

Rail North Committee Consultation Call Minutes

**Tuesday 15 November 2022 at 11.00am
Virtual**

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Cllr Liam Robinson (Chair)	Liverpool City Region
Cllr Craig Browne	Cheshire & The Potteries
Mayor Andy Burnham	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Cllr Charles Edwards	Lakeland
Cllr Keith Little	Lakeland
Mayor Jamie Driscoll	North East Combined Authority
Mayor Oliver Coppard	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
Cllr Jonathan Dulston	Tees Valley
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Partners in Attendance

Name	Organisation
Steve Montgomery	Avanti
Nick Donovan	Northern
Matthew Golton	TransPennine Express

Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Julie Openshaw	Head of Legal
Adam Timewell	Head of Programmes Northern
Chris Roberts	Head of Programmes TransPennine Express
Caroline Young	Partnership and Programme Manager
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
Emma Young	Senior Solicitor
David Hoggarth	Strategic Rail Director

Item No: Item**1 Welcome and Apologies**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were received from Cllr Gannon, Cllr Les, Cllr Duncan, Cllr Waltham, Cllr Hannigan and Mayor Houchen.
- 1.2 The Chair informed Members that he intended to take items 4 and 5 as one item as they cover similar issues.

2 Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the Consultation Call held on 31 May 2022 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Consultation Call held on 31 May 2022 be noted.

4 The Future of Rail in North

- 4.1 Members received the Future of Rail in the North report and the Rail North Partnership Operational report from the Strategic Rail Director who outlined the key points within each of the reports before Members were able to ask questions and make comments.
- 4.2 Mr. Steve Montgomery provided the Committee with an update on the current situation in relation to TransPennine Express (TPE) and Avanti. He recognised the current issues and challenges being faced and apologised to customers and stakeholders for the current situation. Before providing a local update, he gave some context to the wider industry issues.

He stated that industry reform is at different stages and explained that positive levels of engagement are occurring with the Trade Unions looking at reform. He further explained that the unions are seeking a pay increase for their members and together with the Unions and Government they are looking to develop reform that will enable that increase. He then updated the Committee on the current situation with Avanti, explaining that from July staff willing to undertake additional overtime shifts significantly reduced. He then addressed the issue of driver training but stressed that the issue is not driver numbers at either Avanti or TPE as numbers are higher now than pre pandemic but rather getting drivers productive and trained. He added that work on the Avanti recovery plan continues.

Mr. Montgomery explained that final discussions are taking place on the drivers rosters for the December timetable change and was hopeful that the talks would be positive leading to a reintroduction of services from December, particularly on Avanti.

TPE are facing similar issues on driver productivity with a significant amount of training needed on diversionary routes. He reassured Members that they are doing everything possible to restore the services in December that they promised.

- 4.3 Mr. Matthew Golton then provided additional detail on the current situation with TPE. He also apologised for the impact that cancellations have had on customers and Stakeholders. He stated that at the start of the Autumn cancellation levels were at the lowest levels since May but as the Autumn progressed matters became more challenging including a doubling of non-TPE related instances.

An update was provided on progress following the last meeting; he explained that they have been working hard to deliver improvements including a temporary adjustment to services on the West Coast Mainline which provided greater stability and a positive impact on the number of cancellations. More crews are expected to become competent by 12 December and the daily number of services will be increased to 35 in December rising to 40 in May 2023. As competency and depth is added services are anticipated to improve week on week.

- 4.4 Mr. Nick Donovan provided the Committee with a progress update for Northern. He explained that there is currently strong customer demand with the service being at about 90% of 2019 volume levels with leisure continuing to dominate, but this is being impacted by the industrial action and the service delivery challenges.

On the issue of growth Northern recognises that future growth is linked to stronger delivery and performance and he apologised to customers for the service delivery issues. He explained that in the short-term good progress has been made with driver rostering and the issue that had been going on since May was resolved by the end of October though issues still exist with Sunday services. He then highlighted a number of challenges including sickness (which is particularly high in the North East with a lot of focus being placed on improving things in this area), and driver training which has been reduced by about 25% over the last two years despite the rest day working challenge. Regarding the December timetable he explained that the change will be critical for Northern as it will support a more robust delivery.

- 4.5 Cllr Little raised the issue of morning train cancellations and the impact that this has on subsequent trains with them becoming overcrowded and many passengers needing to stand for significant parts of their journey. He further stated that this lack of reliability is making people less likely to use the train.

- 4.6 Mayor Driscoll highlighted the importance of an integrated travel system and the importance of it for growth. He also expressed his support for the "double devolution" proposal as well as the need for a driver training academy in order to help deal with the training needs.

He then addressed the performance issues and the impact that they are having in the North East, highlighting some major issues in rural areas

where businesses have been unable to open due to staff being unable to get to work and school children waiting on dark platforms for long periods. He also highlighted that Northern replacement bus services are not turning up at the stations and expressed concern at the high levels of sickness amongst drivers.

In response Mr. Donovan apologised for the impact to the communities in the North East. He addressed the issue of the high sickness in the area and explained that the management in the North East have a major focus on this issue. On the issue of bus replacement services, he explained that they are having issues in recruiting bus replacement services as the bus companies are having issues in resourcing these. /Mayor Driscoll requested that Northern improve their communication and ensure that the public are kept informed if replacement bus services cannot be put in place either.

The Chair asked Mr. Donovan to ensure that the Regional Director work with Mayor Driscoll, Cllr Little and others in the affected areas while any disruption continues.

- 4.7 Mayor Burnham was critical of the poor service standards during the second half of this year and highlighted the negative impact that this has been having on people's lives, businesses and the wider economy. He believed that the public has lost faith in rail and that this has led to more cars on the road and more congestion in Greater Manchester.

He further stated that the current situation in relation to cancellations over the last few months is worse than May 2018 and specifically highlighted the number of TPE cancellations, as well as the fact that on some mornings there are no services in some places. He added that the people of the North of England have had a very poor service for nearly five years.

Whilst recognising the external and Governmental factors which are beyond the operator's control, he stated that there are things that the operators are in control of and asked for honesty about what they have got wrong and what they are going to change in their service provision. Additionally, he enquired about Government contracts and whether these are playing a part in the poor service. He stated that if their honesty is lacking then there will be no confidence in the December timetable.

- 4.8 In response Mr. Montgomery stated that lessons are always learned from these issues and that previously there has been an over reliance on staff working extra hours in order to maintain services and this has now caused issues. He then explained that they have added more drivers in in order to address this issue and work and discussions have taken place with the Trade Unions on new rosters as well as ensuring that there is a more even spread of drivers available across the week. He stressed that TPE and Avanti want to provide a good service and they are working towards this.
- 4.9 Mayor Burnham reiterated his call for greater honesty from the operators highlighting comments made by the TOCs in the summer where all the

blame for the issues on the trains was placed on trade unions, this he described as inaccurate.

Mayor Burnham stated that he understood why the actions that Mr. Montgomery outlined had been taken and believes that they are the correct actions, but he sought reassurance that three trains per hour between Manchester and London would be reinstated in December.

Mr. Montgomery stated that there are enough trained productive drivers to deliver on this but stated that this was subject to the Trade Unions agreeing to the new rosters.

The Chair requested that Mr. Montgomery keep Members updated on how things progress over the coming weeks.

- 4.10 Mr. Golton highlighted the importance of collaborative working amongst partners in order to deliver a quality and resilient service. He explained that following his arrival at TPE in June 2021 much work has been done to overcome the knowledge backlog and to recruit and train drivers. Due to the December timetable change and the TransPennine Route upgrade this has been a priority. Progress has been made, and there is more to come.
- 4.11 Mr. Donovan highlighted the differences between the forthcoming December 2022 timetable change and that of May 2018. He explained that the planning arrangements for the t timetable structure and its interplay with the infrastructure is in a different place and that only modest infrastructure work is required in order to be able to implement the timetable and much of the work required is on track from completion. /He stated that the most critical part of implementing the new timetable is the train crew resourcing, the rostering negotiations are currently taking place and he was hopeful that these would be completed positively.
- 4.12 Cllr Hinchcliffe shared her frustrations at the poor quality of train service experienced East of the Pennines and highlighted the social and economic impact that this has on communities every time a train is cancelled. She requested that a quantification be done on the economic impact when services are cancelled and are replaced with bus services and that it is important to have this information in order to demonstrate to Government the economic damage that is being done if Northern rail is not funded appropriately.
- On the Rail Academy she requested that this be driven by a group of Combined Authorities from across the North so that all areas have skills leads in order to tap into the existing infrastructure and requested an early meeting of the local authority skills leads with the train operators.
- 4.13 The Chair asked the Strategic Rail Director to monetise the impact of poor performance highlighting that the performance of TPE is costing the Northern economy £2 million per week and asked if this can be localised more.
- 4.14 In response he explained that Transport for the North has the tools and models to be able to demonstrate the economic impact that this is

having on the North of England and that the measures of cost of delays from poor performance and wider social benefits can be combined to produce a figure. /He added that he had already had contact with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority skills lead.

- 4.15 Cllr Edwards highlighted the fact that much of the recovery in rail has been leisure and tourist led during the summer months additionally he highlighted the issues with Sunday travel and how this needs to be resolved because weekend travel is key to those travelling for leisure and tourism purposes. He expressed his concerns and beliefs about the abilities of some operators being able to step up and deliver the December timetable changes.

He requested that the wording of the recommendations be strengthened to state that if the promises are not met and the issues are not resolved then TfN would no longer be willing to support the franchises in their existing state.

- 4.16 The Chair was supportive of the suggested changes to the wording of the resolution and advised the Committee to support the proposed changes. The Committee were also reminded that TfN is able to issue statutory advice.
- 4.17 Lord McLoughlin stated that everyone will be watching what happens at the timetable change on 12 December and that the current situation of one train an hour between London and Manchester unacceptable. He urged operators to be confident in the accuracy of information that they are providing to the public and explained that the public lose confidence in rail services if it is not reliable.
- 4.18 Mr. Montgomery made the Committee aware that there are two strike days planned on Avanti when the new timetable goes live.
- 4.19 The Chair asked that the Train Operators voice their concerns if they are facing issues that are a result of restraints put on them by the Government.

Resolved:

- 1) That assurances be sought from the Department for Transport that the train operators in the North will be provided with the flexibility to put in place short term arrangements that could bring about an immediate improvement to performance – including Rest Day Working Agreements.
- 2) That TfN seeks the support of the Department for Transport to complete the business case for a Training Academy for the North which will ensure there is a pipeline of trained drivers to end the reliance on overtime working and also deliver the growth in services needed.
- 3) That work through the Rail North Partnership continues to hold the train operators accountable for their recovery plans and commitments and should promises and pledges made regarding the December timetable change not be met then TfN would be unable to support continuation of the relevant 'franchises'.

- 4) That the executive be requested to prepare a proposition for consideration by the December 2022 Transport for the North Board that sets out the case for using the existing rail devolution in the North as the basis for rail reform.
- 5) That the case continues to be made for the funding the North needs to support a growing railway including revenue budgets for the train operators and capital investment.
- 6) That the Committee notes the information in the report and the actions that Transport for the North and Rail North Partnership (RNP) is taking to ensure operators have robust recovery plans in place and to provide them with support and guidance to respond to current issues in the best way possible for passengers.

5 Rail North Partnership Operational Update

This was covered in Item 4.

6 Manchester Task Force

- 6.1 Members received the report from the Strategic Rail Director who highlighted the key points within the report.
- 6.2 Mr. Richard Harper the Chair of the Manchester Taskforce provided Members with an update. He explained that the new timetable is designed to improve the situation in relation to delays in central Manchester through reducing the congestion which became apparent in 2018. He added that if a comparison is made between the December 2019 timetable and that which is about to be introduced there are fewer trains making complex routes across Manchester which means less delay will be spread across the region. They are also longer, but also fewer trains more evenly spaced, and whilst this will have an impact on some journeys there will be a big improvement for many. He further explained that standardised service patterns will mean an even delivery of capacity for passengers and will allow for better interchange which will mean fewer trains with better spacing on the Castlefield Corridor.

With regards to infrastructure Mr. Harper highlighted that the industry, through the Task Force, has been closely monitoring readiness for the new timetable. Some infrastructure works have been completed, whilst others are close to completion and are being monitored closely. Work has also been taking place to train drivers on new routes; none of the risks give specific cause for concern, and mitigations are in place.

The Committee was reassured that the Task Force will be closely monitoring the implementation of the timetable.

- 6.3 Mayor Burnham enquired as to “what success looks like” regarding implementation of the timetable and also requested greater clarity on the infrastructure timeline.

Mr. Harper explained that a comprehensive analysis of performance will take place pre- and post- timetable change which will look at all of the detailed root causes. The one measure which is particularly important for the timetable is the level of congestion delay and this will be looked at

closely. He explained that the modelling which was undertaken showed that the new timetable should reduce that by 20% and that is the measure that will be monitored. He then went on to highlight the opportunity for electrification schemes on the Northwest quadrant out of Manchester coming to fruition and the works in Salford and Manchester Victoria.

The Committee was informed that Network Rail is producing work which will be published in the spring which will provide a further update and hopefully remove the vagueness around infrastructure work beyond 2025.

- 6.4 Mayor Coppard raised the issue of there being no link in Sheffield to Manchester Airport and requested an update and requested the opportunity for South Yorkshire to be more involved in the Task Force.

Mr. Harper explained that the service to Manchester Airport is understood and is on the list of service business cases for future. Mr. Golton explained that this is something that TPE are working on.

Mayor Coppard asked Mr. Harper to write to him outlining the plan.

- 6.5 Cllr Hinchcliffe highlighted that there is no link from Bradford to Manchester Airport despite this being promised 3 years ago and requested that a similar approach be taken in West Yorkshire as is being taken in Manchester.

The Strategic Rail Director agreed with Cllr Hinchcliffe on the approach due to many interlinked issues in the Leeds and Bradford areas.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee notes the progress on implementation of the December 2022 timetable;
- 2) The Committee notes the continued progress with development and delivery of the infrastructure upgrades identified in the Blueprint in the short and longer term;
- 3) That the Committee notes the next steps including further development of the longer-term infrastructure requirements.

7 East Coast Mainline Update

- 7.1 Members received the report from the Partnership and Programme Manager who highlighted the key issues in the report.
- 7.2 Cllr Hinchcliffe expressed frustration with the length of time taken. She explained that the Programme Board is in place, but more involvement is required from DfT regarding the infrastructure and highlighted the lack of response to the IRP and the fact that there are still no Terms of Reference to the Leeds Study. She also enquired as to the current position of the Northern Acceleration Council.
- 7.3 The Chief Executive explained that during Grant Shapps tenure as Secretary of State the Department was anxious to release the Terms of Reference although cross governmental approval was needed. Following

the change in the Secretary of State he hoped that the Terms of Reference would be released soon.

- 7.4 Mayor Coppard supported Cllr Hinchcliffe's comments and suggested that a letter be sent to Government with the support of TfN on this matter.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee notes the update on industry work to introduce a revised timetable on the East Coast Main Line and further infrastructure enhancements;
- 2) That Transport for the North writes to Department for Transport to seek inclusion of Transport for the North on the ECML Programme Board;
- 3) That the Committee notes the update on the Leeds Area Study.

8 Resilience and Reliability Delivery Plan

- 8.1 Members received the report from David Worsley who highlighted the key points in the report.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee notes the work that has been undertaken by Transport for the North on small-medium infrastructure schemes
- 2) That the Committee endorses the approach to improving reliability set out in this report
- 3) That the Committee endorses seeking devolved funding from Government, potentially through Network Rail, to address the resilience and reliability of the network

9 Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of items 10 and 11 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 Private Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 10.1 The private minutes of the Consultation Call held on 31 May 2022 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the private minutes of the Consultation Call held on 9 March 2022 be noted.

11 Train Operator Business Plans

11.1 The report was received by Members who were then invited to ask questions and make comments.

Resolved:

That the report of the Rail North Partnership Director be noted.