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<b>Meeting:</b>	Transport for the North Chief Executive Consultation Call (Board)
<b>Subject:</b>	Accessibility at Stations
<b>Author:</b>	David Worsley Head of Rail Specification and Delivery
<b>Sponsor:</b>	David Hoggarth Strategic Rail Director
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	Tuesday, 27 July 2021

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

1.1 The objective of this report is to:

- 1) To set out the position on station accessibility – there are still a large proportion of stations in the North without good accessibility; and
- 2) To set out an approach to securing greater funding and investment in the North.

The work proposed includes not only the longstanding issue of step-free access for Persons with Reduced Mobility (PRMs), but a wider definition of accessibility which includes the need for clear customer information systems (CIS) and audible public address (PA) announcements.

1.2 The paper also describes the work which has already been undertaken as part of the Long Term Rail Strategy Thematic Delivery Plan for stations. This project will provide one of three routes for addressing accessibility, so the report also explains how TfN's partners and DfT's ongoing "Access for All" programme can complete the approach. Strategic Rail are seeking the Board's agreement to pursue these three complementary workstreams as described.

## **2. Executive Summary:**

2.1 Improvements to stations were stipulated as part of the two Northern franchise agreements that were awarded in December 2015.<sup>1</sup> The £60 million which was invested (in over 400 stations) included some accessibility-related infrastructure, such as improved waiting rooms, customer information systems, and CCTV.<sup>2</sup> However, the overall status of accessibility at stations across the North remains very unsatisfactory; of 543 stations at which Northern or TransPennine

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<sup>1</sup> Rail Executive & Rail North, *Transforming the North's Railways: Stakeholder Briefing Document and Consultation Response*, Feb. 2015, pp. 44-46

<sup>2</sup> <https://media.northernrailway.co.uk/news/northerns-better-stations-are-gathering-pace-in-liverpool-and-cheshire>

Express services call, only 287 (53%) provided step-free access to all areas of the station, whilst at 46 stations (8%) there is no step-free access at all. Information is still being gathered on other aspects of accessibility, such as clarity of public address announcements and tactile paving.

- 2.2 Analysis undertaken by Arup has identified the likely value for money that could be generated by investing in typical stations facilities enhancements at representative stations in the North, and suggested some ways in which the business cases for such investments can be strengthened. Arup also researched existing standards, policies and guidance, collating information from 26 documents in total; this enabled a combined view of what is regarded as basic, good and excellent practice regarding station facilities in four subject areas (sustainability, connectivity, accessibility and inclusivity).
- 2.3 An important conclusion from Arup's work was that there is an opportunity to accelerate the progress of improving accessibility by packaging station facilities enhancements which can often generate very high value for money (e.g. cycle parking, relocated bus stops, free wi-fi and workspaces) alongside more expensive accessibility improvements (e.g. step-free access, accessible changing and toilets); these enhancements could in combination create a project which would generate high value for money, and thus be suitable to seek funding from DfT's Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline.
- 2.4 In addition to the RNEP, two other routes to funding station accessibility are envisaged. Firstly, TfN's partners (mainly Local Transport Authorities) will be able to progress other stations projects where a high level of local knowledge is required (e.g. of walking and cycling routes, or multimodal integration) in order to build the strongest possible business case. In these scenarios, TfN will be able to provide support and strengthen partners' business cases by offering access to and advice about our Analytical Framework and modelling tools. Secondly, for stations at which it is difficult to build a strong economic case for change (such as low footfall), funding for accessibility can still be sought on regulatory and social inclusion grounds through DfT's "Access for All" programme.
- 2.5 In order to boost the accessibility and attractiveness of stations (and thereby rail travel in general) it is therefore recommended that a three-pronged approach to securing investment is adopted, using the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline, Local Transport Authorities and the Access for All Fund. Use of TfN's appraisal framework will enable stations to be allocated to each method, by identifying those where facilities investments will generate the strongest economic case.

### 3. Consideration:

#### Background

3.1 There has been a consensus of opinion that accessibility at stations across the North is relatively poor, perhaps because many stations in the North have experienced low footfall in the past and it has been harder to make the economic case for improvements. The TfN Strategic Rail team are currently working with Rail North Partnership in order to obtain full details of what facilities Northern and TPE provide at their stations. Additionally, Merseyrail are currently reviewing accessibility at their stations in the context of the provision of new rolling stock and the potential that they may be able to implement level boarding (i.e. alignment between the top of the platform, bottom of the train doors and the floor of the carriages<sup>3</sup>).

3.2 Northern have published some information about step-free access at 543 stations at which their services call.<sup>4</sup> They rated the stations in the following categories:

- Red: This station has steps and does not have level access to any area.
- Amber: This station has level access to some parts of the station but steps to others.
- Green: This station has level access to all areas.

In total, 287 stations (53%) were classed as Green, 210 were classed as Amber (39%) and 46 stations (8%) were classed as Red. Almost half of stations in the North were therefore sub-standard just from the point of view of level access. Appendix C lists the stations with the highest numbers of passengers in the Red and Amber categories. Many stations in the North are also unstaffed, meaning assistance for Persons with Reduced Mobility or passengers experiencing other impairments is not readily available.

3.3 It is recognised that not all disabilities are visible, and the needs of Persons with Reduced Mobility and wheelchair users are only part of the overall issue of accessibility. Other impairments which can be ameliorated by good facilities include reduced vision and hearing abilities, anxiety, and cognitive and learning disabilities. Improved customer information (CIS) and public address (PA) systems can help with these issues, as can good station wayfinding which extends into the station environs. The use of a consistent tone, accent and volume during public announcements would also mitigate the risk that a passenger may comprehend one announcement but then fail to pick up on a subsequent one (which may rescind or contradict the first).

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that Northern use rolling stock which have 9 different floor heights, so implementing level boarding at their stations would be challenging.

<sup>4</sup> Northern Trains Limited, *Our Step Free Network*, June 2017, p. 1

- 3.4 It should also be noted that there is a wider accessibility agenda focussed on issues such as access to the internet, mobile phone applications and bank accounts. Trends towards making access to the railway dependent on these characteristics would potentially increase social exclusion. Many passengers are also confused by the plethora of different organisations (and thus uniforms) which are involved in the railway industry, thus making it difficult to know who to ask for advice, and subjecting passengers with specific accessibility needs to a variety of policies with regards to meeting them. In order to identify and understand these issues more fully, TfN Strategic Rail has been working with Disability Rights UK, and following their advice we intend to liaise with Transport Focus and incorporate their research.

### Stations Strategy

- 3.5 The first route through which it will be possible to address accessibility issues is Strategic Rail's Stations Strategy, which is currently in development. The Stations Strategy comprises part of the Long Term Rail Strategy (LTRS), being one of the Thematic Delivery Plans which are intended to realise the objectives of the LTRS. This workstream has built upon the recommendations made in the May 2018 report *Long Term Rail Strategy: Stations in the North of England* by Steer Davies Gleave. SDG suggested that future development of a TfN stations policy should focus on 7 key areas, namely: Design Standards; Innovation and Technology; Information; Partnerships; Long-Term Sustainability; Safety and Security; and, Sharing Best Practice.
- 3.6 The emerging Stations Strategy was originally intended to cover only design standards, long-term sustainability and safety/security from this list. However, the report as developed has addressed topics from all areas, including the ability to share best practice by distributing an analytical tool to our partners which will help them to identify promising station interventions.
- 3.7 The first stage of the work was a consultancy commission (undertaken by Arup) intended to:
- Collate existing policy and standards documents (26 in total) regarding what facilities constitute the minimum, desirable and best practice at small and medium-sized stations (i.e. Categories C to F in the standard classification);
  - Undertake hypothetical cost-benefit analyses on implementing sets of enhancements at two selected stations (and nearby stations in a "cluster") in order to identify which interventions typically have the strongest economic case (i.e. value for money); and
  - Develop any general conclusions that can be observed in the research.

The two stations which were chosen as case studies were Whitehaven (as an example of a station at the centre of an isolated line remote

from major cities) and Castleford (as part of a cluster of towns in a metropolitan area).

- 3.8 The combined lists of what constituted basic, good and excellent provision for accessibility were as follows:
- Basic: The minimum legal requirements for accessibility are met; The station and its surroundings provide a safe and secure environment for all users at all times of day.
  - Good: Staff are trained to be aware of the needs of varied user groups; Adequate information is provided to aid the journeys of all users; Infrastructure for accessibility exceeds the minimum legal requirements and meets a relevant code of guidance; Accessible infrastructure (e.g. subways or lifts) is pleasant and convenient to use.
  - Excellent: The station is exploring and utilising new technologies to ensure it is as accessible as possible; The station contributes to a seamless, barrier-free journey for all users; All aspects of station design are optimised for accessibility (e.g. signage is both internally consistent and consistent between stations).
- 3.9 The principal conclusions reached in the research included the following:
- The value for money provided by different types of stations facilities enhancements varies widely, mainly because the cost of interventions often varies more than the benefits. For example, technological interventions (customer information systems, wi-fi in waiting rooms, dedicated workspaces) can benefit a lot of passengers at modest cost, as can intermodal improvements such as cycle parking and the relocation of bus stops. Improvements in station access and accessibility also provide wide benefits, but can sometimes require significant engineering work.
  - The implication of this observation is that packages of interventions at some stations will generate good value for money (VfM) if different types of enhancement are grouped together (e.g. access improvements with low VfM can be combined with very high VfM technology interventions to generate high VfM overall). The challenge is to identify which stations these are.
  - A stronger case for station facilities enhancements can be generated if a group of stations with a significant number of trips between them (a cluster) can receive investment at the same time. Facilities which benefit boarders at one station can benefit alighters who have travelled there from other stations, thereby encouraging trips within the cluster and generating synergy between the investments. Arup's research suggests that an isolated line such as the Cumbria Coast is more likely to enjoy this effect, as a higher proportion of journeys go to nearby similar stations, whereas most passengers from Castleford and its adjacent towns are travelling to Leeds.

- 3.10 The next steps to be taken in this workstream should reflect the wider aspirations that TfN have for stations across the North. It is therefore proposed that the conclusions from Arup's research inform a project in which TfN's analytical tools (i.e. NoRMS, the Northern Rail Modelling System) are combined with the train operating companies' data regarding station facilities, in order to identify the priority stations at which facilities improvements will have the strongest economic case. A system will be devised to automatically assess all stations across the North with respect to all possible facilities enhancements. This would identify those stations at which a package of different types of intervention (including provision of accessibility) would provide the best value for money. TfN could then press for these schemes to be included in DfT's Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline.

### Local Transport Authorities

- 3.11 TfN's Analytical Framework includes data for how passengers access the stations and from where their journeys ultimately originate. However, in many cases this is based on generic models; local partners will often have much better information regarding where passengers live and work (and how they travel to stations) based on surveys. TfN's partners also often have vital experience of working on accessibility issues and policies.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.12 For those stations at which local knowledge will be required in order to develop a strong business case (e.g. because knowledge of walking/cycling routes and intermodal connections is needed) TfN will make its analytical tools and expertise available to partners in order to strengthen their project development processes. Enhancing station facility business cases which are being developed by TfN's partners thus provides a second route to addressing accessibility issues.

### Access for All Programme

- 3.13 For the remaining stations, at which the capital investment required will make generating a strong economic case difficult, it is proposed that TfN and its partners seek additional funding for the Access for All and Mid-Tier programmes, which are intended to improve accessibility across the network on the basis of the number of beneficiaries (weighted by the proportion of Persons with Reduced Mobility in the area) rather than any value for money metric. This could be done by developing a Strategic Case for accessibility in the North, which would illustrate how great the shortfall in provision currently is when compared to other regions.
- 3.14 It has been estimated that there are over 250 stations at which improvements are still needed; however, in Control Period 6 only 15

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<sup>5</sup> e.g. TfGM, *Accessible Travel Policy: Our Commitment to Providing Assistance to Passengers at Horwich Parkway Rail Station*, March 2021; Merseyrail, *Accessible Travel Policy*, March 2021; Northern Trains Limited, *Making Rail Accessible: Helping Older and Disabled Passengers*, March 2016



stations in the North (listed in Appendix A) were included in the full Access for All (AfA) programme, equivalent to 3 per year. This funding is generally used to create an obstacle-free, accessible route from the station entrance to the platforms. This can include providing lifts and/or ramps, as well as associated works and refurbishment along the route.

- 3.15 Alongside the AfA programme, the Mid-Tier programme has allocated £20 million for small-scale accessibility enhancements such as tactile paving, handrails and Harrington Humps (which increase platform heights). The maximum grant is £1m per bidder, and match funding is required. In CP6, 124 stations were successful, of which 92 were in the TfN area (see Appendix B); the disproportionately high allocation to the North is perhaps indicative that many of our stations were below standard compared to other regions. The Mid-Tier programme could be useful to bring stations up to full Equality Act standard (i.e. covering modifications to public address and customer information services), but would be insufficient to fund the major investment required in making all stations step-free.

#### **4. Conclusion:**

- 4.1 Although accessibility was a recurrent theme of TfN's *Strategic Transport Plan* of February 2019, the current status of physical accessibility to stations in the North is a long way from satisfactory, with almost half of stations not providing step-free access to all areas. Local Transport Authorities have striven to improve the situation, but a comprehensive pan-Northern plan is now needed. Some accessibility-related issues could be ameliorated through "quick wins", and Strategic Rail are working with groups such as Disability Rights UK to identify these. Some of the observations made in the Government's recent White Paper, *Great British Railways: The Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail*, are also helpful; for example, standardisation of accessibility policies and even the appearance of facilities across the network will make journeys more attractive for many passengers. However, rectifying some problems will require significant investment.
- 4.2 At the present rate of progress it could take many decades for acceptable accessibility to be provided at all of the North's stations using the "Access for All" route. There are 256 stations at which Northern and TPE call at which we know step-free access alone is inadequate, and the "Access for All" fund has been addressing approximately 3 of these ever year; it would thus take the rest of this century to complete the task. It is therefore proposed that a three-pronged approach be adopted, in order to deploy as much potential funding and use as many business case routes as possible; this will include schemes led by TfN and funded through the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline, schemes led by local authorities with support from TfN's appraisal experts, and continued use of "Access for All" funding.

- 4.3 The Strategic Rail team are now in a position to develop a business case for more investment in accessibility in the North. The Strategic Case will cite the relative under-provision of accessibility at our region's stations and the slow pace of the current delivery routes, drawing on information provided by stakeholders and partners regarding accessibility issues in their areas. Meanwhile, the Economic Case can deploy TfN's Analytical Framework to identify the stations facilities interventions which will provide the best value for money.

## **5. Recommendation:**

- 5.1 It is recommended that the CEO Consultative Mtg with TfN Members agree to the next stages in the workstreams described above, namely:
- That Strategic Rail work with Technical Assurance, Modelling & Economics (TAME) to assess the potential for stations enhancements at all Category C to F stations in the North, in order to allocate them to one of the three potential routes to implementation;
  - For those stations for which a strong economic case is identified for a package of accessibility and facilities enhancements, TfN Strategic Rail will commit resources to developing business cases for submission to the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline;
  - For stations with an intermediate economic case, TfN Strategic Rail will work with Local Transport Authorities and other partners in order to identify solutions which will strengthen the business case for packages of interventions by harnessing local knowledge. TfN's resources (such as assistance from TAME and the models in our Analytical Framework) can be used to complement appraisal undertaken by our partners and help them to develop successful business cases for stations improvements;
  - For stations with a poor economic case, the case for accessibility improvements will continue to be made on social inclusion and regulatory grounds, with funding being sought from the Access for All programme and Mid-Tier fund;
  - The above workstreams will be defined and co-ordinated through the development of an overall Strategic Outline Business Case for investment in accessibility in the North's railway stations; and
  - TfN will use its influence through Rail North Partnership to progress the standardisation of items such as station branding, accessibility policies, staff training on accessibility issues, and public announcements. Some initiatives in these areas could be started relatively quickly.

## **6. Corporate Considerations:**

### ***Financial and Resource Implications***

- 6.1 TfN Finance Team has confirmed there are no financial implications.



TfN HR Team has confirmed there are no direct resource implications.

### ***Legal Implications***

- 6.2 The legal implications have been considered and are referred to in the report. As a public authority, TfN is bound by the public sector equality duty at S149 of the Equality Act 2010 which obliges it in the exercise of its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination described in the Act and to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. The measures outlined in this report are designed to support TfN's compliance with that duty.

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

- 6.3 A risk assessment has been carried out and the main risk is outlined in para 3.3 of the report.

### ***Environmental Implications***

- 6.4 A full Impact Assessment has not been carried out because it is not required for this report.

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

- 6.5 The access requirements for individuals with disabilities has been considered in the report.

### ***Consultations***

- 6.6 A consultation has not been carried out because it is not required for this report.

## **7. Background Papers**

- 7.1 There are no background papers to this report.

## **8. Appendices**

- 8.1 Appendix A: Stations in the North in Control Period 6 Access for All
- 8.2 Appendix B: Stations in the North in Control Period 6 Mid-Tier
- 8.3 Appendix C: Stations with high footfall (2019-20) and sub-standard accessibility

**Appendix A: Stations in the North in Control Period 6 Access for All**

1.	Birkenhead Park	6.	Flint	11.	Menston
2.	Bridlington	7.	Handforth	12.	Selby
3.	Broad Green	8.	Hillside	13.	Shotton
4.	Chorley	9.	Hunt's Cross	14.	St. Michaels
5.	Daisy Hill	10.	Irlam	15.	Todmorden

### Appendix B: Stations in the North in Control Period 6 Mid-Tier

1.	Billingham	32.	Hall Road	63.	Romiley
2.	Accrington	33.	Hamilton Square	64.	Rose Hill
3.	Ainsdale	34.	Heald Green	65.	Ryder Brow
4.	Aintree	35.	Heaton Chapel	66.	Sandhills
5.	Altrincham Interchange	36.	Hightown	67.	Seaforth & Litherland
6.	Aughton Park	37.	Hillside	68.	Southport
7.	Bache	38.	Hooton	69.	Town Green
8.	Bank Hall	39.	Hoylake	70.	Trafford Park
9.	Bebington	40.	Humphrey Park	71.	Wallasey Grove Road
10.	Belle Vue	41.	Hunts Cross	72.	Wallasey Village
11.	Bidston	42.	James Street	73.	Walton
12.	Birkdale	43.	Kearsley	74.	Waterloo
13.	Birkenhead Central	44.	Kirkby	75.	West Kirby
14.	Birkenhead North	45.	Kirkdale	76.	Westhoughton
15.	Birkenhead Park	46.	Leasowe	77.	Barnetby
16.	Blundellsands & Crosby	47.	Liverpool Central	78.	Darnall
17.	Bolton	48.	Liverpool South Parkway	79.	Darton
18.	Bootle New Strand	49.	Lostock North	80.	Dodworth
19.	Bramhall	50.	Maghull	81.	Elsecar
20.	Bredbury	51.	Middlewood	82.	Horton-in-Ribblesdale
21.	Broad Green	52.	Moorfields	83.	Hull Paragon
22.	Bromborough Rake	53.	Moorside	84.	Kiveton Bridge
23.	Bromley Cross	54.	Moses Gate	85.	Kiveton Park
24.	Brunswick	55.	New Brighton	86.	Malton
25.	Chassen Road	56.	Old Roan	87.	Penistone
26.	Davenport	57.	Ormskirk	88.	Pontefract Monkhill
27.	Ellesmere Port	58.	Orrell Park	89.	Silkstone Common
28.	Fairfield	59.	Overpool	90.	Thirsk
29.	Farnworth	60.	Prescot	91.	Thorne South
30.	Fazakerley	61.	Rice Lane	92.	Woodhouse
31.	Formby	62.	Rock Ferry		

**Appendix C: Stations with high footfall (2019-20) and sub-standard accessibility**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Red</b>		<b>Amber</b>	
1	Hunts Cross	1,827,454	Newcastle	8,815,096
2	Newton-le-Willows	973,070	Manchester Oxford Road	6,366,296
3	Levenshulme	541,642	Darlington	2,387,932
4	Walkden	374,288	Carlisle	2,224,702
5	Davenport	349,314	Dewsbury	1,622,478
6	Hindley	340,104	Wilmslow	1,561,422
7	Daisy Hill	309,608	Salford Crescent	1,441,774
8	Kirkham & Wesham	307,970	Guiseley	1,231,618
9	Handforth	290,828	Skipton	1,212,320
10	Frodsham	259,628	Salford Central	1,028,446
11	Flowery Field	253,172	Cheadle Hulme	908,988
12	Bredbury	239,204	Heaton Chapel	827,926
13	Hall-I'-Th'-Wood	214,064	Hebden Bridge	812,902
14	Eccles (Manchester)	197,418	Steeton & Silsden	756,114
15	Swinton (Manchester)	142,280	Hazel Grove	729,850
16	Chinley	129,220	Northallerton	712,450
17	Ashburys	128,958	Burley Park	686,932
18	Patricroft	117,362	Selby	674,836
19	Ramsgreave & Wilpshire	111,452	Menston	659,092
20	Hattersley	110,646	Oxenholme Lake District	657,916
21	Brinnington	109,278	Todmorden	648,482
22	Godley	107,788	Garforth	629,206
23	Orrell	96,894	Penrith (North Lakes)	610,308
24	Meols Cop	95,552	Thornaby	585,452
25	Billingham	91,504	Poulton-le-Fylde	547,252
26	Rose Grove	73,584	Retford	541,674
27	Mill Hill (Lancashire)	72,962	Wakefield Kirkgate	511,034
28	West Allerton	55,072	Marple	498,468
29	Honley	52,192	Bridlington	484,342
30	North Road (Darlington)	46,138	Broad Green	482,604
31	Langho	45,706	Mirfield	447,428

32	Fairfield	43,316	Knaresborough	439,486
33	Staveley (Cumbria)	43,164	Greenfield	432,830
34	Moorside	35,122	Urmston	413,118
35	Ryder Brow	32,794	Sowerby Bridge	409,938
36	Ince (Manchester)	27,928	Scunthorpe	396,638
37	Squires Gate	23,964	Romiley	394,352
38	Manors	17,346	Morley	389,404
39	Egton	13,206	Earlestown	382,616
40	Parton	9,134	Headingley	377,432
41	Belle Vue	8,624	Hexham	372,090
42	Ardwick	1,520	Ashton-under- Lyne	362,246
43	Reddish South	158	Irlam	359,522
44	Denton	92	Malton	348,866
45	Stanlow & Thornton	82	Batley	341,800
46			Mills Hill (Manchester)	338,650
47			Congleton	333,510
48			Atherton	329,668
49			Mossley (Manchester)	327,738
50			Ulverston	323,280

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

a)	AfA	Access for All
b)	CCTV	Closed circuit television
c)	CIS	Customer information system
d)	DfT	Department for Transport
e)	LTRS	<i>Long Term Rail Strategy</i> (published Jan. 2018 by TfN)
f)	NoRMS	Northern Rail Modelling System
g)	NPR	Northern Powerhouse Rail
h)	NTC	Northern Transport Charter
i)	NTL	Northern Trains Limited
j)	PA	Public address
k)	PRM	Person with reduced mobility
l)	RNEP	Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline
m)	STP	<i>Strategic Transport Plan</i> (published Feb. 2019 by TfN)
n)	TAME	Technical Assurance, Modelling & Economics (part of TfN)
o)	TfN	Transport for the North
p)	TPE	TransPennine Express
q)	VfM	Value for money (as part of DfT business case process)