

**Meeting:** Rail North Committee

**Subject:** Rail North Partnership Operational Update

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**Sponsor:** David Hoggarth, Strategic Rail Director

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday 31 May 2022

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**1. Purpose of the Report:**

- 1.1 To update the Committee on operational rail matters, including performance, and to ask Members to note the information in the report. Representatives from Northern, TransPennine Express (TPE) and Network Rail will be in attendance at the meeting.

**2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the information in the report.

**3. Contract updates:**

**3.1 Overview**

Train operations in the North (and elsewhere) continue to be impacted by a number of factors including higher than average levels of sickness, training backlogs caused by covid and a number of Industrial Relations (IR) issues including ongoing and potential future strikes. Rail North Partnership continues to work with the operators to improve the robustness of the service to passengers and oversee operators' plans to recover services back to the planned timetable.

**3.1 Northern Trains Ltd**

This has been a difficult period for Northern, driven by a combination of stakeholder and media reaction to the publication of the May 22 timetable, which rolls over the current service patterns and included some further service reductions, and customer concerns around cancellations and crowding.

The end of emergency rostering on 20 March 2022 brought some relief to daily cancellations, providing a reduction from an average of 98 per day to around 38 per day. This is still a high level of cancellations, coming as it does on top of an already heavily curtailed timetable, as compared to December 2021. General sickness absence continues to impact here, although Northern is tracking at around the operator average in this regard.

Customer survey (NPS and CSAT) results were below target in March due to these operational challenges but improved in April (CSAT on target) due to reduced cancellations.

The immediate period ahead may be impacted by Industrial Relations issues. RMT union notified Northern of its intention to ballot members in late April, closing on 24 May 2022. Northern's management are working on their plans in the event either ballot returns a positive vote for industrial action, discussing the multiple possible scenarios and developing contingency plans around them. Discussions

are ongoing with ASLEF over specific issues in the North West, but it is likely that there will be some impact on services until a resolution is found. Northern is also in discussions over the introduction of a rest day working agreement with ASLEF to help reduce the training backlog.

Revenue has continued to recover, particularly Advanced Purchase (AP), with a return to 98% of levels seen in the peak Autumn (pre-Omicron) period. This is driven by the leisure market with off-peak revenue now back above pre-COVID levels. Commuter recovery continues to show slower growth at 39%, up 2% between P12 and P13 (periods covering February 2022 through March 2022). This is the first year that Northern has achieved more than £50m in advance-purchase revenue. The improving weather and school holiday demand should boost the strong leisure market further.

Northern has worked closely with the National Citizen Service for a number of years supporting young volunteers on a range of projects which have significant social impact on communities across the region. On 19 April 2022, 20 of these young volunteers had the opportunity to share their latest work, a short film to raise awareness and need to report Unwanted Sexual Behaviour, with MPs in Westminster.

Northern won the Silver Whistle Award for passenger operator performance achievement and was shortlisted at the Women in Rail awards in two categories.

Northern recently completed the installation of 100 defibrillators, meaning there are now 184 installed on Northern stations

### 3.2 **TransPennine Express**

TPE introduced the May 22 timetable on 15 May 2022, with the planned increase of services of 33 (to 309 services per day, Monday to Friday) including the restoration of the majority of Manchester-Cleethorpes services and the introduction of two additional Berwick – Edinburgh 'shuttles'. Due to the continuing absence of a Rest Day Working (RDW) agreement for drivers and the RMT conductor strike action, there continue to be cancellations against the new timetable. Until a new agreement with ASLEF is secured, and until the RMT strike action ends, the performance picture is unlikely to improve.

RMT initially called 4 consecutive Sunday strikes on 13, 20 and 27 February 2022 and 6 March 2022 over issues including pay. The strike dates have since been extended through to mid-June and, on Bank Holiday weekends, will now include strikes on Saturday. On those strike days TPE is trying to run 26% of a 'normal' Sunday timetable (around 50 of 200 services) using management volunteers on trains and stations.

TPE continues to engage with the unions to seek resolution to the issues highlighted above.

TPE also continues to suffer from above historic rates of sickness absence across the business, but particularly for drivers and conductors. Due to a combination of issues driver absence has been as high as 20% against a historic level of around 5%. This illness level is also a significant contributor to cancellations.

TPE continues to plan for the December 22 and May 23 timetables against the background of uncertainty due to the deferral of the planned East Coast Mainline timetable changes.

Despite the performance issues, demand continues to recover with leisure markets strong and above pre-COVID levels at the weekend, though the return to

commuting patterns remains slow. TPE's customer volumes are at only 75% to 80% of pre-COVID levels, although recovery of those volumes has been further impaired due to the omicron variant and the IR problems necessitating a reduced timetable and causing additional cancellations.

### 3.3 **TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU)**

Work during 2022 is focused around weekends between April 2022 and September 2022, with some disruption planned over the Jubilee bank holiday weekend in the Manchester Victoria area. However, whilst 2022 is a period of 'lighter' disruptions, the operators continue to work collaboratively to refine and develop Customer Handling plans and deployment of Customer Delivery Managers (an industry resource), in preparation for the more disruptive periods expected from 2023 onwards.

### 3.4 **Other Operators**

#### **CrossCountry**

CrossCountry's focus has been set on contingency planning for any potential industrial action over the next few months. It is still experiencing an impact on performance in the region due to a lack of Rest Day Working agreement. The operator is continuing to work to resolve this issue.

CrossCountry is also working to plan for the May 2023 timetable. For May 2022, it made minor amendments, which include an extension of services into Edinburgh. It also recently collaborated with Northern and organised a revenue protection Focus Day to help tackle fare evasion. Given its success, the operator plans to run similar events in the near future.

CrossCountry continues its support of Community Rail Partnerships across the network. It recently delivered over £250,000 in funding to various partnerships and has now opened up the Community Engagement Fund to further support projects throughout the year.

#### **Avanti (West Coast Partnership)**

Passenger demand continues to grow on all routes, driven primarily by leisure travel focused on weekends, with business and commuter travel returning at a slower rate, albeit increasing particularly since Easter to around 70% of pre-COVID, however some routes are performing stronger, notably the Anglo-Scottish route which has recovered to over 100% of pre-COVID demand, followed by Liverpool at 82%.

In response to passenger trends, changes were introduced as part of the national timetable change on 15 May 2022, with services on the London to Manchester route increased to three trains per hour in most hours. Direct services between London Euston and Holyhead have been increased to four trains per day in each direction with an additional direct London Euston to Chester return service to supplement these. Liverpool has retained its one train per hour service as it has throughout the pandemic.

The residual impact of COVID continues to affect traincrew availability and the training of new employees; short-term changes are necessary in response to heightened absence levels, and as a result, between May 2022 and September 2022, a small number of services on the Manchester to London via Stoke-On-

Trent route and a number of direct hourly Euston – Chester services have been withdrawn. These will be re-introduced from September.

The £117m programme to refurbish its fleet of Pendolino trains is progressing well, with the first three units now returned to service.

On Tuesday 17 May 2022, the West Coast Partnership brought together over 150 industry experts and senior politicians to discuss the future of rail at its second annual virtual stakeholder conference.

### **East Midlands Railway (EMR)**

On 16 May 2022, EMR introduced its latest timetable change, which sees the re-introduction of several services on EMR Regional lines, including seasonal Sunday services on the Cleethorpes – Barton-on-Humber route, and additional services on the Liverpool-Norwich line – leaving only one service still omitted from the route, the 0851 departure from Liverpool.

On the Intercity route, EMR will no longer service stations between Sheffield and Leeds.

Having come to agreements on a number of disputes with the RMT, EMR are no longer facing any formal disputes with unions at present.

Regarding the ballot for National Rail Strikes, EMR is standing up its crisis command to help get ready for potential strike action.

Over 2,000 EMR staff have been issued with a new uniform, which can be seen at stations and on-board services now. The new EMR uniform has designed to be more easily identifiable to customers.

The late introduction of new trains on other parts of the network prevents a cascade of more Class 170s into EMR, which in turn prevents EMR releasing more of its legacy fleet types to Northern Trains, who also need these trains in order to restore services in their own timetable. EMR is continuing to work with the Department for Transport and other train operators to release trains.

### **LNER (London North Eastern Railway)**

LNER is investing £800,000 into station waiting rooms across the East Coast route. Berwick upon Tweed, Darlington, Wakefield Westgate and Retford were the first stations to have their waiting rooms refurbished, with Doncaster, Durham, Grantham, Peterborough, Newark Northgate, Newcastle and York to follow.

### **First Hull Trains**

Hull Trains has resumed a full timetabled service since providing a reduced service following the Omicron COVID wave at the start of the year. Leisure passenger numbers are strong and recovered, however the business passenger market remains markedly lower than pre-pandemic levels.

Recent innovations have seen improved refund and compensation systems, delivering a faster service to customers, while to support the local leisure market and visitor economies, by bringing people into Hull and Doncaster, the operator

launched new leisure return fares for stations between Hull and Doncaster, reducing existing fares by 50%.

Hull Trains now offers a reduced 2-hour Passenger Assist booking window for disabled customers, granting more flexibility and reassurance to those with a greater need of assistance during their journey.

Hull Trains has been shortlisted for 'Fleet Achievement of the Year' and 'Outstanding Team of the Year' at the forthcoming National Rail Awards.

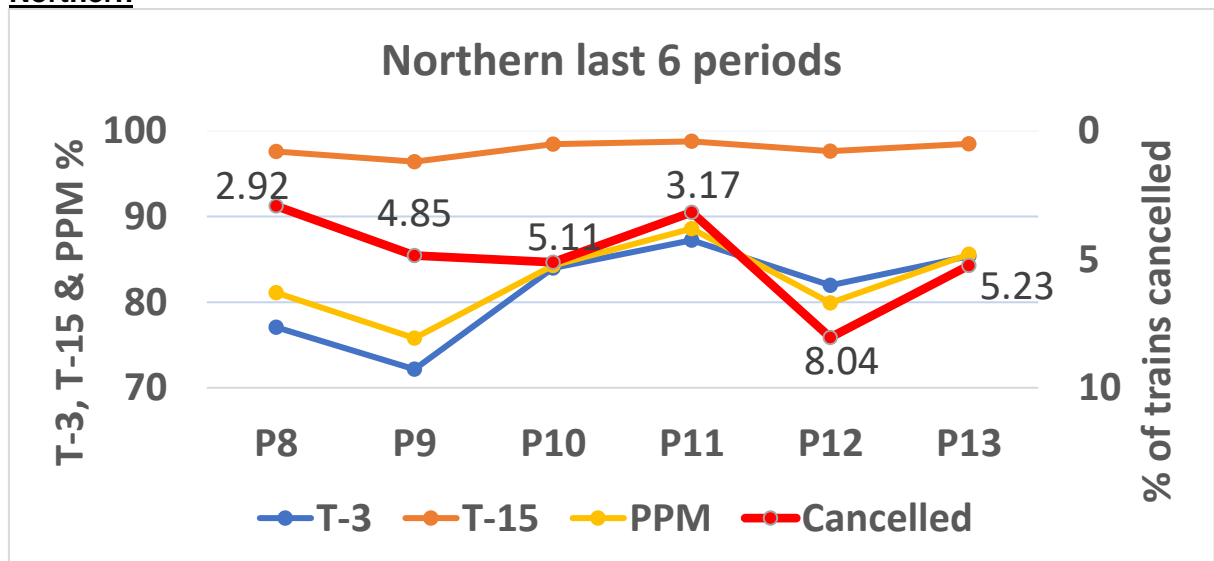
### 3.5 Performance update

The graphs below highlight the train performance for both Northern and Transpennine Express. The data is reported under the new performance metrics:

- T-3 (arriving within 3 minutes)
- T-15 (arriving within 15 minutes)
- Cancellations (% of trains cancelled v scheduled to run)

Although Public Performance Measure (PPM) is no longer a reporting metric, it has been included as a visual guide (data for PPM is extracted from the Office of Rail and Road webpages).

#### Northern

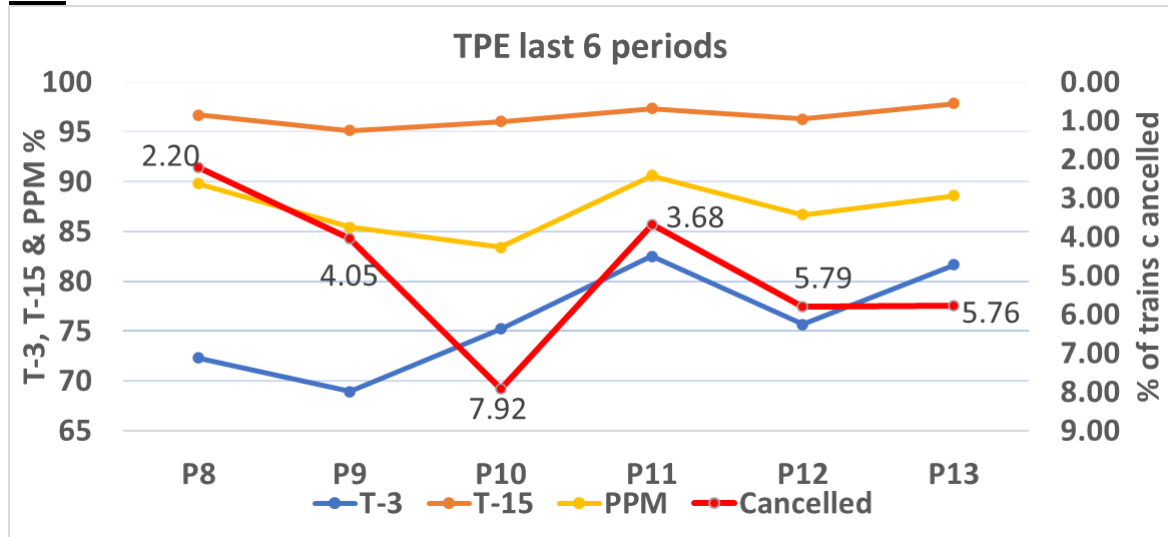


Performance improved from period 9 and the emergency timetable introduced during period 10 further helped with performance stability.

The proportion of trains running to T-15 and T-3 saw a significant improvement from period 9. However, cancellations have remained high since period 9 and spiked at 8.04% in period 12. Instance of COVID-19 absence and isolations impacted performance from period 11 to the end of period 13.

PPM is no longer an official measure; analysis shows that the PPM tracked T-3 and currently sits mid 80%.

## TPE



Transpennine Express performance was stable until the end of P8. T-15 has remained consistently in the 80% range throughout the past 6 periods. However, T-3 tracked mostly under 75% with a slight improvement in period 11 and 13. PPM follows the same trend and cancellations increased significantly to a peak of 7.92% during P10.

The main reason for the downward trend of cancellations is due to Driver rest day working agreement ending and the impact of COVID-19 absence and isolations.

#### 4. Corporate Considerations

##### **Financial Implications**

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

##### **Resource Implications**

4.2 There are no direct resourcing implications to Transport for the North arising from this report.

##### **Legal Implications**

4.3 There are no apparent legal implications arising from this report.

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

4.4 Risk implications are included in this report.

##### **Environmental Implications**

4.5 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the EIA Directive and therefore does not stimulate the need for SEA or EIA. 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**

4.6 There are no equality or diversity issues arising from the report.

## **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.*

- a) *TPE*                      *TransPennine Express*
- b) *NTC*                     *Northern Transport Charter*
- c) *NPS*                    *Transport Focus National Passenger Survey*
- d) *CSAT*                  *Customer SATisfaction Survey*