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**Meeting:** Transport for the North Board  
**Subject:** May 2022 Rail North Committee Update  
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**Sponsor:** Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive  
**Meeting Date:** Thursday 30 June 2022

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**1. Purpose of the Report:**

- 1.1 This report provides feedback from the recent Rail North Committee and asks the Board to consider and endorse the proposed actions.

**2. Recommendations:**

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1. That the Board notes the feedback from the Rail North Committee held on 31 May 2022.
  2. That the Board endorses the actions set out in the report including:
    - a. Adopting a collaborative approach to addressing the current challenges facing the industry in a way that draws on the local knowledge and insight of the North and supports the growth and Levelling-up agendas.
    - b. Through the Rail North Committee, undertaking work to plan for a growing railway in the North, recognising the changes in demand patterns post-covid and building on committed investment plans.

**3. Main Issues:**

- 3.1 Members expressed frustration with the current performance problems linked to staff shortages and were also concerned that operators had implemented reduced timetables to make the service more reliable for passengers, but performance is currently poor. Allied with this, they were concerned that the clarity on infrastructure schemes to support re-instatement of services is not there (e.g sorting the congestion problems in Central Manchester) and that future year budget constraints might mean further service cuts impacting on the Levelling Up agenda. Updating the Strategic Transport Plan was seen as an opportunity to look beyond the short-term challenges facing the sector and re-state the need for growth in the rail offer across the North if we are to achieve wider economic and social objectives.

***Strategic Transport Plan Update***

- 3.2 Members were updated on the process for revising the Strategic Transport Plan (STP). The report highlighted that the previous versions of the Long Term Rail Strategy had been successful in bringing the North together around a single, evidenced, plan and vision for rail and had led to investment (including new rolling stock for Northern and TPE).
- 3.3 It was reported that it is now proposed to fully embed the rail strategy within the STP. Members felt that the revised STP was an opportunity to look beyond the immediate challenges and get back to the original ambitions for the North's rail offer. In particular, the Committee highlighted the importance of focusing on identifying what is needed in the next two industry control periods.
- 3.4 The Committee emphasised the importance of the revised Strategic Transport Plan putting passengers first and the need to have clear deliverables in short,

medium and long terms. It must be both visionary and targeted and include Levelling Up as a specific theme – something that ran throughout the discussions at Committee.

### ***Rail North Partnership: Operational Update***

- 3.5 Operators updated on the covid recovery; Northern were reporting 88% of pre-covid demand and TPE were reporting 75% of journeys and 80% of revenue.
- 3.6 Against this backdrop both operators reported significant challenges impacting on their ability to provide a full, reliable service. Both operators are working through substantial training backlogs and had suffered from higher than usual levels of sickness – particularly TPE. Northern reported specific challenges in the North West caused by a 'failure to agree' with ASLEF, the drivers union. TPE was being impacted by the lack of a Rest Day Working Agreement with ASLEF and an ongoing dispute with RMT including weekend strike action. Both operators were facing the prospect of national disruption as a result of the recent RMT ballot which subsequently led to strike action across Network Rail and most operators. Accordingly, it was reported that the North of England Contingency Group had been re-convened by Transport for the North to ensure that the industry worked closely with Local Authorities on planning for strike action.
- 3.7 Members questioned the industry representatives about the actions being taken to restore an acceptable level of services. Members provided examples of the local impacts of the current level of service (including the high level of short-term cancellations being experienced on some routes) and the impacts on economic development. Northern confirmed that they intend to restore the services cut from the May timetable in December 2022 but will also review pre-covid levels against the current demand patterns.
- 3.8 In summary the Committee was concerned with progress made to date to restore services and performance. In expressing the importance of all sides involved in the national dispute to pursue constructive dialogue as a means of preventing further disruption the Committee also expressed the hope that DfT could provide greater flexibility for the operators to sort out the local issues hampering service recovery.
- 3.9 Following the discussion on this subject at the previous Transport for the North Board the Chairman had written to the Rail Minister seeking an early discussion with a view to working together to address the local issues as a matter of some urgency.

### ***East Coast Main Line Services and Infrastructure***

- 3.10 Following the example of the Manchester Task Force, it was reported that Transport for the North had produced an initial draft of a blueprint for the East Coast Main Line (ECML) linking future service enhancements to investment in infrastructure.
- 3.11 An update was provided on the work to deliver a revised timetable for ECML services from May 2023. The details of the revised proposal (in response to the strong consultation response from Transport for the North and others last year) were awaited and it was noted that an officer briefing followed by a briefing for Committee Members were planned. The work that Transport for the North had commissioned on the timetable proposals confirmed it was not possible to fit in all the desired services to a regular timetable pattern which underlined the case for investment in infrastructure.
- 3.12 The Committee welcomed the joint work undertaken (Transport for the North, North East partners and Network Rail) that demonstrated progress was being made and noted the draft Blueprint. The scope of the IRP on the ECML including

studies of Leeds-Sheffield, Leeds-Bradford and the Leeds Station Area were noted and Members urged the publication of the Terms of Reference and establishment of appropriate governance.

### ***Manchester Recovery Task Force Update***

- 3.13 An update was provided on progress with the infrastructure to support future timetable enhancements together with a draft methodology for assessing service options. These will be presented to future meetings of the Committee ahead of the 'points of opportunity' highlighted on the blueprint (which include infrastructure to support more services and/or better performance).
- 3.14 Members questioned whether funding would be sufficient in the next industry control period to deliver on the requirements in Manchester and whether progress was being made quickly enough. They requested greater visibility and greater vision from the Task Force and it was highlighted that a revised blueprint would be tabled at the September meeting which would include greater clarity on the longer-term infrastructure. It was agreed that the Chief Executive would write to Network Rail seeking greater clarity and visibility of the overall plan for fixing the Manchester congestion problem.

### ***Train Operator Business Planning***

- 3.15 Feedback was provided from the recent Members working group where Members raised concerns about the potential for further service cuts in future years if the budget shortfall was not resolved. It was agreed that this would be pursued at the planned Ministerial meeting. The need to ensure that Levelling Up was part of any decision-making process on future services was highlighted. A timeline for work on the review of 'Stations as a Place' across the North was discussed.
- 3.16 In conclusion it was noted that it was likely to be turbulent period for the rail industry and that now, more than ever there was the need for an overall plan for rail in the North which Members can get behind and that this should be something discussed at the main Transport for the North Board meeting on 30 June 2022. Such a plan would need to be integrated with infrastructure plans and could also be an input to future funding reviews.

### ***Actions Arising from the Committee***

- 3.17 A collaborative approach to addressing challenges faced by the industry. Rail North Partnership will continue to work with the train operators on recovery plans to seek to restore performance and services to the previously planned levels as quickly as possible.
- 3.18 Given that some of the issues impacting on performance are national ones, the Ministerial meeting will be used to highlight the case for flexibility to allow operators to address local issues and improve the service for passengers.
- 3.19 Transport for the North's involvement in the Rail North Partnership provides a unique opportunity for the North's perspective to shape the reform and transformation of the industry. In particular it offers the opportunity to ensure that change supports delivery of the North's wider socio-economic agenda, whilst also reflecting the need to accept the reality that changes in rail demand post-covid mean it is not simply a case of returning to what was the case previously. The key is to ensure that what is in effect a change management programme is the close and continuous engagement with Transport for the North members to ensure local priorities shape the change process.
- 3.20 Examples of where early benefits could be realised include changes to working practices to support delivery of Sunday services (and provision of additional services to reflect changing retail patterns); transformation of stations to

integrate them more with local places and improve accessibility, safety and security; modernisation of ticket purchase to reflect the switch to digital, coupled with the early roll out of London-style 'Pay-as-You-Go' Ticketing.

- 3.21 The latter needs to go hand in hand with the simplification of fares – an area which is already devolved to Transport for the North, so a clear area for partnership with national government and Great British Railways. It is also proposed to pilot a number of fares and timetable initiatives in the North that could specifically target markets where there is capacity for growth and generate additional revenue for the industry.

#### **4. Growing the Railway**

- 4.1 Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan set out the scale of the economic opportunity across the North. Its evidence-based approach identified the importance of expanding the rail offer to realise that opportunity. Additional technical work undertaken since the adoption of the STP has served to reinforce this point – in particular, Transport for the North's work on the Regional Decarbonisation Strategy. Indeed the (award-winning) Future Travel Scenarios work set out the scale of growth in the rail market if the requirement to achieve net zero is to be achieved.
- 4.2 The recovery of the rail market – both passenger and freight – across the North serves as a reminder as to rail's key role. And so, whilst it is important to address the short-term issues relating to current operations, it is equally important to continue to be focused on the importance of planning for significant growth in the rail offer.
- 4.3 The Strategic Transport Plan benefited from the work that had been originally done to produce the Long-Term Rail Strategy. As work to update the STP is taken forward, so it is important that the key role rail must play in enabling sustainable economic development continues to be a focus for Transport for the North.
- 4.4 The Rail North Committee will look to provide leadership in this regard over the course of the summer and into the autumn. In restating the importance of planning for growth the Committee will ensure that Transport for the North:
- Sets an ambitious vision setting out a clear agenda for growth, building on the strong recovery from the pandemic;
  - Undertakes a stock-take of the base position including progress with rolling stock, stations, service coverage and infrastructure;
  - Establishes the baseline infrastructure programme (for example the North of England Programme, Manchester Task Force, ECML and IRP-related commitments);
  - Undertakes a 'gap analysis' comparing the current programme against what is required in the short, medium and long terms;
  - Establishes the choices that would need to be made as the base programme is delivered (e.g priorities for new services when elements of the infrastructure programme are delivered);
  - Identifies opportunities as part of the Rail Reform agenda for further devolution (e.g greater decision-making in the North and 'double devolution' in the city regions);
  - Uses the evidence-base (e.g using Transport for the North's analytical framework) to support the vision and demonstrate cost-effectiveness; and

- Completes an assessment of what else is needed as an input to future spending reviews and industry control periods.

4.5 In this way Transport for the North's work on updating the Strategic Transport Plan will enable it to shape the Whole Industry Strategic Plan (to be produced by Great British Railways).

## **5. Corporate Considerations**

### ***Financial Implications***

5.1 There are no direct finance implications as a result of this report.

### ***Resource Implications***

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

### ***Legal Implications***

5.3 There are no apparent legal implications arising as a result of this report.

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

5.4 The report relates to corporate risks 309 (The long-term impacts on Covid-19 may impact on the viability of rail services) and 311 (Future timetable changes in Manchester and on the ECML that could reduce connectivity in the North). The report includes reference to mitigating actions being undertaken by Transport for the North.

### ***Environmental Implications***

5.5 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.

5.6 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***

5.7 Improving the rail offer and addressing issues of unreliability would help address inequalities by improving connectivity for those without access to a car.

### ***Consultations***

5.8 The report is an update, so consultation is not required.

## **6. Background Papers**

6.1 There are no background papers.

## **7. Appendices**

7.1 There are no appendices.

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

a)	STP	Strategic Transport Plan
b)	TPE	TransPennine Express
c)	DfT	Department for Transport
d)	RMT	Rail Maritime and Transport (Union)
e)	IRP	Integrated Rail Plan
f)	ECML	East Coast Main Line