
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Rail North Committee Update
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Sponsor: Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive
Meeting Date: Thursday 29 September 2022

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Board with an update on rail matters that were due to be considered by Rail North Committee on 13 September 2022. The Committee meeting was postponed following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 2.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes this update on rail matters and endorses the actions set out in paragraphs 3.22 and 3.23.

3. Main Issues:

3.1 Operational Rail Overview

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 are resulting in unacceptable levels of performance and disruption for passengers. 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 flexibility previously afforded by driver rest day working is having on daily performance. During the period of mourning following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 2 planned strikes were cancelled and operators worked collaboratively with staff to provide additional services to support the events including travel to and from the State Funeral.

3.2 Avanti West Coast

As a result of a shortage of available drivers, Avanti announced on 8 August that they would be temporarily amending their West Coast services from 14 August. Avanti is 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.

- 3.3 The revised timetable has a significant adverse impact for 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 Rail North Partnership (RNP), Transport for the North has met representatives from Avanti and DfT to stress the extent to which the impacts on the North are unacceptable and seek reassurances that a plan to restore services at the earliest opportunity

is produced, and against which progress can be monitored. A recovery plan was being developed at the time of writing.

3.4 The current contractual arrangements with Avanti are scheduled to be reviewed by the Department for Transport in mid-October. Given the importance of Avanti services to the North (and Scotland and North Wales) the Board may wish to consider emphasising that publication of the recovery plan and progress made in its delivery are material considerations for the Department.

3.5 Northern and TransPennine Express

Against a backdrop of stronger recovery of passenger demand in the North, operational performance is below target levels. A factor that the Board needs to keep in mind is that the recovery in passenger demand includes changes in travel patterns compared to those seen pre-COVID (for example the growth in leisure travel). It is therefore important to ensure that the deployment of resources available (rolling stock and staff) continues to be actively managed to meet changes in demand. RNP has been working with TfN, TPE and Northern to develop plans for each operator to return to a position where they can first operate a more reliable service and then restore services in line with demand 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.

3.6 As a temporary solution, and subject to strict conditions, TPE introduced 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. Early indications are that the timetable change has brought more stability and certainty for passengers. TPE will seek to reintroduce some services from the December 2022 timetable change, with the remaining services reintroduced by May 2023.

3.7 In the case of Northern, whilst performance is still below target, the revised timetable introduced in May 2022 has generally operated better 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 cut in May 2022 will be restored from the December 2022 timetable change.

3.8 RNP has also begun work with Northern's holding company (the Government's operator of last resort), TfN, 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.

3.9 Manchester Task Force

The Manchester Task Force (including representatives from industry, DfT, TfN and TfGM) is overseeing the work to address the congestion bottleneck in central Manchester. Building on the recent more collaborative approach, the remit and mandate of the Task Force is being extended to cover the longer-term strategy which includes:

- Implementation of the December 2022 timetable as an initial step to address service reliability issues;

- development of the 'Blueprint' that links on-going infrastructure enhancements to delivery of the connectivity and capacity needed beyond that initial step;
 - Work, led by Network Rail, on the range of infrastructure solutions to support the implementation of the Blueprint, arranged in three 'tranches' of work and;
 - Implementation of an option testing methodology developed for train service improvements facilitated by infrastructure delivery which will allow TfN to clearly articulate its priorities.
- 3.10 Preparation for the December 2022 timetable change is progressing well; lessons learned from May 2018 have been fully incorporated into the approach including the development of detailed contingency plans should the current Industrial Relations issues impact on preparations. Following on from the December 2022 change, which is focussed on tackling performance, the work on the first (tranche 1) set of infrastructure enhancement schemes is well underway with a final investment (funding) decision expected early in 2023. The next major service change opportunity beyond December 2022 will be in 2024/25 (resulting from the committed electrification schemes).
- 3.11 The next (tranche 2) works are mainly focussed on the Castlefield Corridor and include the re-building of Manchester Oxford Road Station (which also provides an opportunity to significantly improve the public realm in the area) and changes to the signalling to improve the operation of the corridor. There is now a clear industry view on the optimum design for the Manchester Oxford Road scheme and it is now progressing through the development and funding approval process with the full business case due to be completed in December 2023.
- 3.12 Over the summer, a series of workshops have facilitated considerable progress on identifying and developing options for the major infrastructure upgrades (tranche 3) to deliver further service enhancements in the longer term and to understand the opportunities presented by digital signalling, which will be reflected in an update to the Blueprint.
- 3.13 East Coast and Leeds Area
- TfN has previously made a robust response setting out its concerns in relation to plans for an amended East Coast timetable which would have reduced East-West Connectivity. Revised proposals have been developed, but it unlikely these will go ahead in May 2023. It would be possible to make some marginal changes (e.g Cross Country improvements which will benefit passengers).
- 3.14 In discussion with DfT, Transport for the North understands that infrastructure changes required on the East Coast Mainline (ECML) north of York are now included within the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) Delivery Programme being delivered by the DfT and there is a commitment to deliver the 7th/8th path per hour on the ECML which would allow a better balance of East-West and North-South Services (retain the two TPE trains per hour).
- 3.15 The Government's Integrated Rail Plan commits to look at the most effective way to run HS2 trains to Leeds including the most optimal solution for Leeds Station capacity and starting work on the West Yorkshire Mass Transit System. Studies cover extension of high-speed services to Leeds, Leeds station network capacity and better Bradford connections, as set out in the IRP. The Terms of Reference for the HS2 to Leeds Study have not yet been published by the DfT. The TfN Board has written to the Secretary of State calling for the Terms of Reference to be published as soon as possible.

3.16 Growing the Railway

The Rail North Committee is overseeing work on how to grow the railway in the North. The purpose of this work is, as a precursor to the Strategic Transport Plan refresh to re-assert the vision for Rail in the North with a focus on growth, taking advantage of the strong bounce-back from covid and with a focus on the remainder of the decade up until around 2030. Members have re-stated the importance of maintaining a strong and clear ambition for railways in the North – despite short-term resource and funding challenges faced by the industry. In many ways it is more important to re-state the vision as short-term operational decisions need to be seen in the context of the vision. The Board will be mindful that TfN’s work on Future Travel Scenarios, which informed its work on the Regional Decarbonisation Strategy, provides the evidence for planning for significant growth in the railway.

3.17 The emerging ambition for rail in the North over the remainder of the decade is:

*Significantly **increase the attractiveness** of rail in the North to encourage **transfer from less sustainable modes** to deliver on the decarbonisation ambition. To achieve this we need a **growing railway** (flexible to new markets) that can provide customers with a dependable offer that is easy to understand, **offers value for money** and is more **integrated** with local travel networks and local social, environmental and economic objectives. This in turn should provide better value for money for government and funders.*

3.18 Subject to comment from Members, this initial analysis and statement of ambition will be used to inform the development of the Strategic Transport Plan refresh and the broader case for investing in rail in the North. Transport for the North will also seek to influence and shape the Whole Industry Strategic Plan (WISP) which is the new 30-year strategy being developed by Great British Railways. Transport for the North has already made a substantial contribution to the evidence base for the WISP drawing on evidence through the Independent Economic Review, Transport for the North’s analytical framework and the Future Travel Scenarios.

3.19 Operator Business Plans

The Rail North Committee has a Working Group to consider train operator business plans (their plans, including budgets and timetable proposals for each year). The Group discussed the recent meeting with former Rail Minister Wendy Morton MP, Cllr Robinson, Lord Patrick McLoughlin the train operators and officials.

3.20 The TfN representatives were able to raise the concerns expressed previously by the Board about future funding for train operators and the unacceptability of service cuts driven by funding shortfalls. They were able to draw on the specific analysis and evidence provided by partner authorities. They also highlighted the need to build on recent investment and grow the market and explore other options for efficiency savings before reducing services. It was a positive meeting with the Minister acknowledging the need to resolve the short-term issues and supporting the need to improve connectivity, but at the same time highlighting the extra funding provided to the rail industry during the pandemic and the need to ensure the railway is sustainable. The Minister was also open and receptive to innovation through some of the pilot growth projects presented.

3.21 Considerable progress has been made on Northern’s proposed timetable for May 2023. Whilst some local issues remain to be finalised and there are a number of areas where resource constraints limit growth, it does represent a further step towards the pre-covid quantum of service. Further growth will be dependent on

future budget settlements and the possibility of service cuts remains should sufficient budget not be available.

3.22 Next Steps and Actions

As noted above, TfN has held a meeting with the former Rail Minister to discuss the issues outlined in the paper. We have also had a number of detailed meetings with DfT officials and continue to use our influence in the RNP to seek appropriate contingency and recovery plans from operators. Progress will continue to be monitored by the Rail North Committee.

3.23 In addition, it is proposed to:

1. Work with DfT and RNP on recovery plans for train operators including both short and long-term solutions to the current issues with the availability of suitably trained drivers with the appropriate route knowledge. Progress will be monitored by the Rail North Committee.
2. Work with Rail North Partnership to develop plans for a Rail Academy for the North to provide a pipeline of trained drivers to address the current challenges by positive action in the North. The training academy could also be the first step for a more comprehensive approach to public transport skills including bus and tram drivers.
3. Use existing and newly-commissioned (through the TAME team) analysis to make the case for investment in the North's railway to support a growing railway and wider objectives such as reduced transport social exclusion and decarbonisation.
4. Work collaboratively with operators to promote the return to rail to help grow new markets and make rail more sustainable.

4. **Corporate Considerations**

Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct finance implications as a result of this report. The DfT holds the funding risk for rail service contracts.

Resource Implications

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

Legal Implications

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

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 4.4 The report relates to corporate risk 309 (relating to 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

- 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.
- 4.6 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

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

Consultations

- 4.8 The report is an update, so consultation is not required.

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 There are no background papers

6. Appendices

- 6.1 There are no appendices.

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.

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| a) TPE | TransPennine Express |
| b) DfT | Department for Transport |
| c) RNP | Rail North Partnership |