
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Rail North Committee Update
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Sponsor: Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive
Meeting Date: Monday, 9 December 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Board with feedback on the matters discussed at the Rail North Committee Consultation Call on 20 November 2024.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 For the Board to note the feedback from Rail North Committee.

3. Accessibility Task and Finish Group

- 3.1 Members were updated on work undertaken by the Accessibility Task & Finish Group. The focus of work in recent months had been on how to prioritise investment in railway station accessibility, given the routes to delivery which are available. Members were clear that criteria other than standard cost-benefit analysis needs to be used.
- 3.2 A multicriteria framework has been developed incorporating information about disabilities and health in station catchment populations, and the standard of existing facilities, alongside passenger numbers and revenue impacts. The Committee approved continuing this approach, but with additional criteria (such as station crime statistics) added to the analysis to broaden the inclusivity focus. Members also requested to see the detailed work and offer local input.

4. Northern Trains Performance

- 4.1 Members received a briefing on Northern's updated recovery plans from Tricia Williams (Managing Director) and Matt Rice (Chief Operating Officer). Northern once again apologised for the unacceptable service and outlined the steps they are taking to address it. It was noted that agreement on a Rest Day Working agreement with drivers had helped improve performance during weekdays. An interim agreement with conductors for Sunday working was under consideration by the union. The Committee heard that in the absence of an agreement Northern would need to amend timetables over the Christmas period to provide passengers with clarity as to which services would and would not run.
- 4.2 Whilst appreciating the progress and openness from the Northern representatives, Committee Members were concerned about the seriousness of the decline in performance since 2015. They were also deeply concerned at the suggestion that it could take until 2027 before achieving a fully satisfactory service. Members were clear that the need for action was urgent and pressing, they emphasised the need for a clear set of milestones against which progress would be monitored on a regular basis.
- 4.3 Members were particularly concerned that Northern had not implemented full ticket acceptance at times of disruption: during such times it should be possible for a Northern passenger to use any other operators' service with the same ticket. In the meeting, the CrossCountry representative indicated that they were happy to support Northern and continue discussions on ticket acceptance. Members emphasised the importance Northern should give to being in a position

where there should be no further 'do not travel notices' issued by Northern because of arrangements put in place for alternatives and ticket acceptance.

- 4.4 The Committee agreed that, given their concerns, an additional meeting be arranged for the first half of January at which Northern would be expected to provide more detail and a clear set of milestones. They reiterated that they were prepared to back Northern on the actions they need to take on behalf of passengers but that there must be greater transparency.

5 East Coast Main Line Timetable

- 5.1 The Committee had met with the Chair of the East Coast Main Line Taskforce in mid-October. Following that session, the Committee wrote to the Rail Minister stating its conditional support for the introduction of the new timetable subject to several conditions being met. The Committee heard that the Minister was expected to respond to the Committee's letter shortly and was advised that at that point the proposed timetable was still the subject of discussion at Ministerial level. Officers advised that as soon as the response from the Minister was received this would be shared with RNC Members and their officers and if required a meeting arranged to discuss.

6. Rail Reform

- 6.1 Unlike elsewhere in England, Northern leaders already have the benefit of a degree of rail devolution, as set out between the Department for Transport (DfT) and TfN through the Rail North Agreement. This gives TfN a contractual role, alongside the DfT, in the specification, letting and management of contracts for Northern and TPE. Implementation of the Rail North Agreement is undertaken on behalf of TfN and DfT through the Rail North Partnership executive. This team consists of TfN employees and provides the North with the technical capacity and capability required.
- 6.2 The report before the Committee acknowledged that these working arrangements would need to evolve as part of the rail reform agenda. Drawing on TfN's experience of rail devolution to date, the report set out a series of initial requirements that would be used to shape the development of a proposal from TfN. The report recommended the establishment of a working group involving officers from constituent authorities to assist in this work. The Committee endorsed this as a way forward noting the need to both reflect the expected role of Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA) and the importance of ensuring that the voice of all constituent authorities across the North was heard.

7. Infrastructure Update

- 7.1 Following the presentation in September of the State of Play, the first time that there has been a single overview of planned investments in infrastructure, rolling stock and associated timetable changes, the November infrastructure report provided an update on progress with the implementation of recommendations, including the establishment of Task Force Boards for Leeds, Sheffield and Liverpool, along with place-based groups in key towns and cities.
- 7.2 The report set out a sequenced implementation and the progress of discussions with partners, as well as a summary of the engagement and positive steps taken across the industry, particularly Network Rail. It also referenced several industry workstreams due to report early 2025 which will inform discussions and areas of focus. In continuing to welcome the State of Play, members expressed desire for the recommendations to be implemented faster in order to support submissions to the upcoming Spending Review. Members were reassured that the main TfN Board would be considering the Spending Review at its meeting and would draw on workstreams underway across TfN.

8. Rail North Partnership Operational Update

The committee received updates covering all train operators in the North of England. As part of this, CrossCountry Trains spoke to the Committee and confirmed that they had made good progress on their recovery plan and had restored services earlier in November as planned.

9. Corporate Considerations

Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no financial implications for Transport for the North as a result of this report.

Resource Implications

- 9.2 There are no direct resourcing implications as a result of this report.

Legal Implications

- 9.3 The Rail North Committee on behalf of Transport for the North, manages the agreements with the train operators (Northern and TransPennine Express) in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Partnership Agreement between Transport for the North and the Secretary of State.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 9.4 Transport for the North is managing three risks at corporate level which relate to the content of this report:

Risk 647, with significant investment in the North's railway system underway/planned and given the interdependencies, there is a risk that individual programmes are not aligned and expected benefits not realised. This is being managed through the work associated with the State of Play.

Risk 310, there is a risk that TfN could have a reduced role in the rail industry following the implementation of rail reform including the role with Great British Railways. This is being managed through the work with partners to develop a TfN proposition.

Risk 311, future timetable changes (passengers and freight) in the North reduce rail connectivity. e.g. reduced frequency/direct services. This is being managed through TfN's role in the Rail North Partnership and through the work associated with the State of Play.

Environmental Implications

- 9.5 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive and therefore does not stimulate the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or EIA. Any infrastructure proposals to improve the capacity and reliability of the system will be subject (where appropriate) to EIA Screening, conducted by Network Rail as part of the consenting process for those projects.

- 9.6 Passenger rail has an essential part to play in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within Transport for the North's Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around reducing private car vehicle mileage.

Equality and Diversity

- 9.7 There are no specific implications as a result of this report. Industry will undertake appropriate assessments on individual projects and proposals

Consultations

9.8 There are no specific consultations required as part of this report

10. Background Papers

10.1 None

11. Appendices

11.1 None

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used (if applicable)

Please include any technical abbreviations and acronyms used in the report in this section. (Please see examples below.) This will provide an easy reference point for the reader for any abbreviations and acronyms that are used in the report.

<i>EIA</i>	<i>Environmental Impact Assessment</i>
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<i>SEA</i>	<i>Strategic Environmental Assessment</i>
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<i>TfN</i>	<i>Transport for the North</i>
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<i>DfT</i>	<i>Department for Transport</i>
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<i>TPE</i>	<i>TransPennine Express</i>
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<i>MCA</i>	<i>Mayoral Combined Authority</i>
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<i>RNC</i>	<i>Rail North Committee</i>
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