

**Meeting:** Rail North Committee

**Subject:** Rail North Partnership Operational Update

**Author:** Gary Bogan, Rail North Partnership Director

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

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday 13 September 2022

**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 FirstGroup, Northern Trains, TransPennine Express (TPE) and Network Rail will attend the meeting. Readiness for the Manchester Task Force-led timetable changes in December 2022 is covered in a separate report at Agenda Item 5.

**2. Recommendations:**

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the information in the report and the actions that Transport for the North and Rail North Partnership (RNP) are taking to ensure operators have robust post pandemic recovery plans in place and to provide them with support and guidance to respond to current issues in the best way possible for passengers.

2.2 It is recommended that Committee members discuss the current issues with representatives of the industry attending the meeting.

**3. Overview and Avanti West Coast**

**Overview**

3.1 Train operations in the North (and elsewhere) continue to be impacted by industry-wide issues including Industrial Relations (including ongoing and potential future strikes), higher than average levels of sickness and training backlogs caused by covid. These issues are combining to create a very challenging environment for operators and unacceptable levels of performance and disruption for passengers. It is clear that for performance to improve to sustainable levels, the training backlog has to be addressed and this needs to be managed alongside the ongoing impact industrial action, sickness and the loss of rostering flexibility previously afforded by driver rest day working is having on daily performance through full or part cancellations.

3.2 In the North of England strikes took place on 21 and 23 June 2022, 27 July 2022 and 18 and 20 August 2022. Drivers who are members of ASLEF at Northern and TPE have voted for strike action in the widening series of disputes over pay. (Other operators had previously had similar ballot results.) The latest ballots mean 12 UK train operators now have mandates to strike. ASLEF has announced its members will strike at all these operators on 15 September 2022, with TSSA members also taking action short of strike on that date at TPE. RMT members will be taking strike action on 15 and 17 September 2022 and TSSA members will be undertaking further action on 26 and 27 September 2022 at Network Rail.

- 3.3 Transport for the North is using its role and influence in the Rail North Partnership (RNP) to seek solutions to the underlying issues as well as short-term mitigations. RNP is using its contractual relationship with Northern and TPE to develop appropriate recovery plans, implement them once approved and hold the operators to account for delivery against them.
- 3.4 Representatives from FirstGroup (Avanti West Coast), Northern, TPE and Network Rail have agreed to attend the meeting to discuss the issues and their recovery plans with members.

### **Avanti West Coast**

- 3.5 As a result of a shortage of available drivers, Avanti announced on 8 August 2022 that they would be temporarily amending their West Coast services from 14 August 2022. Avanti are temporarily running four trains an hour from London Euston, one to each of Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. Every two hours trains will run through to Edinburgh, via the West Midlands. There will be a shuttle service between Crewe and Holyhead, plus a through service between Euston and Chester once a day. This amended timetable will be in place until further notice.
- 3.6 The revised timetable has an adverse impact in the North; particularly Manchester (where the previous service of 3 trains an hour has been reduced to 1 train per hour), but also severely reducing connectivity between Crewe/Chester and North Wales. While Avanti's contract is not managed through RNP, Transport for the North has met representatives from Avanti and DfT to highlight the impacts on the North and seek reassurances that a plan to restore services at the earliest opportunity is being produced. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

## **4 TransPennine Express and Northern Recovery Plans**

- 4.1 Against a backdrop of stronger recovery of passenger demand in the North, performance is below target levels (see Appendix 1), due to the impact of sickness, training, industrial action and the loss of driver rest day working flexibility. That said, the December 2022 timetable will see more vehicle miles provided by Northern and TPE services than before covid.
- 4.2 RNP has been working with Transport for the North, TPE and Northern to develop plans for each operator to return to a sustainable footing. RNP is working with operators to transform ways of working to provide a sustainable and responsive foundation for growing back reliably and making sure operators have the resources, including through large-scale recruitment, to run reliable services and increase services as resources allow.
- 4.3 RNP has also begun work with DOHL (the holding company for the Operator of Last Resort), Transport for the North, DfT and the operators to develop plans, originally put forward by Northern, for a Rail Academy for the North – a multi-location training academy for our (and potentially other) operators, which will both offer people across the North the opportunity to develop the skills needed for careers in rail and provide operators with a sustainable supply of skilled staff for future growth.
- 4.4 Transport for the North met the rail minister to outline its concerns on performance and recovery and has continued to meet with DfT and operators to

push for greater clarity on future plans and certainty for passengers where services are disrupted.

- 4.5 RNP has additionally approved TPE's recruitment of additional driver trainees this year, building on its already significant pipeline of trainees.
- 4.6 Operators' recovery will be measured by constant monitoring of performance across the network to see if timetable adjustments are supporting service stabilisation, monitoring of sickness levels to see if trends are improving or degrading, and reporting of recruitment plans and levels of recruitment through performance dashboards.
- 4.7 A review of South and North Transpennine route timetables is also currently being carried out by RNP with TPE to establish whether selected temporary minor reductions in services may also help stabilise the performance position on those routes.

### **TransPennine Express**

- 4.8 Throughout the year, TPE has seen ongoing high levels of sickness, greater than anticipated levels of drivers leaving the business and a very substantial volume of driver training required to recover from Covid-related competency loss and to meet the demands of enhancement programmes (principally TRU and MRTF) and timetable changes.
- 4.9 This has impacted service performance, with the situation compounded by diminished rostering flexibility from the loss of driver rest day working since December 2021 and strike action by the RMT which has impacted the rate at which training can be delivered. The scale of strike action has now grown with action being planned by TPE staff who are members of TSSA and ASLEF.
- 4.10 RNP has been working with the operator and stakeholders to resolve the underlying issues and improve the service for passengers.
- 4.11 As a temporary solution, and subject to strict conditions, TPE is introducing a revised timetable from mid-September 2022 for services it operates on the West Coast Main Line. The amended timetable entails reductions in services back to a similar level provided pre-May 2022, but complemented by additional bus services in Cumbria and the Scottish Borders. The operator wants to give greater levels of travelling certainty for passengers and the regions TPE serves, on the basis that passengers prefer a reliable service to the offer of a choice of more trains that may well not run.
- 4.12 It is important to state that these temporary reductions are being made for operational stability and certainty only and are not being made for budgetary reasons. Those affected services remain part of the core timetable the operator will be required to operate once the core issues affecting performance, such as realising the benefits of ongoing and additional training, have been addressed. RNP has insisted that the reduced timetable must be for as short a period as possible, and that, in the management of the services, fleet and staff on this line, restoring service levels is TPE's priority. The operator will seek to reintroduce services from the December 2022 timetable change, with remaining services reintroduced by May 2023.
- 4.13 There will be a focus on the provision of accurate and timely information to passengers about the changes to be implemented and any issues with delivery of the new timetable.

- 4.14 TPE will continue to work with Transport for the North members and stakeholders to understand the impact of the timetable in practice and consider any improvements or enhancements to better align the passenger offer with passengers' particular requirements or experiences.
- 4.15 TPE will continue to work with RNP, Transport for the North and DfT to develop a recovery plan to address the underlying issues which have triggered the need for this change.
- 4.16 TPE's industrial relations issues, which are a significant factor in the operator's poor performance, continue. TSSA members have voted (73 percent on a 63 per cent turnout) for strike action, as have ASLEF members (97 per cent on a turnout of 82 per cent).
- 4.17 Looking forward, TPE continues to make headway with its significant driver training programme and is recruiting additional driver trainees. With the May 2023 timetable change, TPE is looking to add additional York – Scarborough services for holiday traffic (Fridays and weekends / bank holidays), as well as extending its Manchester – Huddersfield service to York via Wakefield and Castleford.

#### **Northern Trains Ltd.**

- 4.18 At the last meeting of the Committee, concern was expressed about timetable changes made by Northern in May 2022, when it made a number of service reductions to improve reliability, pending progress on training that had been curtailed during covid. (The backlog was then compounded by high sick rates earlier in the year.)
- 4.19 While performance has worsened in recent weeks due to other issues, the revised timetable introduced by Northern in May 2022 has operated more robustly than before the change and has given passengers greater certainty. Transport for the North members have continued to push for restoration of the lost connectivity, and Northern has recently confirmed that the majority of services will be restored from the December 2022 timetable change.
- 4.20 RMT's Northern members joined the union's national strikes in June 2022, July 2022 and August 2022. ASLEF members at Northern have voted (96 per cent on a turnout of 86 per cent) for strike action. ASLEF has since announced action across 12 operators for 15 September 2022 and RMT for 15 and 17 September 2022.
- 4.21 Northern launched its latest flash sale on 30 August 2022, with one million advance purchase tickets available. Adult tickets cost £1 (50p for those aged 5-15). Tickets were available to buy from 30 August 2022 to 2 September 2022, for journeys between 6 September 2022 and 20 October 2022 (excluding half term), on routes with capacity, with relevant restrictions on certain routes during weekends and for major events. More than 100,000 tickets were sold in the first 48 hours of the sale.
- 4.22 Performance continues to be an acute challenge, with T-3 (the measure of trains arriving within 3 minutes) generally 1-2 percentage points below target. Passengers are still experiencing significant service disruption through on-the-day cancellations. While Northern had removed services from the train plan to mitigate the impact it is still making a large number of traincrew and operations-related cancellations per period – the majority occurring in the North West, in the context of a challenging industrial relations environment. The situation is unlikely

to improve quickly; RNP is working with Northern on developing possible options to improve the situation.

- 4.23 The first installation of the long-term solution to the previously reported CAF (train manufacturer) trains Yaw Damper issue is now complete. This is being monitored before full rollout across the remainder of Northern's CAF fleet. An important milestone in Northern's rolling stock strategy was achieved in the period, as the oldest trains (Class 150) replacement draft plan was produced for review. The entire fleet of CAF diesel trains has had seat covers replaced, with 10,000 covers supplied as part of the Trains Deep Clean project. The CAF electric trains are already being refitted, with other trains to follow.
- 4.24 Northern recently briefed RNC members' officials on plans for the December 2022 timetable.

## 5 **Other Updates**

### **Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU)**

- 5.1 Following publication of the Integrated Rail Plan, TRU programme funding has increased to around £9bn. Work to better connect passengers in the North between Manchester, Huddersfield, Leeds and York is due to be completed in the next 10 years. The programme aims to transform the Transpennine route into a high-performing, reliable railway, bringing more frequent, more reliable, faster, greener trains.
- 5.2 The 76-mile Transpennine line serves 23 stations, crosses over and dips under more than 280 bridges and viaducts, passes through 6 miles of tunnels and crosses 29 level crossings. As well as electrification of the entire route, TRU involves station improvements and a new signalling system.
- 5.3 The programme is funded by the Department for Transport and delivered by Network Rail, working with TPE, Northern, freight operators and combined authorities across the region, as well as the businesses across the North that make up the TRU supply chain.
- 5.4 Work during 2022 is focused on weekends between April 2022 and September 2022, with some disruption planned over the Jubilee bank holiday weekend in the Manchester Victoria area. However, while 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.
- 5.5 Communications to staff and public, including around the installation of the first overhead wires, a video of the project vision and Huddersfield station's 175<sup>th</sup> birthday, are ongoing. Network Rail will be providing an update to Transport for the North's Board at the meeting on 29 September 2022.

### **Cross Country Trains**

- 5.6 The operator's focus has been on maintaining close relationships with industry colleagues to deliver a robust service, where possible, during the recent extreme weather conditions and several days of industrial action. These have caused higher levels of disruption for passengers, and CrossCountry is looking to strengthen contingent arrangements to deliver the best service possible during disruption.

- 5.7 Special workstreams have been set up with key stakeholders to address specific performance issues focussing on service recovery and mitigation of trespassing and cable-theft.
- 5.8 During the recent service delivery challenges at TransPennine, CrossCountry has supported passengers by providing ticket acceptance and amended stopping patterns to serve Reston on a temporary basis.
- 5.9 CrossCountry has recently launched the Customer and Communities Investment fund to support projects that have a local or regional benefit, or address an area of social need, in the places and communities served across its routes. Applications are open until 12 September 2022.

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

- 5.10 EMR's December 2022 timetable sees very little change compared to what is in the base timetable today. The primary barrier to further service introductions for EMR is the shortage of diesel rolling stock, as mentioned in previous updates. EMR is continuing to work with the Department for Transport and fellow train operators to release trains as swiftly as possible.
- 5.11 There are no further planned instances of strike action affecting EMR at this point. As before, EMR will receive 14 days' notice of any strike action from the RMT or TSSA unions. ASLEF is currently balloting its members; this ballot closes on 19 September 2022. The earliest their members could be asked to take action is 3 October 2022, and the indication is that any strike action would take place between then and 18 March 2023.
- 5.12 EMR's new advertising campaign, featuring the brand mascot Miles, has now launched. The campaign will further help support recovery of the rail industry by driving consideration and awareness of travelling by train with EMR, focussed on reaching commuter and business audiences as they return from annual leave. This will air on ITV, Sky and on-demand channels (ITV, All4) in EMR's mainline region and Sky and on-demand channels in EMR's Connect region. TV will also be supported with radio and digital activity.

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

- 5.13 New data shows LNER saw the most customers return to its services when compared with pre-pandemic usage than any other operator. The findings, published by the Office of Rail and Road, show that LNER recorded relative usage of 83 per cent in the year from April 2021 to March 2022, up 63 percentage points compared with the previous year, meaning LNER has topped the table for four consecutive quarters.
- 5.14 LNER also revealed the findings of new research commissioned to give an insight into what the future of business travel looks like, which showed that 89 per cent of office workers are confident that face-to-face meetings will become the norm again by the end of the year.
- 5.15 LNER launched its Green Guide 2, an inspirational guide for destinations to help those making eco-changes to their travel, as research undertaken following the July 2022 heatwave showed nine of out ten people (89 per cent) feel that climate changes has contributed to the hot weather.

- 5.16 LNER Customer and Community Investment Fund applications for the next round of funding have been received.
- 5.17 Looking ahead, Network Rail's upgrade works will see Carlisle diversions in place in September 2022 and October 2022, while planned upgrade works to the East of Newcastle Central Station will be carried out by Network Rail from 1-9 October 2022 with an impact on a number of operators and services.

### **First Hull Trains**

- 5.18 Hull Trains has been affected by the recent industrial action by RMT and ASLEF, resulting in a reduced service on some weekdays and at weekends. The company remains committed to a resolution of the disputes but also requires reforms around productivity and pensions to secure the future of the business. While revenues have been impacted, more services are being operated on strike days, as contingent staff are helping to support services.
- 5.19 The operator has been impacted more recently by the hot weather and significant infrastructure-related events which illustrate some of the issues with overhead lines on the East Coast Main line.
- 5.20 The company is continuing to evolve its product offer, introducing a new 'Seat Picker' service, which allows customers to select their own seats for their journey. A number of additional connections tickets have also been created, offering passengers better value long distance fares on specific connecting services.
- 5.21 Finally, the Hull Trains team has been shortlisted at the National Rail Awards in the categories of Outstanding Team of the Year, Best in Class Fleet and Outstanding Personal Contribution, so will await the final results in September 2022.

## **6. Corporate Considerations**

### ***Financial Implications***

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

### ***Resource Implications***

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

### ***Legal Implications***

- 6.3 There are no apparent legal implications arising from this report.

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

- 6.4 Risk implications are included in this report.

### ***Environmental Implications***

- 6.5 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***

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

## **7. Appendices**

7.1 Appendix 1. Performance Update

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

*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) RNP   | Rail North Partnership                                     |
| b) TPE   | TransPennine Express                                       |
| c) NTL   | Northern Trains Ltd  |
| d) NPS   | Transport Focus National Passenger Survey                  |
| e) CSAT  | Customer Satisfaction Survey                               |
| f) RMT   | National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers     |
| g) ASLEF | The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen |
| h) TSSA  | Transport Salaried Staffs' Association                     |



## Appendix 1.

### Performance Update

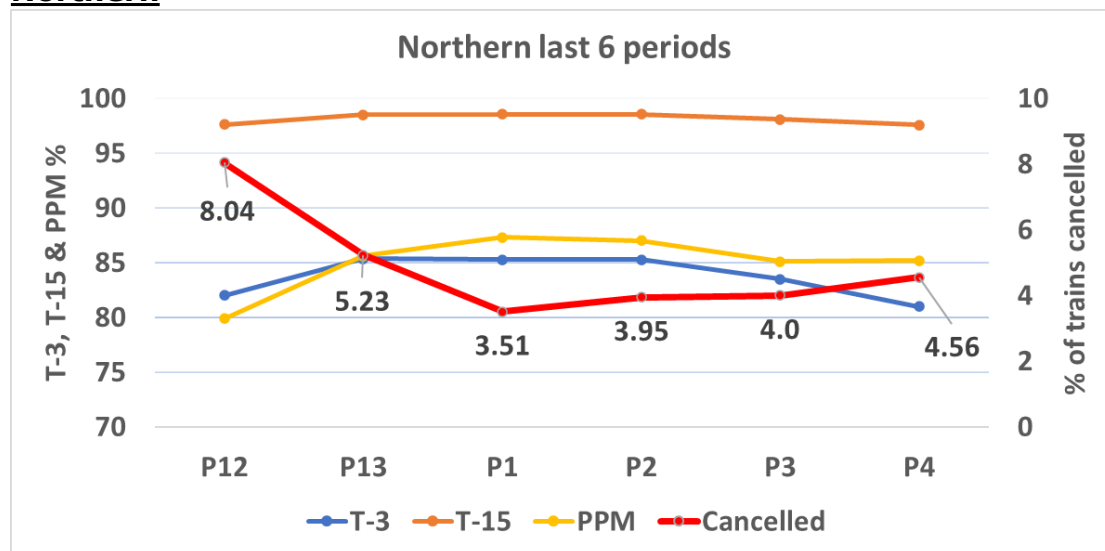
The graphs below and overleaf highlight the train performance for both Northern and TransPennine Express.

The data is reported under the new performance metrics:

- T-3 (arriving within 3 minutes of timetable)
- T-15 (arriving within 15 minutes of timetable)
- 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

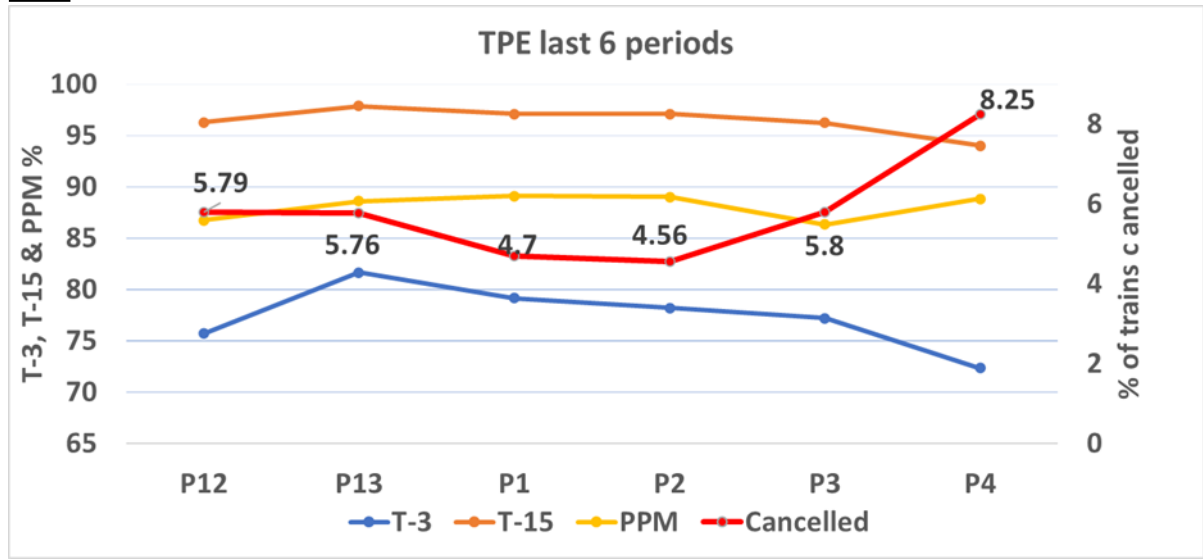


Performance saw improvement from period 12 to P2 but decreased from P2 to P4 due to COVID-19 and internal IR disputes.

The proportion of trains running to T-3 has declined along with PPM, cancellations have improved since the last report (P10-P12) but has increased slightly since P1 to P4.

PPM is no longer an official measure; analysis shows that the PPM tracked T-3 and currently sits at 85.2% for period P4.

## **TPE**



TPE performance was stable until P2 but has decreased since to P4. T-15 has remained consistently in the 90% range throughout the past 6 periods. However, T-3 tracked mostly under 80%. PPM has mostly been in the high 80s% and currently sits at 88.8% for P4. Cancellations has been tracking mostly above 5% and peaked at 8.25% in P4.

The main reason for the downward trend of cancellations is due to the loss of flexibility previously afforded by driver rest day working agreement. TPE continues to reduce train services through implementing planned service reductions before 22.00 hours the previous day and these services do not reflect in the overall performance of cancellations.

## **Customer Service Scores**

Northern's customer metrics were only very slightly improved from the all-time lows set last period. Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) analysis is clear that cancellations dominate customer feedback and impact on satisfaction with other areas of the service.

NPS has increased slightly from its lowest ever point in period 3 but remains well off target. The downward trend appears to have levelled off, but the performance impacts of industrial action and hot weather continue to be a break on improvement.

Several areas have been identified for improvement: Help Points will be refreshed in October this year, and the roll out of backing posters should improve customer perception, while seat covers are currently being replaced across many of the fleet which will drive improvements in this area.

For TPE, despite its poor operational performance, NPS remains positive, although in the most recent periods CSAT has fallen (to +15% from a long-term average of +30% NPS), and complaints remain relatively low, even by historic standards.

Under the Service Quality (SQR) regime, TPE is achieving good results - above average for those operators who are under the SQR regime. In P4, TPE exceeded the benchmarks in 6 of

the 9 SQR areas, although this represented a slight decline from P3. Main areas of concern are with station toilets cleanliness which drags the overall stations SQR results to below benchmark levels. TPE is working hard to address the issue, and RNP is monitoring closely.

On wavelength surveys, TPE is also above industry average in most areas. In P4 'Trust' scored 7.3, down from 7.9 in P3, while satisfaction scored 7.9, down from 8.3. Industry average for satisfaction is 7.7 in P3.