

Rail North Committee Minutes

**Thursday 25 March 2021
MS Teams**

Present:

Attendee

Cllr Liam Robinson
Cllr Craig Browne
Cllr Trevor Ainsworth
Cllr Richard Hannigan
County Cllr Keith Iddon
Cllr Carl Marshall
Cllr Don Mackenzie
Cllr Heather Scott

Local Authority

Liverpool City Region;
Cheshire & the Potteries;
East Midlands Authorities;
Humber Authorities;
Lancashire and Cumbria;
North East Combined Authority;
North Yorkshire;
Tees Valley Combined Authority;

Also in Attendance:

Cllr Keith Little (Observer)
Cllr Chris Brewis
Melissa Farmer

Lancashire and Cumbria;
East Midlands Authorities;
Sheffield City Region

Partners in Attendance:

Karen Hornby
Carolyn Watson
Mark Powles
Darren Higgins
Graham Meiklejohn

Network Rail
Northern Rail
Northern Rail
Transpennine Express
Transpennine Express

Officers in Attendance:

Name

Barry White
Gary Rich
James Lyon
Julie Openshaw
Adam Timewell
Rosemary Lyon
Gary Bogan
Deborah Dimock
David Hoggarth
Jim Bamford

Job Title

Chief Executive
Democratic Services Officer
Executive Assistant
Head of Legal
Head of Rail Service Outputs
Legal and Democratic Services Officer
Rail North Partnership Director
Solicitor
Strategic Rail Director
Head of Investment Planning

**Item
No:**

Item

1. Welcome and Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received from Mayor Andy Burnham and Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2021 were considered and their accuracy as a correct record confirmed.
- 3.2 Cllr Craig Browne advised that he had sent apologies for the previous meeting and Cllr Karen Shore had substituted.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January be approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Priorities for Future Rail Services

- 4.1 The report of the Strategic Rail Director was received by Members who highlighted the key points of the report.
- 4.2 The report was split into two parts; Part 1 covering rail recovery post-Covid and Part 2 looking at decarbonisation of rail. Mark Powles (Northern Rail), Darren Higgins (TransPennine Express) and Karen Hornby (Network Rail) would also be providing short updates.
- 4.3 The report primarily addressed the need for the rail industry as a whole to be ready to welcome back passengers as the country came out of lockdown and the report used the Roadmap to Recovery to set out a framework for the industry to focus on.
- 4.4 A central element to recovery was rebuilding passenger confidence and bringing the service back to full capacity in a reliable and sustainable manner.
- 4.5 Fares and ticketing initiatives were being explored to cater for the expected changes in the commuter market in particular; however a strong leisure market was expected due to the limited overseas travel opportunities currently.

- 4.6 David Hoggarth added that TfN was keen to work with all operators in a proactive manner to ensure a smooth recovery that took advantage of the opportunities.
- 4.7 Karen Hornby (Network Rail) advised that initial talks with train operators, stakeholders and tourist organisations had been held although NR was waiting on a steer from DfT regarding a national campaign around the return to public transport. Surveys of rail users were also being undertaken and a review of engineering works was ongoing in order to try to schedule work effectively around the changing passenger demand. Performance over the previous year had been excellent and Ms Hornby advised that maintaining these performance figures as customers returned to the railway was a key target.
- 4.8 Mark Powles (Northern) added that the previous 12 months with reduced customers had allowed Northern to complete its train refurbishment programme and introduce new rolling stock and improve station facilities. Northern had also conducted in depth research and survey work with customers and Transport Focus to help develop rebuilding plans. Northern had identified that the return-to-work market would significantly change with greater working from home and flexibility expected and therefore the products and services, especially ticket structure, would need to change to cater for this.
- 4.9 Darren Higgins of TransPennine Express (TPE) advised that TPE's approach had largely mirrored that of Northern. Their data analysis work had shown a reduction in passenger numbers of 83% over the year. Comprehensive work with user groups and stakeholders remained ongoing and TPE was putting in place a similar reassurance and incentivisation-to-travel package to Northern as the industry messaging began to change from "essential travel only" to "travel with confidence". However, he noted that there was a degree of flexibility in the campaign timelines dependent on any movement of the dates in the Government plan.
- 4.10 The Strategic Rail Director continued with the Decarbonisation report advising that the TfN Board had approved the Draft Decarbonisation Strategy which has a target of near zero-carbon surface transport by 2045 and he highlighted the rail aspects of this; one was the national target to remove diesel rail vehicles by 2040 which would involve a combination of electrification of as much of the network as possible and, where electrification was not possible, investment in alternative technology such as hydrogen or battery trains. The Chair added that MerseyRail is in the process of commencing a battery train live trial as part of the roll-out of new MerseyRail stock.

Resolved:

The Chair thanked the presenters for their update and reiterated the importance of the rail industry regaining customer confidence. The Committee noted the progress on the three workstreams.

5. Rail Reform Matters

- 5.1 Members received the report of the Strategic Rail Director on Rail Reform Matters. Key points of the report were highlighted, noting that the Williams Review is now expected to be published after the May elections and therefore was not available for comment.
- 5.2 The Manchester Task Force consultation, pertinent to both Item 4 and Item 5, had concluded and had received a strong response which was being worked through at the current time. A detailed response was expected to be presented at the next meeting on Friday 16 April.
- 5.3 TfN's priority was to maintain its strong "one voice" approach to rail reform plans and to push the devolution proposition to facilitate strong local input to rail enhancements.
- 5.4 A review of Rail North Partnership arrangements was also underway to determine the long-term changes to revenue risk and the control that DfT had over the franchises.
- 5.5 He noted that the Rail North Partnership, working with both DfT and TfN was the first step of devolution and had proven a very effective way of putting the voice of the North forward.
- 5.6 The Committee was asked to note the preparatory work being done on rail reform and invited to ask questions on matters arising. The Chair expressed his disappointment at the delay in publication of the Williams Review and strongly supported the principle of more devolution within the rail system in the North.

Resolved:

The Committee noted the work on the rail reform agenda and the review of the Rail North Partnership arrangements.

6. Rail North Partnership Update

- 6.1 Members received the report from the Rail North Partnership and Gary Bogan (Rail North Partnership Director) highlighted the key areas of the report. He explained that the Rail North Revenue Recovery Group is pulling together the strands of what would be a national campaign to get people

back to using the rail network and extracting the parts that could best suit the two main operators in the North, i.e. Northern and TransPennine Express. He also referred back to the points made by both operators under Item 4.

- 6.2 He praised the work done so far in moving the timetable and service very much towards a customer-focused priority, citing the discussions on introducing limited services on Boxing Day as an example.
- 6.3 Some discussion on the renewal of contracts and service agreements ensued with the comment that both operators would be running under Direct Award contracts which was expected to be a quicker and more effective process to renew the contracts.
- 6.4 Northern, having missed the outputs of their 100-Day plan due to Covid, had successfully converted the aims into a long-term Business Plan.
- 6.5 Cllr Heather Scott reiterated the points made in the report about connectivity on the East Coast Mainline; Gary Bogan replied that this would be discussed in more detail at Rail North Partnership Board on Thursday 1 April.
- 6.6 Melissa Farmer (on behalf of Mayor Jarvis of the Sheffield City Region) enquired about the delivery of the original franchise agreements and the continuation of these goals, noting that Sheffield still does not have a second express service to Leeds which had been part of Northern's previous franchise. She further asked about renewal of rolling stock, noting that the shorter contracts were less conducive to operators updating their stock. Gary Bogan advised that the changes to services were based on the timetables that were in place in December and, as the second service had not been running at that time, it was not factored in; however, this did not present a barrier to incorporating it later as part of the ongoing work between operators, TfN and DfT to "build back" the services.
- 6.7 Jim Bamford added that the reason the second express service between Leeds and Sheffield had not operated was because of limitations in the infrastructure at Leeds and he returned to a point made earlier in the debate in relation to the enhancements being made in conjunction so that rolling stock renewal, service uplift and infrastructure upgrades were made in an order to assist each other.

Resolved:

The report was noted.

7. Business Planning and Commissioning

- 7.1 Members received the report of the Strategic Rail Director on Business Planning and Commissioning.

- 7.2 It was noted that the TfN Board the previous day had approved the budget and Business Plan and also confirmed the Members' subscriptions.
- 7.3 The report looked at how to allocate resources to best cater for the Members' priorities and best manage the investment pipeline of works needed to improve reliability and capacity.
- 7.4 Measures to improve inclusivity and accessibility would also form part of this plan with the need to decarbonise the rail network embedded throughout.
- 7.5 There were no questions or comments arising from the business planning priorities which had largely followed on from the TfN Board discussion the previous day.

Resolved:

- 1) The Committee agreed the revised business plan priorities as presented to Transport for the North Board on 24 March 2021 and noted that the Members' subscriptions for 2021/22 previously advised were now confirmed.
- 2) The Committee noted the review the forward plan and additional items suggested for future Committees.

8. Any Business Which the Chair is Satisfied is Urgent

- 8.1 There was no urgent business for discussion.

9. Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED: that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, there will be disclosure of confidential information as defined in Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and/or exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)

10. Private Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 10.1 The private minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2021 were considered and their accuracy as a correct record confirmed. There were no issues arising from the minutes.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January be approved as a true and accurate record.

11. Feedback from Working Group on TPE Direct Award and Northern Business Plan

11.1 The report on Feedback from Working Group on TPE Direct Award and Northern Business Plan was received by Members. They were then invited to ask questions and make comments on the update.

Resolved:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the discussed recommendations be agreed.

12. Investment Planning

12.1 The report on Investment Planning was received by Members. They were then invited to ask questions and make comments on the update.

Resolved:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the discussed recommendations be agreed.