
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Rail North Committee Update
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Sponsor: Darren Oldham, Rail and Roads Director
Meeting Date: Thursday 23 March 2023

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Board with feedback on the matters discussed at the Rail North Committee Consultation Call on 22 February 2023.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Board:
1. Notes the feedback from the Rail North Committee including detailed discussions with the train operators about their plans to improve performance for passengers;
 2. Endorses the feedback from the Committee (set out in paragraph 3.4) that TPE's recovery plan does not go far enough or fast enough and that Government needs to play a role working with TPE and the Trade Unions to find a way to improve the current situation for passengers; and
 3. Endorses the early implementation of Rail Reform in the North noting that TfN is taking action to improve local involvement through the establishment of a further Business Unit under the existing Rail North Partnership Agreement.

3. Main Issues:

3.1 Rail Performance

The Committee discussed ongoing rail performance issues with representatives from FirstGroup (which operates both Avanti West Coast and TransPennine Express), TPE and Northern Trains. The Committee heard that there had been some improvement on Avanti West Coast with the full 3 trains per hour between London and Manchester re-instated in the timetable from December 2022. In the case of Northern, its cancellation performance matched the industry average and whilst there were still areas that needed improvement, the Committee acknowledged the progress that has been made.

- 3.2 The main focus for the Committee was on the continued unacceptably poor performance of TPE which is continuing to impact on passengers and businesses across the North. Matthew Golton, Managing Director of TPE summarised the Recovery Plan his team had developed which had been recently submitted to Rail North Partnership. The plan targeted a reduction in cancellations of up to 60% by June 2022. TPE accepted that rail users wanted to see a quicker improvement back to normal levels of performance and highlighted that the most impactful measure would be a short-term resumption of Rest Day Working (overtime); discussions with staff and unions were ongoing on this. Mr Golton also acknowledged the need to re-build passenger confidence as the service recovers and highlighted plans for a marketing campaign focused on fares offers.

- 3.3 Committee members questioned how they could have confidence in the recovery plan given previous commitments and experiences, but also acknowledged that

Government has a role to play to resolve the position in the interest of passengers.

3.4 Following the call, feedback was provided to Rail North Partnership Board acknowledging that a robust recovery plan is essential to re-build confidence.

The Committee concluded that from TfN's perspective, the recovery plan put forward by TPE doesn't go far enough or quickly enough. TfN wants to see government work with TPE and the unions to agree a way forward that brings about a quicker improvement for passengers. TfN set out that the recovery plan must be accompanied by:

- a) *A contractual mechanism to ensure **accountability** (i.e., the plan must be built into current and future contracts);*
- b) *Monitorable and **measurable milestones** and targets (monitored via RNP with regular updates to TfN members and DfT ministers); and*
- c) ***Compensation** for passengers that rebuilds the market (i.e., focused on winning passengers back).*

TfN also highlighted that there needs to be sufficient funding from DfT for TPE's planned service level and rolling stock and a commitment and funding for a rail academy to address the long-term staffing requirements of the industry. TfN is using the Committee's conclusion to shape its input into the Rail North Partnership.

3.5 Manchester Task Force

The Committee received an update on the work of the Manchester Task Force. This highlighted that a major milestone had been achieved with the implementation of the December 2022 timetable change. Although a formal assessment would be provided when sufficient data is available later this spring, the initial signs were encouraging that the structure of the timetable is more reliable albeit will some loss of connectivity.

3.6 Committee was updated on the ongoing development of infrastructure plans to address the congested infrastructure, with a particular focus on 'configuration state 2' (including electrification, platform lengthening and 'turnback's' in the Manchester Victoria area) from the middle of the decade – final funding approval was expected soon, and service change options would be discussed with the Committee shortly. In the discussion members raised concerns about the ability of the infrastructure to accommodate the promised TransPennine Route Upgrade service enhancements and the clear desire to restore and enhance services to/from Manchester Airport, and in particular South Yorkshire. A more detailed report including an update to the TfN Statutory Advice will be tabled at the next meeting of the Committee.

3.7 East Coast Main Line

An update was provided on the work to unlock capacity on the East Coast Main Line particularly North of York. Updates were also provided on improvements between Leeds and Bradford to support additional London services in advance of the City of Culture in 2025. Members expressed frustration and concern that the Leeds Area Study (following the Integrated Rail Plan publication in November 2021) had still not had its terms of reference published.

3.8 Strategic Transport Plan

Members of the Committee endorsed an approach to the rail elements of the Strategic Transport Plan (STP). Public consultation on the revised STP will be accompanied by the publication of a Strategic Rail report which sets out the vision

and need for the rail network to expand in capacity, capability and reliability considerably to support the wider Plan. Analysis shows that a significant shift to rail and other sustainable modes and substantial increase in rail freight is needed to support wider objectives including decarbonisation and social inclusion. This will be reflected in the proposed metrics included within the revised STP. The Strategic Rail report draws out the need for sustained investment in transforming the rail network (including Northern Powerhouse Rail in full), but also highlights the ability for smaller scale 'quick wins' to deliver substantial benefits for passengers. Work undertaken by TfN includes reliability and resilience schemes and work to strengthen the business case for investing in consistent standards for the North's rail stations including improvements to accessibility.

3.9 North West Regional Business Unit.

Following-on from experience gained with an existing Business Unit in the North East, the Committee approved plans to create a North West Regional Business Unit. This is the first step to greater local influence and better accountability reflecting the desired outcomes of rail reform – but utilising the existing Rail North Partnership arrangements. The new arrangements will be implemented in the first part of 2023/24 in parallel to the further development of plans for a new form of partnership between TfN and Great British Railways which are being developed for submission to a future meeting of the TfN Board.

4. **Corporate Considerations**

Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications for Transport for the North as a result of this report.

Resource Implications

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

Legal Implications

4.3 Transport for the North's Constitution will be kept under review in case any amendments are required. Contract management of the train operators is undertaken by the Rail North Partnership in accordance with the DfT's contractual mechanisms.

Risk Management and Key Issues

4.4 This paper does not require a risk assessment, however, risks relating to the future of rail services are highlighted. A risk has been included on the Transport for the North Corporate Risk Register in relation to the future viability of rail services and Transport for the North's future role.

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. Any infrastructure proposals to improve the capacity and reliability of the system will be subject (where appropriate) to EIA Screening, conducted by Network Rail as part of the consenting process for those projects.

Equality and Diversity

4.6 A full impact assessment has not been carried out because it is not relevant to the type of work referenced.

Consultations

4.7 A consultation is not required on the issues covered in this paper.

5. Background Papers

5.1 None

6. Appendices

6.1 None

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used (<i>if applicable</i>)	
a) <i>TPE</i>	<i>TransPennine Express</i>
b) <i>NPR</i>	<i>Northern Powerhouse Rail</i>
c) <i>IRP</i>	<i>Integrated Rail Plan</i>