3.1 Operational performance remains mixed – TransPennine Trains (TPT) has significantly reduced cancellation levels and at the December timetable change will restore services that were temporarily removed in December 2023. Northern is continuing to suffer significantly high levels of cancellations, with particular challenges in the North West on Sundays.
- 3.2 RNP is working with TPT and Northern to enable the operators to take appropriate actions for their respective businesses and to ensure there are operational performance recovery plans to meet their contractual targets.
- 3.3 Updates from other operators serving the North (not covered by the Rail North Partnership Agreement) are included in Appendices 1-3.

### **Northern performance improvement plan**

- 4.1 In July RNP issued Northern with a breach of contract notice for its level of self-on-self cancellations, requiring Northern to produce an improvement plan setting out how it will address the issues leading to its current unacceptable performance.
- 4.2 After submitting two draft plans, neither of which were considered satisfactory by RNP or partners, on 31 October 2024 Northern submitted its final plan. The contents of this are presented in a separate paper by TfN. Northern's Managing Director Tricia Williams and Chief Operating Officer Matt Rice will attend the committee to answer members' questions.
- 4.3 Following an emergency meeting of the Rail North Committee on 30 October 2024, Northern has shared a Mitigation Plan with TfN and members on how it will provide greater certainty to passengers and businesses in the run up to Christmas and the New Year.

4.4 RNP will be writing to Northern to formally request it undergoes a temporary period of strict focus and prioritisation on improving performance in key areas, namely:

- Operational performance (service reliability for passengers);
- Accessibility, with a focus on passenger assist and actions which enable everyone to use the railway; and
- Internal processes to facilitate Northern's ability to function as a good and efficient operator and deliver for passengers.

## **5. Reintroduction of Cross Country (XC) timetable**

5.1 On July 29 XC announced a temporary reduction in services from 10<sup>th</sup> August until 9 November 2024 in an effort to reduce on-the-day cancellations and provide passengers with more certainty about which trains would actually run.

5.2 During the step-down:

- Nottingham-Cardiff via Gloucester had fewer services, with some starting or finishing at intermediate stations.
- Some Newcastle-Birmingham-Reading trains did not run.
- Some Manchester-Bristol-Paignton services did not reach Devon.

CrossCountry stated there would be "minimal" alterations to its core Scotland-South West, Manchester-Bournemouth and Birmingham-Standed routes.

5.3 The full timetable was reinstated as planned. XC's Ben Simkin will attend the meeting to answer members' questions.

## **6. TransPennine Trains (TPT)**

6.1 TPT remains on programme to deliver its recovery plan as outlined at previous meetings, with all services restored by December 2024. TPT's overall driver competency is now 90% across the business, in line with its recovery plan.

6.2 A combination of significant infrastructure changes and staffing issues, including a high rate of drivers leaving and an ageing driver profile, means TPT's forward training load will be higher than previously. TPT is actively managing that risk through mapping of Rest Day Working (RDW) renewal/requirements and working with trades unions on mutually acceptable terms and conditions reform to increase underlying resilience.

6.3 Service developments in December include:

- Four fast trains per hour between Manchester and Leeds, departing every 15 minutes (clock face) – eastern destinations: Newcastle, Redcar Central, Scarborough and Hull;
- Majority of trains via Sheffield operating with six carriages;
- 40 TPT services a day operating Liverpool - Manchester;
- A new hourly service York - Manchester via Castleford;
- A new evening service Manchester - Oxenholme;
- Hourly calls at Chester-le-Street;
- Eaglescliffe is added to the TPT network with hourly services; and
- A 12% increase in seats or 1,300 extra per day.

6.4 TPT's plans for December 2024 originally included withdrawal of its morning and afternoon stops at South Milford. It now plans to retain its morning calls at South Milford. Afternoon calls cannot be accommodated due to a pathing conflict with a freight service. From December TPT's Liverpool - Newcastle service will no longer

call at Northallerton; LNER will introduce a weekday York – Newcastle "shuttle" to cover these stops.

- 6.5 TPT cancellations are down 70% since its transfer into DOHL in April 2023, while customer sentiment is at a record high of +11 net promoter score.
- 6.6 TPT collected the highest revenue in the history of TransPennine Express during period seven (15 September to 12 October), helping to reduce taxpayer subsidy, while national data for period six (18 August to 14 September) showed TPT was also the fastest growing train company nationally. Passenger growth on TPT services is trending at 20% year on year, indicating the benefit of stable and consistent good performance to attract customers.
- 6.7 Driver training continues to be progressed in line with operational plans. 63 new drivers have been recruited; 92 trainee and qualified drivers have been passed out; 169 drivers have acquired new traction knowledge; and 300 drivers have been passed out on diversionary routes.
- 6.8 Over the winter a Changing Places facility will be installed by TPT at Cleethorpes station, with DfT funding secured through Muscular Dystrophy UK, making it available for customer use in the core tourism season in 2025. TPT operates 10% of all Changing Places facilities available across the rail network.
- 6.9 On 15 November TPT held two events at Cleethorpes station. The first saw TPT and the Watkins Society unveil a blue plaque to commemorate Sir Edward William Watkin, Chairman of the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway who brought the railway to Cleethorpes in 1863. In the second TPT and Network Rail marked the completion of works to bring platform four at Cleethorpes back into operational use.
- 6.10 The accessible toilet at Middlesbrough station has been upgraded by TPT to be stoma friendly. A shelf, hooks to hang belongings on, and a back rest have been added to meet Colostomy UK requirements to be stoma friendly.
- 6.11 TPT has continued with its approach to enable leisure journeys by train for major events. Additional calls were made at Chester-le-Street on 24 September to increase travel options for attendees of the England v Australia cricket match at the Riverside Ground. TPT ran an additional evening service between Manchester to Hull on 12 October to increase rail capacity for supporters attending the Super League Grand Final, while an additional call was made at Wigan North Western.
- 6.12 TPT is currently working on its business plan for 2025/26. As part of this it has approached Local Transport Authorities to explore any partnering opportunities to try and deliver some of the outputs of the RNC accessibility task and finish group. Funding availability is limited, but discussions continue to explore all potential opportunities that might be enabled through the business plan process.
- 6.13 TPT is working with Inter City Rail Freight on the potential to transport very small consignments of priority freight on board its services. Trial loadings are expected to start in November. The outcome of the trial will inform if, how and when the transportation of regular small consignments of freight can be accommodated across the TPT network.

## **7. Northern Trains**

- 7.1 Northern has secured a new Rest Day Working (RDW) agreement with train drivers after constructive talks with ASLEF. The agreement runs until 26 December 2027 and will enable increased service resilience.
- 7.2 Customer demand for travel with Northern is growing at around 2.5%, with leisure trips a key contributor. To continue driving leisure growth, Northern has

made its best value advance fares more widely available for quieter services, seeing around 100,000 extra journey a week as a result.

- 7.3 The educational seasons programme continues to grow, providing a pipeline of rail customers for the future while supporting the link between communities and education opportunities as well as combatting child ticketless travel. Growth of the scheme year on year since 2021 has been 20%, but this year the scheme has seen growth of 32%. Going forward Northern will be collaborating with colleagues at TPT to extend the scheme across their network offering a more seamless journey for all customers.
- 7.4 Northern continues to collaborate with partners to deliver local initiatives that unlock long-term demand growth. This includes a social value partnership with Liverpool City Region, working across industry to provide a care leavers' ticket, improving access to employment opportunities and supporting long-term public transport use. In addition, Northern and TPT together delivered a market headroom study on the key barriers to customers travelling by rail in the North, opportunities to overcome these barriers and drive modal shift to rail, with an early output being a price trial in the Hull area.
- 7.5 Northern has submitted a plan to the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) on its passenger assistance, which focusses on delivery of reliable passenger assist for all customers who need it, with a combination of priority focused short term/quick-win actions and longer-term and continuous improvement initiatives.
- 7.6 As part of Northern's strategy to improve the diversity of its workforce, the female attraction strategy has begun to take shape. A roadmap of activity and key initiatives is to be launched next quarter and good progress has been made in introducing gender balanced interview panels.
- 7.7 Northern held a series of stakeholder roundtable events in late October which enabled in-depth discussion on the most pressing issues affecting rail across the North as well as broader areas for future collaboration.
- 7.8 Passengers will see little change to Northern's timetable in December, although in the North East the opening of the new Northumberland line is a significant forthcoming milestone – traincrew route learning started on time in August and the programme remains, for drivers and conductors, on plan.

## **8. TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU)**

- 8.1 TRU has seen a recent period of sustained disruptive construction works with trains diverted between Leeds and Huddersfield; for those travelling to intermediate stations, rail replacement services are in operation. This latest period of disruption will end on 23 November 2024. The TRU Customer Handling team are focusing their attention on how customers will be managed during the first Huddersfield blockade in August/September 2025.
- 8.2 TPT has completed or nearly completed TRU driver training at a number of depots and remains on track to operate up to 3 trains per hour over each of the TRU diversionary routes from May 2025. Going forward all new drivers will be trained on the diversionary routes as part of business as usual.
- 8.3 TPT continues to make good progress on its new rolling stock procurement. The manufacturer procurement is progressing well. The financier procurement also continues to progress as planned; the standard selection questionnaire was issued to the market in October 2024, and the invitation to negotiate remains on track to be issued early 2026.

## **9. Rolling stock procurements update**

- 9.1 In May 2024 Northern issued an initial contract notice for the replacement of the oldest diesel trains in its fleet (Class 150, 155, and 156) with a combination of new electric, battery-electric and multi-mode trains. This represents one of the

biggest replacement programmes in the UK, with the first phase of 127 units due to enter service from 2029, and a second phase of 126 units following in the mid-2030s (meeting the 2040 decarbonisation target). The new trains will deliver key aims of growing and levelling up the economy, improving transport for the user and reducing environmental impacts.

- 9.2 TPT plays a significant role as delivery partner to Network Rail in the TRU and is in the process of buying new rolling stock (29 units) for TRU, due in service from 2029, with an option for an additional 26 units. The new rolling stock will be capable of running in self-powered mode and under electrified overhead line and will be required to support ambitious decarbonisation and sustainability requirements.

## **10. Corporate Considerations:**

### ***Financial Implications***

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications to Transport for the North arising from this report.

### ***Resource Implications***

- 10.2 There are no direct resourcing implications to Transport for the North arising from this report.

### ***Legal Implications***

- 10.3 Any legal implications are contained with this report.

### ***Risk Management and Key Issues***

- 10.4 Transport for the North have two relevant corporate risks which are being actively managed - 309 'viability of future train services and future investment decisions' and 311 'future timetables.'

### ***Environmental Implications***

- 10.5 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the EIA Directive and therefore does not stimulate the need for SEA or EIA. Passenger rail has an essential part to play in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within Transport for the North's Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around managing private car vehicle mileage.

### ***Equality and Diversity***

- 10.6 There are no equality or diversity issues arising from the report.

## **10. Appendices:**

- 10.1 Appendices 1 – 3: Operator Updates

## **Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms:**

ASLEF	The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
DOHL	Department for Transport OLR Holdings Ltd
ECML	East Coast Mainline
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ITN	Invitation to Negotiate
NTL	Northern Trains Ltd or ("Northern")
ORR	Office of Rail and Road
PPM	Public Performance Measure
RDW	Rest Day Working
RNP	Rail North Partnership
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
TfW	Transport for Wales Rail-Trafnidiaeth Cymru
TPT	TransPennine Trains Ltd or ("TransPennine Express")

TRU	TransPennine Route Upgrade
LNR	London Northwestern Railway (operates West Midlands Trains)
LNER	London north East Railway

## **Appendix 1: East Midlands Railway (EMR) Update**

- A1.1 EMR are currently concentrating on Autumn service delivery and Christmas readiness. EMR have a dedicated Event Management and Assurance Team who monitor and prepare for events that may impact services or stations, due to increased footfall. To support smooth operations during busy times, EMR employ a range of capacity management strategies when planning for events which includes providing additional train units, where possible.
- A1.2 With regards to staff availability, EMR's on-train and station colleagues operate on shift-based rosters with built-in resilience, including spare and standby cover, to address unexpected absences. Additionally, EMR have a pool of contingency managers available to step in as needed, to ensure minimal disruption to services during the Christmas period.
- A1.3 EMR's performance between 15 September to 12 October was good, with 73.5% T-3 performance (the percentage of trains arriving within three minutes of their schedule at each calling point) and 96.4% T-15 performance (as before, within 15 minutes). EMR had a network cancellation rate of 3.6% and a short formation rate of 0.84%.
- A1.4 The December 2024 timetable change sees no amendments to timings on EMR's Liverpool – Norwich route, but the operator will be running more services as Class 170 units in 3-car and 6-car formations based on demand and feasibility.

## **Appendix 2: Transport for Wales Rail (TfW) update**

- A2.1 In December 2024 TfW will introduce Class 197 trains on its services from Manchester to Wales. Along with the removal of speed limits and changed calling patterns for its Class 67/mark IV services, this will reduce journey times across TfW's services.
- A2.2 TfW will also be introducing additional stops at Alderley Edge on its 0629 Crewe-Piccadilly service and its 0550 Cardiff Central-Piccadilly services.
- A2.3 TfW services from Manchester-Cardiff/Swansea and Milford Haven/Fishguard will have increased capacity from December.
- A2.4 The 0454 service Holyhead/Llandudno-Manchester Airport and the 1625 and 1725 Manchester Airport-Llandudno/Holyhead will be 5-car trains to increase peak capacity.

## **Appendix 3: London Northwestern Railway (LNR) update (West Midlands Trains)**

- A3.1 Performance has remained consistent in Periods 5 and 6 (21 July to 17 August and 18 August to 14 September), with T-3 figure at 78.3% in Period 5 and 78.7% in Period 6. T-15 was 97.2% in Period 5 and 97.5% in Period 6.
- A3.2 From the December timetable change, LNR will double the number of off-peak trains running between Liverpool Lime Street and Birmingham New Street from 1 train per hour to 2 trains per hour. This timetable change will also see LNR begin serving Mossley Hill for the first time and which will provide a direct service during the day for passengers at Mossley Hill to Crewe, Stafford and Birmingham.

- A3.3 LNR is continuing to roll out improvements across its stations, with upgraded, full-colour Digital Customer Information Screens on platforms and in waiting rooms. LNR is also providing improved Help Points across its stations, including Google Maps functionality which will allow customers to plan their entire journey door-to-door, including train travel. LNR's traincrew facilities at Crewe station have recently been upgraded with three new rooms and additional space, allowing improved delivery of driver and conductor training.
- A3.4 Customer communications regarding Christmas engineering work is now live. There will be significant signalling work in the Crewe area between December 25 and January 2, impacting LNR services. A reduced service to Liverpool will run during this period, with rail replacement buses.