TRANSPORT FOR THE NORTH

Meeting:	Rail North Committee
Subject:	Rail Accessibility
Author:	David Worsley, Rail Strategy Manager
Sponsor:	Darren Oldham, Rail and Road Director
Meeting Date:	Wednesday 13 September 2023

1. Purpose of the Report:

1.1 This paper is intended to establish the current baseline position with regard to the accessibility of railway stations in the North. It quantifies the current status of accessibility-related facilities at our region's stations, and identifies issues that will need to be addressed and sets out next steps

1.2 The paper also draws together themes and information from previous work on this topic, including the *Accessibility at Stations* paper presented at Transport for the North Board on 27 July 2021, and Transport for the North's *Northern England Station Enhancements Programme: Strategic Outline Business Case* of May 2022.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 It is recommended that Rail North Committee:

- Notes with concern the sub-standard status of accessibility at railway stations in the North
- Supports the need for investment to address this through Transport for the North's *Stations Strategy* and the "Stations as a Place" initiative
- Requests an Accessibility Action Plan be prepared for a future meeting.

3. Main Issues:

3.1 The poor state of accessibility at the North's railway stations is highlighted in the *Strategic Transport Plan* (p. 124) and *Strategic Rail Report* (Ch. 7). It was noted that data collated by Northern Trains in 2017 had indicated that, of 543 stations at which Northern or TransPennine Express services called, only 287 (53%) provided step-free access to all areas of the station, whilst at 46 stations (8%) there was no step-free access at all. Information was still being gathered on other aspects of accessibility, such as clarity of public address announcements and tactile paving.

3.2 The volume of information available to us increased during 2022, when Mott MacDonald gathered data from numerous sources as part of their production of Transport for the North's *Northern England Station Enhancements Programme: Strategic Outline Business Case* of May 2022 (NESEP). A database was compiled with information about facilities at 600 stations across the North, including those facilities relating to accessibility. The results of this are shown in Table 1 below, disaggregated by station category. (The level of some facilities is assessed against what has been deemed acceptable or desirable for that category of stations.

Table 1: Accessibility Facilities at Stations in the North

Item	Total	%	A National hub	B Regional interchange	C Important feeder	D Medium staffed	E Small staffed	F Small unstaffed
Number of stations	600	100%	9	11	18	39	171	352
CIS on platform	498	83%	9	11	18	39	166	255
PA system	464	77%	9	11	18	37	165	224
Staff on the platform	208	35%	9	11	18	32	128	10
Help points	352	59%	6	10	8	28	141	159
CCTV	435	73%	9	11	18	38	159	200
Acceptable standard of shelter	336	56%	9	9	18	35	119	146
Desirable standard of step-free access	288	48%	8	10	17	27	79	147
Induction loop	533	89%	9	9	18	39	158	300
Ramps for trains	521	87%	9	11	18	36	152	295
Physically accessible waiting shelters	226	38%	2	5	12	19	35	153
Information on connecting modes	164	27%	3	4	15	14	64	64

3.3   It should be noted that this data was compiled from numerous sources, including the National Rail website, so it should be viewed as indicative rather than definitive. However, we are confident that it gives a good overall indication of the state of accessibility at the North's railway stations.

3.4   Furthermore, the NESEP demonstrated that there is a reasonable economic case (benefit to cost ratio of 1.8) for a circa £1 billion capital expenditure programme of stations enhancements across the North, which would include enhancements to facilities relating to accessibility.

3.5   Based on the experience of Transport for the North in addressing these issues, a number of other factors must be taken into account when considering accessibility, including:

1) There is much more to accessibility than the provision of step-free access. Although this helps numerous groups (e.g. wheelchair users, customers with reduced mobility, people transporting luggage or children), there are many other (sometimes hidden) disabilities which can be catered for by other improvements. For a station to be "fully accessible" could require numerous interventions

2) The industry's legal duty to improve accessibility relates not just to disability, but to any protected characteristic covered by the Equality Act of 2010. Notably this includes age, which involves many of the same factors regarding physical abilities as disability

3) Inclusive accessibility should also involve consideration of safety and security (at the station, on the train and during the first and last mile), and integration with other modes of transport

4) Different designs of ticket vending machines (TVMs) provide differing standards of accessibility, which will impact the inclusivity of ticket purchase

5) The complexity of ticket types and difficulties in purchasing could likewise be seen as an accessibility issue

6) The role that customers' varying mobility is assessed and catered for in the ticketing and journey-planning system as a whole needs to be thought through consistently and in an integrated manner

7) The accessibility of rolling stock (and the interface between train and platform) must be considered as part of the strategy. This includes the desirability of moving towards "step free" boarding

8) Any strategy should develop a pipeline of investments which address the issues of providing enhanced accessibility at all stations and making the major rail hubs much more capable of accommodating a range of accessibility problems

9) It should be recognised that technology which impacts this field (especially information and communication technology) is constantly evolving.

3.6 Whilst some positive progress has been made on improving accessibility of the North's stations (e.g. recent "Access for All" improvements at Bridlington, Handforth and Todmorden) it is clear that substantial investment is needed to address inequalities and levelling up, as historically the North has missed out on investment compared to locations with higher overall footfall. It is also an opportune moment to act in this area, as the DfT has recently launched a consultation on Design Standards for Accessible Railway Stations.

3.7 It is therefore proposed to use the evidence collated by Transport for the North in the Strategic Transport Plan, Northern England Stations Enhancements Programme, and through the work on Transport Related Social Exclusion to develop an action plan for improving accessibility at the North's railway stations. Transport for the North will produce a draft Accessibility Action Plan for consideration at the November 2023 meeting of the Committee.

4. Corporate Considerations:

Financial Implications
4.1 There are no financial implications for Transport for the North relating to this report.

Resource Implications
4.2 There are no direct resourcing implications to Transport for the North as a result of this report.

Legal Implications
4.3 Legal implications are included within the report.

Risk Management and Key Issues
4.4 Transport for the North is currently managing two corporate risks which relate to this report. Risk 298, Transport for the North might be unable to make a timely, robust, credible, evidence-based case for investment in transport. Risk 309, the pandemic has changed travel patterns and behaviours and therefore service and investment decisions will need to reflect new markets and emerging evidence of demand.

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.

Addressing accessibility of public transport is a fundamental building block of inclusive transport decarbonisation, the focus for Transport for the North within its emerging STP and Decarbonisation Strategy update.

Equality and Diversity

4.6 A full Impact Assessment has not been carried out because it is not required for this report. The purpose of this workstream is to improve the inclusivity of the North's railway through better physical accessibility.

Consultations

4.7 Transport for the North's partners were consulted as part of the research for the *Northern England Station Enhancements Programme* in 2022.

5. Background Papers:

5.1 There are no background papers for this report.

6. Appendices:

6.1 Mott MacDonald (for Transport for the North), *Northern England Station Enhancements Programme: Strategic Outline Business Case,* May 2022.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used		
a)	DfT	Department for Transport
b)	ESEP	Northern England Station Enhancements Programme
c)	STP	Strategic Transport Plan
d)	TPE	TransPennine Express