
Meeting	Rail North Committee Consultation Call
Subject:	Strategic Rail Report
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1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of Transport for the North's *Strategic Rail Report*, which is a summary of the activities and policy positions developed in support of the forthcoming *Strategic Transport Plan*. It explains how the specific plans address current transport issues and links to the *Strategic Transport Plan's* objectives.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to consider the approach to the *Strategic Rail Report* and endorse it as a supporting document for the *Strategic Transport Plan*.

3. Main Issues:

- 3.1 The *Strategic Rail Report* explains the policy background and events which have led to Transport for the North's latest rail strategic planning work. Our *Long-Term Rail Strategy* of January 2018 indicated a number of areas for further research and policy development work, but was partly overtaken by events, when the problems associated with the May 2018 timetable change raised issues around reliability to the top of the rail agenda. The government subsequently initiated the Williams Rail Review to examine the long-term future of the industry, but the start of the pandemic in early 2020 led to a forced restructuring of rail industry governance and an enormous impact on demand patterns and travel behaviour, which has led to long-term changes.
- 3.2 It should be noted that an earlier draft of the Strategic Rail Report was reviewed by members of Rail North Committee at a special briefing session on 7th December 2022. The latest version includes changes made in response to feedback received then and in consultation sessions with Transport for the North partners, including additional material on the relationship of the *Strategic Rail Report* to the forthcoming *Strategic Transport Plan* and *Investment Programme*, the immediate problems faced by our railways, decarbonisation, user needs, transport and public health, freight, and Community Rail.
- 3.3 The *Strategic Rail Report* examines how all these factors have impacted on a number of rail industry themes, and Transport for the North's responses and proposals. For each theme, it identifies what issues have remained unchanged since before the pandemic, where change has been thrust upon the industry, and where our own research and strategy development has improved our understanding. The report therefore includes Transport for the North's positions on the following issues:
 - a. A summary of how Transport for the North's various initiatives (in areas such as journey times, reliability, stations enhancements, or freight) are expected to contribute towards our intended transport outputs (such as improved performance, modal shift to rail, decarbonisation and enhanced inter-urban connectivity). These outputs in turn contribute towards our

overall environmental and social goals, including improved economic performance, social inclusion, “levelling up” (in terms of both transport provision and regional prosperity) and long-term sustainable and transformational growth;

- b. A summary of the other Transport for the North strategies which complement the *Strategic Rail Report*, including the *Transport Decarbonisation Strategy* and *Freight & Logistics Strategy*;
- c. A restatement of Transport for the North’s support for our preferred network for both HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, and their relationship to the Transpennine Route Upgrade programme;
- d. A description of our *Northern England Station Enhancements Programme: Strategic Outline Business Case*, which presents the case for 3 different programme options for stations facilities enhancements across the North;
- e. A discussion of the interconnected nature of issues concerning rail connectivity, service frequency, capacity and journey times, the significance that future electrification programmes will hold for improving all of these, and the contribution that our work on linespeed improvements and Combined Train Service Specifications for 2050 can make in this area;
- f. Examination of the changing temporal distribution of rail demand since the pandemic, the importance of early morning, late evening and weekend travel, and our related research on the *Visitor Economy and Transport in the North of England*; and
- g. A discussion of the central importance of reliability and resilience for the attractiveness of rail travel, and Transport for the North’s work in this area, which has identified over 120 small and medium-sized enhancements which could be enacted to improve rail performance in the North in the short to medium term.

3.4 The first topic examined (at Chapter 6) is the major programmes intended to enhance long-distance and inter-city connectivity between the North’s main population centres, and between the North and other parts of Britain, namely High Speed 2, Transpennine Route Upgrade, and Northern Powerhouse Rail. The future of all three was covered in the government’s *Integrated Rail Plan* of November 2021, and the *Strategic Rail Report* restates Transport for the North’s policy that we wish to see our preferred network for NPR implemented in full, along with the necessary supporting elements of HS2.

3.5 The report also includes (at Chapter 7) an overview of Transport for the North’s work on stations facilities, which demonstrates that there is a strong economic and strategic case for a programme of enhancements which would bring all 600 stations in Transport for the North’s area up to a set of common standards. This would be especially important for improving accessibility to all of our region’s stations, as at present only about half have step-free access to all areas, whilst many also lack the customer information systems or public address announcements that are needed by some travellers.

3.6 The next chapter (at Chapter 8) examines the interconnectedness of connectivity (e.g., the ability to catch a direct service or the need to change), service frequency, passenger capacity and journey times, as all are dealt with through the timetable planning process. It explains how Transport for the North has contributed to the production of Combined Train Service Specifications for 2050, which detail our expectations as to what volume of services will be required in the long term. It also incorporates discussion of Transport for the North’s Line Speed Improvement Programme (being developed by Network Rail) which has

developed a new approach to identifying where linespeeds could be increased with the optimal value for money and could yield improvements which could be taken as journey time reductions, operating cost reductions, or performance improvements.

- 3.7 Another group of topics is collected under the theme of “seven-day railway” issues (at Chapter 9). This explains how changed demand patterns since the start of the pandemic, including the increased relative significance of weekend travel, tie in with the importance of travel for leisure reasons and the visitor economy in the North. There is also a link between improving weekend, early morning and late evening travel opportunities, and the reduction of transport-related social exclusion.
- 3.8 Finally, the North’s particular problems with service reliability and resilience are discussed (with performance in the north being almost uniformly worse than elsewhere in the country). In order to begin rectifying this in the short-to-medium term, Transport for the North have assembled and prioritised a programme of over 120 small and medium-sized reliability enhancements, in conjunction with the operators.
- 3.9 The full Strategic Rail Report will be published alongside the *Strategic Transport Plan* consultation draft.

4. Corporate Considerations

Financial Implications

- 4.1 The financial implications are anticipated to be submitted as part of the 2023/24 budget and business planning process which will be subject to board approval in March 2023. This includes Strategic Rail support for the *Strategic Transport Plan* and *Investment Programme* as “must do” items.

Resource Implications

- 4.2 The resource requirements to deliver TfN’s Strategic Rail related key priorities has been identified as part of TfN 2023/24 budget and business planning process and will be subject to approval by the Board in March 2023.

Legal Implications

- 4.3 Transport for the North has a statutory duty to produce the *Strategic Transport Plan* and the *Strategic Rail Report* forms a supporting part of this work.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 4.4 Transport for the North are managing several corporate risks in relation to the *Strategic Rail 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. All proposed infrastructure developments will be subject to screening for the need for EIA by the relevant development authority as part of the design development and consenting process.

Equality and Diversity

- 4.6 A full Impact Assessment has not been carried out because it is not required for this report.

Consultations

- 4.7 Transport for the North's partners have been informally consulted on our approach and will have the opportunity to provide further input as the *Strategic Transport Plan* evolves.

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 None

6. Appendices

- 6.1 Appendix 1. A summary of the *Strategic Rail Report*.

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

a)	DfT	Department for Transport
b)	EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
c)	GBR	Great British Railways
d)	LTRS	<i>Long Term Rail Strategy</i> (published by TfN in January 2018)
e)	NPIER	Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review
f)	NPR	Northern Powerhouse Rail
g)	NTC	Northern Transport Charter
h)	RNP	Rail North Partnership
i)	STP	<i>Strategic Transport Plan</i> (published by TfN in February 2019)
j)	TfN	Transport for the North