

Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Rail North Committee Update
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Meeting Date: Thursday 22 June 2023

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Board with feedback on the matters discussed at the Rail North Committee on 7 June 2023.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Board:
1. Notes the feedback from the Rail North Committee including discussions with the Operator of Last Resort and Interim Managing Director of TransPennine Express (TPE) who will report back on their initial work in September
 2. Endorses the further work on Statutory Advice (the Secretary of State) on Manchester to ensure that the industry moves at pace to clearly set out an infrastructure solution to facilitate growth and connectivity needed in the North.

3. Main Issues

Chair and Vice Chairs

- 3.1 Mayor Burnham and Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe were appointed as Chair and majority (political group) Vice Chair respectively. There remains a vacancy for a minority Vice Chair.

Operator's Business Plans

- 3.2 The committee considered a set of priorities for the 2024/25 business plans of Northern and TPE. The covering report highlighted the opportunity to link business plans more closely to Transport for the North's Strategic Transport Plan, supporting social and economic priorities in the North. Members raised a number of areas where there are still gaps in service provision which they would like to see filled. It was suggested that in some areas the operators might be taking a cautious approach to restoring services and that there might be opportunities to grow revenue further with service increments.
- 3.3 It was recognised that funding would again be tight, but members were clear that the strong growth back of services in the North serves to emphasise the importance of considering potential revenues alongside costs. Priorities set out in the report included restoring performance, restoring the quantum of services pre-covid and supporting new and developing markets such as leisure and tourism. It was agreed that the social benefits of rail in the North needed to be expressed stronger in the way the priorities are identified and that the priorities should be developed further and re-presented. The committee agreed to re-establish a member working group to steer Transport for the North's input into the business planning work.

Infrastructure and Future Service Development

- 3.4 The report covered work to link future services more closely with infrastructure schemes to avoid the types of issues that occurred in May 2018. There was a brief update on the East Coast Main Line and members registered their continued frustration and concern that the terms of reference for the HS2 Leeds Area Study were still awaited.
- 3.5 The main consideration was around the Manchester area bottleneck. Members noted the successful implementation of the December 2022 timetable change which had generated a greater than expected improvement in performance. Whilst supporting the collaborative approach of the Manchester Task Force, Members highlighted their concern at the loss in connectivity for some areas (such as Sheffield to Manchester Airport and the Warrington area) that was a consequence. The committee was clear that resolving issues in Manchester remained a priority for the North as a whole and that Transport for the North needs to continue to push hard for the infrastructure needed which would allow additional services to operate.
- 3.6 In the context of the recently announced (and welcomed) funding for 'configuration state 2' and Network Rail's decision to remove the Transport and Works Act Order for the original 'Package C' scheme, the committee considered whether an update to Transport for the North's Statutory Advice was required. It was noted that the suggestion in the draft updated advice to move to a more outcome-based specification represented no dilution of Transport for the North's ambition. Members were, however, clear that Platforms 15/16 (at Piccadilly) should remain as a future option until such time as an alternative is presented. Officers confirmed that Platforms 15/16 remained under consideration for future phases. Committee was clear that there needed to be work 'at pace' to set out a comprehensive and clear plan. The importance of airport connectivity and Stockport area congestion being tackled were discussed.
- 3.7 It was agreed that further work should be undertaken in the draft Statutory Advice for presentation to the next meeting of the committee in September 2023 prior to being considered by this Board later in the year.

Rail North Partnership Operational Update

- 3.8 As part of the operational and performance update, the committee heard from the two main train operators.
- 3.9 Richard George, Chair of the Operator of Last Report (OLR) company outlined the successful transition of TPE from First Group at the end of May 2023. He emphasised that the transition was done in an incredibly short period of time (2 weeks) and paid tribute to the hard work of staff at all levels of the company. He highlighted that OLR needed time to stabilise and tack stock of the business but that it is absolutely committed to re-setting relationships quickly. Chris Jackson was introduced as the Interim Managing Director and Chris outlined his three priorities: improving performance, re-setting relationships and supporting the Transpennine Route Upgrade. Members gave the new team their support and acknowledged the very difficult task of turning the business around would require time. They emphasised the need to focus on staff and passengers where there could be some quick wins. It was noted that the new team would be engaging with key partners at the start of summer and return to the committee in September 2023 with their initial findings.
- 3.10 Nick Donovan, Managing Director of Northern Trains outlined the work they were doing to support and encourage growth. He highlighted the success of recent campaigns and the growth where new markets had been opened up. In the discussion, members supported the work on a training academy for the North,

but were keen to move it forward with greater urgency and to integrate TPE more now they are part of the same owning group.

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 There are no apparent legal implications for Transport for the North. 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 were highlighted in the Committee meeting. 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 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive and therefore does stimulate the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (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

a)	<i>TPE</i>	<i>TransPennine Express</i>
b)	<i>OLR</i>	<i>Operator of Last Resort</i>
c)	<i>NPR</i>	<i>Northern Powerhouse Rail</i>
d)	<i>EIA</i>	<i>Environmental Impact Assessment</i>
e)	<i>SEA</i>	<i>Strategic Environmental Assessment or EIA</i>