
Meeting: Rail North Committee
Subject: Rail Strategy and Rail Reform
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Sponsor: Darren Oldham, Rail and Road Director
Meeting Date: Wednesday 13 September 2023

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with an update on Transport for the North's rail strategy work (including the Strategic Transport Plan) and delivering rail reform in the north.
- 1.2 To provide members with an overview of some of the main rail themes coming through as part of the Strategic Transport Plan consultation.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the strategic approach to rail in the north set out in Transport for the North's draft Strategic Transport Plan (STP) is noted.
- 2.2 That the main rail themes in the STP consultation are considered.
- 2.3 That the approach to developing a Rail Outlook for the North is endorsed.

3. Main Issues:

Rail Strategy

- 3.1 Members have highlighted the strong growth back (post Covid) in the north driven by the diversity of markets in the including a very strong leisure market. At the same time, Transport for the North's work on future travel scenarios indicates that rail has the opportunity to attract significantly more passengers provided that there is sufficient investment in the network and services to support it. Service development will need to be agile to reflect emerging and changing markets. This approach has been captured in the draft Strategic Transport Plan and the supporting Strategic Rail Report.

Strategic Transport Plan

- 3.2 The current Strategic Transport Plan was launched in 2019 and Transport for the North is now developing a refreshed plan. Public consultation was held on the refreshed Plan between May 2023 and August 2023. That consultation has taken the form of 3 public events held in Manchester, Leeds and Newcastle, specific events for example with environmental groups, other meetings and a virtual engagement event together with a virtual consultation "room" allowing all to submit views. The feedback from these processes is now being analysed and will be used in production of the final Plan which will be launched in 2024. The draft Strategic Transport Plan has a number of supporting documents, one of which is the Strategic Rail Report which sets out more detail on Transport for the North's approach to rail. Taken together, upon adoption the Strategic Transport Plan and Strategic Rail Report will replace the Long-Term Rail Strategy which has been existence for some time.
- 3.3 The vision of the draft Strategic Transport Plan is that "By 2050 the North of England will have become a thriving, socially inclusive region. Our communities, businesses and places will all benefit from sustainable economic growth, improved health and wellbeing and access to opportunities for all. This will be achieved through a transformed, zero-emission, integrated, safe and sustainable

transport system, which will enhance connectivity, resilience and journey times for all users.” This vision is supported by three clear strategic ambitions:

- Improving economic performance, informed by an updated Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review
- Enhancing social inclusion and health, informed by Transport for the North’s socially inclusive transport strategy
- Rapid decarbonisation of surface transport, informed by Transport for the North’s Regional Decarbonisation Strategy.

The draft Plan recognises that poor road and rail connectivity is holding back the North, an issue exacerbated by current deficient performance of our rail network. The draft Plan sets out a series of strategic priorities for rail:

- Better connectivity
- More capacity
- Improved customer experience
- Greater opportunity for freight
- Supportive of communities
- Cost effectiveness
- Integrated
- Sustainable
- Accessible.

3.4 The draft Strategic Rail Report then sets out an approach to how these will be addressed. Short term actions include specific schemes to address reliability and also to increase line speeds. In the medium term, all stations need to be made fully accessible and the Transpennine Route Upgrade will be delivered in full. In the longer term, HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail will be delivered in full as per the Transport for the North Board’s preferred network, building on the networks proposed in the Integrated Rail Plan. In addition, the SRR recognises that a rolling programme of electrification in the North is needed to address all suitable routes to support decarbonisation and reduce costs.

3.5 The consultation responses to the draft Plan are still being analysed; however, a number of themes are already emerging that will be considered:

- Need to reflect all operators serving the North. Northern and TransPennine Express are overseen by Transport for the North through the Rail North Partnership however other operators provide important regional and inter-city links
- Need to also recognise other committed schemes, particularly Midland Main Line electrification which is important to South Yorkshire and as an enabler for further electrification
- Light rail / mass transit – need to consider this in the context of the whole transport offer, so that an integrated, accessible, and sustainable network is provided with rail as part of it
- Affordability – need to consider what an affordable network looks like, both in terms of users and those organisations which would procure and fund services.

Rail Reform

3.6 The Government’s commitment to rail reform was confirmed by the Secretary of State whilst giving the George Bradshaw Address in February 2023. He confirmed the plan for a more customer-focused and joined-up railway and suggested an enhanced role for the private sector. He confirmed plans to create Great British Railways and for a new headquarters which was subsequently announced as Derby. However, there is no certainty when the legislation will be introduced to create Great British Railways and establish the other arrangements envisaged and this is unlikely to be clarified until later in 2023.

- 3.7 In the meantime, the Great British Railways Transition Team has continued to undertake preparatory work including scoping partnership arrangements with local areas, developing the Long-Term Strategy for Rail and leading on a number of fares and ticketing initiatives. In addition, the Government has agreed a trailblazer deal to deepen devolution to Greater Manchester Combined Authority which includes a new rail partnership with Great British Railways to support the delivery of the Bee Network by 2030. (This will see full multi-modal fares and ticketing integration, co-branding, 'pay as you go' ticketing pilots, better integration of local stations, identification of opportunities for regeneration and development, greater access to local rail data and giving GMCA the opportunity to sponsor infrastructure and service enhancement schemes).
- 3.8 The Transition Team is initially focussing on developing partnerships with Greater Manchester and West Midlands as these require new arrangements. They acknowledge that Transport for the North has an existing partnership that will be evolved to meet the requirements of rail reform. It is expected that formal arrangements to develop a new partnership with Transport for the North will be established around the beginning of 2024, but in the meantime Transport for the North continues to engage informally with the Transition Team, building on the partnership principles considered in autumn 2022. The idea of the partnerships is to provide for greater local input. In Transport for the North's case this could be a steppingstone towards the ambition of having much greater devolved input in the future. It is planned to have an outline proposal for consideration by Transport for the North's Board prior to formal engagement with the Transition Team.
- 3.9 In light of the uncertainty on the programme for introducing rail reform at a national level, Transport for the North and partners have been able to utilise the existing powers through the Rail North Partnership to deliver some early benefits around greater localisation including establishing a North West Regional Business Unit.
- 3.10 The establishment of a North West Regional Business Unit was approved by this Committee in February 2023. The NWRBU has since held its first NWRBU Board in shadow form and a memorandum of understanding with the Rail North Partnership and Transport for the North is set for approval. It is anticipated its first formal board will be held in mid-October 2023.
- 3.11 The NWRBU has set out a business plan which includes priorities such as better informing train service operations, developing proposals for fares adjustments and working with the wider rail industry to agree a prioritisation framework for the delivery of accessibility improvements. The NWRBU has been involved in implementing these priorities through the RNP's early engagement on the annual business planning process, which is underway.

Rail Outlook

- 3.12 As indicated above, the potential for rail in the north to play a greater role in local and regional transport strategies is significant, but the pace of reform nationally is slow. Transport for the North and partners have made some positive progress on aspects of reform but are well-placed to pilot other initiatives and deliver at pace.
- 3.13 The need for a joined-up approach across infrastructure and services that can respond to changing demand and opportunities is at the heart of the way rail reform needs to be implemented. Transport for the North's TAME team is already working with partners and Rail North Partnership on evidence of changing demand and future needs. Transport for the North has also led the creation of infrastructure and service 'blueprints' for the congested network in Central Manchester and more recently for the East Coast Main Line north of York.

- 3.14 It is proposed to bring together the approach and evidence set out in the draft Strategic Transport Plan with work on reviewing services and infrastructure to form a 'Rail Outlook' document which covers:
- A review of how services should evolve and grow to support the economic and social needs of the north whilst growing revenue
 - A blueprint for the whole of the north's rail infrastructure
 - An 'offer' of a new partnership for the north including an early pilot working with network rail and operators including the government's Operator of Last Resort who now run three operations in the North (LNER, Northern and TransPennine Express).

4. Corporate Considerations:

Financial Implications

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

Resource Implications

- 4.2 The proposed work will be undertaken with existing resources included in Transport for the North's business plan for 2023/24.

Legal Implications

- 4.3 There will be a need to review aspects of Transport for the North's Constitution as and when the new partnership arrangements are further developed.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 4.4 There is a corporate risk on rail reform relating to a potential for reduced influence for the north on rail matters. The work highlighted in this report is a key mitigation for this risk.

Environmental Implications

- 4.5 Planning for growth in rail demand and ensuring that the network can accommodate is an important element of Transport for the North's decarbonisation strategy.

Equality and Diversity

- 4.6 There are no equality and diversity implications as a result of this report.

Consultations

- 4.7 The report refers to the Strategic Transport Plan which has just been the subject of a full public consultation. The report highlights the main feedback on rail matters and provides an indication of how Transport for the North proposes to respond.

5. Background Papers:

- 5.1 None.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

a) TPE	TransPennine Express
b) NPR	Northern Powerhouse Rail
c) SRR	Strategic Rail Report
d) STP	Strategic Transport Plan