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**Meeting:** Transport for the North Board  
**Subject:** Rail North Committee Update  
**Author:** David Hoggarth, Strategic Rail Director  
**Sponsor:** Darren Oldham, Rail and Road Director  
**Meeting Date:** Wednesday 27 September 2023

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**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 13 September 2023.

**2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That the Board:
1. Notes the feedback from the Rail North Committee including discussions with TransPennine Trains Ltd on their recovery plan
  2. Endorses the response to the Ticket Offices Closure proposal attached as Appendix 1
  3. Agrees the updated Statutory Advice (to the Secretary of State) on Manchester Congestion issues as set out in Appendix 2.

**3. Main Issues:**

**TransPennine Trains Recovery Plan Outcomes**

- 3.1 The Committee considered a presentation from Chris Jackson of TransPennine Trains Ltd (TPT). This Board will have received a further update from Robin Gisby under a separate agenda item.

**Ticket Office Consultation**

- 3.2 On Wednesday 5 July 2023, train operators launched the consultation on station ticket office closures under the Rail Delivery Group's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement. Originally the consultation was open for 21 consecutive days (5-26 July 2023) but was then extended to 1 September 2023. Under the arrangements associated with the Rail North Agreement, Transport for the North has an additional period to submit its response to the Secretary of State. It is proposed that Transport for the North will submit its response in early October.
- 3.3 The Committee agreed to formally object to the proposal to close ticket offices in the North on the basis that:
- The consultation process is flawed
  - The proposals will have a detrimental impact on the North and will have a particularly adverse effect on more vulnerable groups
  - The proposals do not have a strong business case and are therefore poor value for money.
- 3.4 The consultation response proposes an alternative way forward by addressing the need for future retailing to evolve as part of a wider ticketing and stations reform programme in a way that works for the North. This would be undertaken in the context of integrating stations more fully with their local communities and making rail travel more attractive and accessible.

3.5 The Committee agreed the Transport for the North overall response and asked that the following points should be incorporated into the final version:

- Given the poor state of accessible infrastructure in the North, the loss of staffing at stations will lead to a loss of confidence therefore the starting point for reform should be no reduction in the staffing hours at stations ahead of any discussion on future deployment of staff
- Members were concerned that recruitment to fill current ticket office vacancies was not being carried out, particularly if this leads to ticket offices being closed on occasions because of the lack of available staff: action is needed in the short-term to protect against this
- Some integrated tickets, such as those between Northern services and Metrolink in Manchester, are only available from a ticket office and therefore closing ticket offices without investment to maintain availability of such products could reduce integrated travel
- To highlight that where third-party funding was committed to enhance station facilities (not limited to only the ticket office) operators should not be considering closing ticket offices e.g., Darlington, Middlesbrough and Sunderland stations.

The final consultation response (incorporating these amendments) is provided as Appendix 1 to this report.

### **Rail Accessibility**

3.6 In the context of the planned closure of ticket offices members were particularly concerned about the poor state of accessibility of stations across the North. The report (and associated Station Enhancements document) highlighted that less than half of all stations across the North meet the desirable level of step free access to all parts of the station. The report also highlighted significant gaps in a range of facilities to support equal access to stations.

3.7 It was agreed to establish a Task Force to make progress on addressing this issue by considering particular hotspots and priorities to be developed into an action plan for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

### **Rail North Partnership Operational Update**

3.8 The Committee heard from Tricia Williams the Managing Director Designate for Northern. She highlighted the strong growth experienced by Northern (14% predicted compared to the previous financial year), positive reductions in ticketless travel and work the industry was doing to prepare for Autumn. It was noted that growth on Northern represented real growth relative to pre-COVID levels. Members raised questions around cancellation levels in the North East and gaps in service and capacity in West Yorkshire.

### **Future infrastructure and Service Changes**

3.9 With several major rail investment schemes being delivered in the North over the coming decades, there is a need to ensure these are coordinated to maximise the benefits and avoid unintended consequences of schemes not effectively integrating with each other or the existing network. An exercise is being undertaken, working with the industry, to map out in totality those schemes which are in development and delivery through to the mid-2040s (incorporating Transpennine Route Upgrade, HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail, Trilink, Manchester and North West Transformation Programme, etc.). This can then be used to identify gaps where further investment is required to integrate schemes or meet the service requirements necessary to enable the strategic ambitions of the North to be realised.

- 3.10 An immediate priority for Transport for the North is the resolution of issues in the Manchester area which serve as a major limitation on the rail network across the whole of the North. Through the Manchester Task Force and Manchester and North West Transformation Programme significant investments have been identified, developed and delivered in recent years, however more is needed with services still limited by the lack of infrastructure. The December 2022 timetable traded connectivity on some routes in favour of improved performance and reliability. Whilst this has stabilised services, if rail services are to effectively support economic growth and decarbonisation further investment is required.
- 3.11 Transport for the North has previously submitted Statutory Advice to the Secretary of State which at the time specified interventions to be delivered to support an improved level of service and connectivity. Since this advice was produced, the industry working in collaboration through the Manchester Task Force, has reviewed and refined the proposals for the Manchester area, developing a series of interventions split across configuration states which will address long standing issues with the infrastructure whilst looking to prepare the network for other schemes arriving in the area.
- 3.12 It is therefore recommended that Transport for the North revises its Statutory Advice in recognition of the developments by the industry and has strengthened its approach. Rather than specifying which interventions are needed, the revised advice sets out the outcomes which are needed for the North, which include the ability for the network to accommodate the level of services required to meet customer demand, improved performance and reliability on par with those across the national network, and a commitment that local services will not be compromised to make way for new services on HS2, Northern Powerhouse Rail or other major schemes. The Board is asked to endorse the revised Statutory Advice for Manchester for submission to the Secretary of State for Transport.

#### **Operators' Business Planning**

- 3.13 The Committee agreed the priorities to inform the train operator business planning process for 2024/25. The Working Group (which met in August 2023) had highlighted that the focus for operators should be on building back demand and confidence, addressing social exclusion and improving accessibility.

#### **Rail Strategy and Rail Reform**

- 3.14 The paper highlighted the Committee's desire to maintain a focus on the growth agenda, building on the strong growth back experienced in the North. Growth is at the heart of the draft Strategic Transport Plan objectives and feedback was highlighted from the recent public consultation. Points included the need to reflect the full spread of train operators and investment across the North and addressing affordability issues. It was agreed that a Rail Outlook document would be developed which would include identifying how the North could act as 'guiding minds' for the industry and pilot some of the rail reform outcomes in the absence of Great British Railways.

### **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 Closure of rail station ticket offices will have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups who are more reliant on face-to-face contact to purchase tickets, particularly customers with disabilities and those most impacted by transport related social exclusion. This is highlighted in Transport for the North's response.

#### ***Consultations***

4.7 There are no specific consultations required as part of this report.

### **5. Background Papers**

5.1 None.

### **6. Appendices**

6.1 Appendix 1. Ticket Office Consultation Response

6.2 Appendix 2. Statutory Advice on Manchester Area Congestion.

### **Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used**

a) TPT	TransPennine Trains
b) STP	Strategic Transport Plan