

Rail North Committee Strategic Rail Director Consultation Call Minutes

Wednesday 15 September 2021
Virtual

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Cllr Liam Robinson	Liverpool City Region;
Cllr Craig Browne	Cheshire East;
Mayor Andy Burnham	Greater Manchester Combined Authority;
Edwards	Lancashire;
Cllr Don Mackenzie	North Yorkshire;
Mayor Dan Jarvis	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority;
Cllr Heather Scott	Tees Valley;
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;

Partners in Attendance:

Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Adam Timewell	Head of Rail Service Outputs
Julie Openshaw	Head of Legal
Rosemary Lyon	Legal and Democratic Services Officer
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
Manjit Dhillon	
David Hoggarth	Strategic Rail Director
Salim Patel	Programme Manager - Rail North

**Item
No:**

Item

1. Welcome & Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members to the Consultation call and apologies were received from Cllr Cupit.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

3.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 23 June 2021 and 14 July 2021 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 23 June and 14 July be noted.

4. Rail Reform Matters - Responding to the White Paper

4.1 The report of the Head of Rail Specification & Delivery was received by Members. The Head of Rail Specification & Delivery then highlighted the key areas of the report.

4.2 The Strategic Rail Director explained that a form of devolution is already in place in the North through the Rail North Partnership. He explained that a number of conversations had already been held with GB Railways and Network Rail and that there are a number of opportunities for Transport for the North.

4.3 Mayor Burnham welcomed the work and stated that the focus would not have been on these long-standing issues had it not been for the Rail North Committee and TfN. He supported the role that TfN plays on the railways and believed that the response could be submitted with confidence.

4.4 Cllr Browne sought recognition of how integration with other regions would be managed.

4.5 The Strategic Rail Director explained that TfN is working closely with all neighbouring authorities and will pick up on this specific proposal prior to the Board meeting.

4.6 Cllr Hinchcliffe asked whether there is a standard model that all transport bodies should be signing up to. She also raised the issue of revenue risk and asked to be sighted on this.

4.7 The Head of Rail Specification & Delivery explained that TfN is more advanced as an organisation compared to other Sub National Transport Bodies and believes that a standard model would constrain TfN. The Strategic Rail Director explained that Transport for the North will collaborate where necessary.

4.8 On the issue of revenue risk the Strategic Rail Director explained that at this stage he does not expect there to be a transfer of revenue risk

under this proposal but as devolution progresses to future stages this issue will need to be considered as part of any case for change.

- 4.9 Mayor Driscoll stressed that the role that TfN needs to take within GB Railways is important and that there is a need for a northern voice. He also highlighted that Transport for the North can play a major role in integrated travel.
- 4.10 In summing up the discussion the Chair emphasised the opportunities available and was content that Network Rail wants to work with Transport for the North. He also highlighted the issue of not “hardwiring” the double devolution principle and that some authorities want to go further with this than others.
- 4.11 He also raised the issue of the need to regulate rolling stock companies more and highlighted the Liverpool model on this, which will save money on the current leasing model.
- 4.12 Cllr Hinchcliffe requested that officers advise of any budget implications before pursuing a specific route.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes that Transport for the North’s proposed response, based around the four pillars set out in the report.

5. Manchester Services and Infrastructure Update

- 5.1 The report of the Interim Head of Investment Planning was received by Members. The Director of Strategic Rail then highlighted the key areas of the report.
- 5.2 Mayor Burnham stated that clear progress has been made as a result of the committee’s intervention leading to connectivity to the airport with the possibility of stops being added at Bolton, Greenfield and Mosley. He stated that whilst progress has been made it is still a sub-optimal situation and he believes that should only be accepted with an exit route.

He also raised the issue of platforms 15-16 and the need to move from promises to a decision and solution. He further highlighted the continuing issue of Sunday services.

- 5.3 Mayor Jarvis emphasised the sub-optimal nature of the solution. He stressed that the revised timetable should be seen as an interim measure to allow for a transition into a solution acceptable to all Members from the North of England with a clear road map out off this timetable. He described it as a critical moment in terms of securing infrastructure.

5.4 Cllr Scott expressed concern that service changes may not be short term and that services from the North East to Greater Manchester need to be retained.

5.5 The Chair raised an issue from Cllr Parish concerning the cross-Warrington service.

The Strategic Rail Director stated that he will contact Cllr Parish.

5.6 The Chair stated that progress has been made and that matters have improved, but the collaboration agreement with the DfT needs to be finalised. He highlighted the need for the road map beyond December 2022 to be shared as it is vital for everyone across the North to understand the work that Transport for the North is engaged with as part of the Manchester Recovery Taskforce.

Resolved:

- a) That the Committee notes the progress made on the development of the December 2022 timetable and the next steps including a further round of public consultation.
- b) That the Committee notes the progress on developing an enhanced collaboration with the Department for Transport on the infrastructure solution which would facilitate a clear roadmap to restore and improve connectivity.

6. Rail North Partnership Operational Update

6.1 The report of the Director of the Rail North Partnership was received by Members. The Director of the Rail North Partnership then highlighted the key areas of the report.

6.2 Mr. Matthew Golton from TransPennine Express explained that absolute numbers continue to increase in terms of passengers and are 66% of pre Covid levels. Commuter numbers are beginning to improve but remain low; however the leisure market is strong and is leading the recovery. The full picture relating to the business market will not be known until the new year.

6.3 Members were informed that performance is strong at 98.1% PPM (Public Performance Measure) which is better than anticipated.

6.4 Mr. Mark Powles provided an update from Northern where the leisure market is also leading the recovery with some weekend travel over the summer period exceeding 2019 figures. He highlighted the growth of advanced purchase where sales exceeded 2019 levels by 150%. He explained that Northern had used the Covid period to invest in its business resulting in a steady improvement in customer satisfaction. He highlighted an uplift in the morning peak and a good uptake in the education market.

- 6.5 Members raised area specific issues relating to services. Cllr Edwards raised an issue about the frequency of rail replacement buses on Morecambe services and Cllr Hannigan highlighted disappointment with the planned changes to the Hull-Bridlington services from December 2021 and an offline discussion was agreed.
- 6.6 Cllr Hinchcliffe urged the train operators not to make timetabling decisions now and to wait to make a judgment on the commuter market, which she believes will continue to improve. She expressed concern that if decisions are made now then vital services may be lost.
- 6.7 The Chair concurred with Cllr Hinchcliffe and explained that rail passenger recovery levels in the North has been stronger than in other areas of the country and as a result of this he would want to see 100% of resource pre-covid be put back on to the system as soon as possible.
- 6.8 The Strategic Rail Director stated that there needs to be a lengthier discussion between Members and officers (on future timetables) which he'd like to facilitate in the coming weeks.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7. Business Planning

- 7.1 The report of the Programme Manager was received by Members. The Programme Manager then highlighted the key areas of the report.
- 7.2 Cllr Hinchcliffe questioned the need for two separate business planning processes.

The Programme Manager explained that there is a TfN business plan and train operator business plans which are two separate processes that Transport for the North look to knit together.

- 7.3 The Strategic Rail Director explained that there is a TfN process and an industry process and the work with GB Railways and the transition team is fundamental to bringing the work together.

Resolved:

- a) That the Committee note progress on delivery of the business plan for 2021/22
- b) That the Committee endorses the approach set out in the report to the 2022/23 business plan. This will be developed further as part of the Business Planning Process
- c) That the Committee endorses the meeting forward plan.

8. Virtual Participation in Meetings

- 8.1 Members received the report from the Senior Solicitor who then highlighted key aspects of the report.
- 8.2 Cllr Scott welcomed the flexibility proposed in the report and requested that going forward that not all meetings be held in Manchester.
- 8.3 The Strategic Rail Director explained that whilst some meetings might be required to be face to face there will be others where the Committee can continue to meet virtually under the delegated powers of the Chief Executive.
- 8.4 Mayor Driscoll stated that when an in-person meeting is required the North East would be happy to accommodate such a meeting.
- 8.5 The Chair stated that when considering meeting locations these would need to be Covid secure with appropriate equipment to facilitate webcasting and suggested the Local Authority buildings would be best placed to do this.

Resolved:

- a) That the Committee notes the recommendations of the Members' Working Group and the Transport for the North Consultation Call and the proposed amendments to the Procedure Rules in the Constitution which are proposed to be recommended to Board on 29 September 2021 to allow Members and officers to contribute to meetings virtually.

9. Exclusion of the Press & Public

Resolved: That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Item 10 on the grounds that:

(1) It is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during such item(s), confidential information as defined in S100A(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) would be disclosed to them in breach of the obligation of confidence; and/or

(2) it / they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the Paragraphs [where necessary listed below] of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

10. Train Operator Business plans

Mayor Driscoll left the call.

- 10.1 Members received the report of the Director of the Rail North Partnership.
- 10.2 The Chair stated that the move to the new approach is a mature and sensible. On the issue of process he believes that being embedded in the process from the start is vital.
- 10.3 The Strategic Rail Director stated that the paper highlighted six clear themes which capture the views of Members and are basis for positive discussion.
- 10.4 Cllr Hinchcliffe requested sight of any routes that are being earmarked for fewer trains per day than is currently the case in West Yorkshire as she believes some may need to be challenged to avoid decisions being made on incorrect assumptions. She asked when Members would be able to see the timetable changes; the Strategic Rail Director confirmed that a meeting would be arranged for October.

Cllr Hinchcliffe also raised the issue of Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) with 50% of the services not being operational in 2025 and requested that ways be looked at in reducing this. She asked to see the economic impact of the timetable changes and closures.

In response the Director of the Rail North Partnership highlighted lack of accountability as the reason why the Rail North Partnership became involved in TRU.

He explained that the operator is only one part of this but as it is difficult to hold either the operator or Network Rail accountable on economic impact the work that the Rail North Partnership is doing around this will continue.

- 10.5 The Chair commented that this appears to be a more positive way of working and looked forward to an additional consultation call in October.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes the information in the report.