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<b>Meeting:</b>	Transport for the North Board
<b>Subject:</b>	Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024 - 2026
<b>Author:</b>	Katie Day, Strategy Director and Deputy Chief Executive
<b>Sponsor:</b>	Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	Monday 9 December 2024

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**1. Purpose of the Report:**

- 1.1 To update the Board on Transport for the North (TfN)'s approach to communications and engagement; and seek any views/feedback. Our strategic approach and aims have been reviewed and updated to reflect the changing political and policy context, and the evolution of TfN's role given greater devolution.

**2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 The Board is asked to note, and provide feedback, on the refreshed strategic approach to TfN communications and engagement.

**3. Main issues:**

**Context**

- 3.1 In June 2023, the Board considered our outline communications and engagement strategy for the following three years. We noted that we would keep that strategy under review and would refresh it in light of any fundamental change in our operating environment. As the political and policy context has changed following the General Election it is timely for such a review. Reflecting on the steer from constituent authorities over the summer, we are adjusting our approach so as to better reflect the role we now have in supporting MCA/LTA partners to enable delivery of the Strategic Transport Plan (STP).
- 3.2 The (separate) business planning report sets out the emerging priorities for the year ahead that have informed the communications and engagement refresh, specifically:
- Providing strategic evidence and advice
  - Acting as a broker/convener on cross-border and pan-regional matters; and
  - Providing technical support through the TfN offer.

As such we need to socialise that intended focus with our stakeholders and interested parties to demonstrate how we can, and are, adding value as a statutory body led by its political members with business representation. We also want to be more proactive in working with partners to access the TfN offer to support their transport planning and business cases.

- 3.3 For TfN, our communications and engagement need to support our Political leaders by: enabling them to speak as a collective when they wish to, for example on pan-regional matters (as they have done recently on train operating company performance); and/or where our technical services, statutory advice and convening powers can amplify their cases for investment and accelerate delivery in line with the STP.

3.4 Our refreshed approach also reflects the Board's steer to ensure we bring a greater diversity of perspective to our work and meetings. We have already stepped up our engagement over the last 12 months with the business community, especially those in the transport "world" – like our ports, airports and freight companies – to inform TfN's evidence/advice to government on those pan-regional connections to unlock more sustainable growth. We will extend that engagement over the next 15 months through our roundtable programme, connecting public and private partners together on matters of pan-regional significance. But we also want to create more opportunities to engage with underrepresented groups in transport. Alongside our citizen's panel – Northern Transport Voices – we intend to establish a 'community forum' (or similar) to provide more diverse perspectives into our work.

#### 4. **Strategic aims**

4.1 Based on the context above, we have begun developing a detailed plan to deliver our refreshed approach. Ahead of finalising our plans, we want to test with the Board our revised communication and engagement aims:

4.2 We are proposing the following:

- **Connect** public and private partners, stakeholders and interested parties together on cross-boundary matters to amplify collective priorities and accelerate delivery of pan-regional transport infrastructure for the North
- **Reach out** to bring a wider perspective to our work, engaging businesses, interested parties and underrepresented groups, so our evidence and statutory advice more readily reflect the North's 'lived experience'
- **Enable** greater access to our technical capability to support local and national partners in their planning and delivery, including business cases.

4.3 These aims will underpin our communication and engagement activities. In addition, as Political leaders require, we will advocate for, and amplify the need for, investment in the North's pan-regionally significant transport priorities required to deliver the STP. Under our refreshed approach, our role will be to support the TfN Board when it chooses to speak collectively as the North on those matters, using our communication and engagement activities to advocate their position, case for investment and/or strategic priorities.

#### **Communication and engagement activities**

4.4 As well as refreshing our strategic approach, we have carefully reviewed our routine communications and engagement activities. With the resources available to TfN we want to maximise opportunities to work with/support/complement others, so we can deliver more efficiently. Equally, working more closely with our partners enables us to better amplify their voices and align resources to deliver the collective ambitions and outcomes set out in the STP.

To that end, we intend – for the next 15 months at least – to focus our efforts on the following activities/tactics:

- Business roundtables, led by the TfN Chair and relevant elected members and business representatives, initially on improving access to our international gateways and enabling rail freight growth
- Establishing a 'Community Forum', or similar, to engage with underrepresented groups to enhance diversity of thought and perspective into our work and in advice to TfN Committees and Board

- Amplify our partners and the TfN Board’s collective voice by maximising engagement opportunities around our Board meetings; and more targeted involvement in national groups/conferences to promote investment and delivery in line with the STP
- More engagement by TfN Chair, Chief Executive and officers with MCAs/LTAs via visits/workshops to establish how we can help/support – via the TfN offer and the use of statutory powers already held by TfN – to accelerate delivery
- Work in support of TfN members to ensure that MPs have access to the evidence that supports the case for the North
- Facilitating cross border groups – including continuation of those groups most valued by our partners such as the North’s Bus Forum and EVCI group
- Support other groupings such as Growth Track 360 (connecting North Wales and Cheshire) and relevant All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), such as the Leamside Line and Freight & Logistics
- Refreshing our website, so it is easy for partners to access our tools and evidence to support their work and complement this with a new external newsletter.

4.5 In practice, this will mean less singular, TfN-led events and more collaboration, partnering and selective conferences. We therefore do not intend to continue the TfN APPG, nor host fringe events/stands at the 2025 party conferences. We have also taken the decision not to hold a stand-alone TfN conference in 2025 and instead play a greater role in the Convention of the North. This reflects the collaborative approach, led by TfN, that produced the updated Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review (NPIER), which in turn forms the basis of transport as a pillar in the Northern manifesto. So, the “joining up” we have set out in the STP will be mirrored in how we communicate and engage going forward.

4.6 We will continue to ensure our communication and engagement activities reach across the whole North, whilst at the same time strengthening our collaboration with partners. Appendix one captures engagement activities by MCA/LTA since January 2024 and proposals to March 2026.

## **5. Corporate Considerations**

### **5.1 *Financial and resource implications***

The emerging TfN business plan for 2025/26 reflects the revised budget/resourcing requirements to deliver this refreshed strategic approach to communications and engagement. We are confident the refreshed approach will enable us to deliver more efficiently and reduce professional costs.

### **5.2 *Legal Implications***

Any legal implications are included within the report.

### **5.3 *Risk management and key issues***

Any communication, stakeholder or reputational risks are reflected in TfN’s corporate risk register. This is reviewed on a regular basis, and should new risks emerge as we deliver this refreshed approach, they will be captured accordingly.

### **5.4 *Environmental Implications***

There are no environmental implications arising from the report.

5.5 ***Equality and diversity***

We will ensure our communication and engagement activities meet relevant standards, as necessary, for accessibility.

5.6 ***Consultations***

n/a.

**6. Background Papers**

6.1 n/a

**7. Appendices**

7.1 Appendix 1 - Draft Engagement Plan 2024-26

**Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used**

APPG – All-Party Parliament Group

EVCI – Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

LTA – Local Transport Authority

MCA – Mayoral Combined Authority

NPIER - Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review

TfN – Transport for the North

STP – Strategic Transport Plan

## Appendix one – Draft Engagement Plan 2024-26

North East	Jan 2024 – Chair/CEO visit March 2025 – TfN Board meeting
Tees Valley	June 2024 – Business roundtable September 2025 – TfN Board meeting
Cumberland	March 2025 – Chair visit
Westmorland & Furness	March 2025 – Chair visit
Lancashire	March 2024 – Chair visit March 2025 – Convention of the North
Blackpool	TBC - Chair/CEO visit/workshop
Blackburn with Darwen	TBC - Chair/CEO visit/workshop
Liverpool City Region	Feb 2024 – TfN Conference June 2025 – TfN Board Meeting
Warrington	TBC – Chair/CEO visit/workshop
Cheshire East	Spring 2025 – Crewe summit
Cheshire West and Chester	TBC – Chair/CEO visit/workshop
Greater Manchester	December 2024 – TfN Board Meeting December 2025 – TfN Board Meeting
West Yorkshire	Summer 2025 - TfN staff meeting (Leeds) TBC – Business roundtable
Hull	TBC – Chair/CEO visit/workshop
East Yorkshire	February 2024 – Chair/CEO visit
South Yorkshire	TBC – Chair/CEO visit/workshop March 2026 – TfN Board Meeting
York and North Yorkshire	October 2024 - CEO visit/roundtable TBC – First Community Forum meeting (York)
North and North East Lincolnshire	TBC – Chair/CEO visit/workshop