

Rail North Committee Minutes

Wednesday 13 September 2023
Virtual

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Mayor Andy Burnham (Chair)	Greater Manchester Combined Authority;
Cllr Craig Browne	Cheshire & The Potteries;
Cllr Rupert Swarbrick	Lakeland;
Cllr Mark Ieronimo	North of Humber;
Cllr Paul West	North of Humber;
Mayor Jamie Driscoll	North of Tyne Combined Authority;
Cllr Tim Mitchell	South of Humber;
Cllr Stephen Harker	Tees Valley;
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;

Partners in Attendance:

Tricia Williams	Northern
Chris Jackson	TransPennine Express

Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Julie Openshaw	Head of Legal
Adam Timewell	Head of Programmes Northern
David Hoggarth	Head of Strategic Rail
Charlie French	Investment Planning Manager
Darren Oldham	Rail and Road Director
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
Caroline Young	Senior Project Manager
Joanne Barclay	Senior Solicitor
Angela Harwood	Senior Solicitor

**Item
No:**

Item

1 Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed Members to the meetings and apologies were received from Mayor Coppard, Mayor Rotheram, Cllr Robinson and Cllr Duncan.

2 Declarations of Interest

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the Consultation Call held on 7 June 2023 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2023 be noted.

4 Transpennine Trains Recovery Plan Outcomes

- 4.1 The Chair introduced the item and acknowledged the difficult task that Mr Jackson and his team have inherited in order to improve the organisation, and he noted that they are getting to grips with the difficult issues. Whilst recognising the situation that they are taking over he referred to the difficulties that people of the North have been experiencing over a number of years with the railways. He stated that whilst the Committee is supportive of what they are trying to achieve he sought reassurances that any changes made in order to help them secure improvements will not turn into permanent service reductions or deterioration in service permanently.
- 4.2 Members received the presentation from Mr Chris Jackson who highlighted the key points within his presentation.
- 4.3 The Chair expressed on behalf of the Committee his appreciation to Mr Jackson for his openness and stated that the logic for what they are trying to do is clear. He believed that the presentation justified the call from the Committee to place TPE into operator of last resort measures. /The Chair sought a guarantee that any services temporarily removed will be replaced by the December 2024 timetable change.
- 4.4 Mayor Driscoll highlighted the improvement in industrial relations and plans for economic growth. /He requested the plans and details on how full service will be restored, particularly in ensuring more than one train an hour travels from the North East to Liverpool.
- 4.5 Regarding incentivising the public to use trains, Cllr Hinchcliffe sought assurance that should they go down this route that they will be able to tolerate the increased demand. She also sought reassurance that they would not run three-car trains. Regular reviews were requested to help facilitate a return to full service more quickly than by a year's time.

She then expressed concern at the removal of the Nova 3 trains stating that this could hinder the return to a full service. She asked to see the rolling stock plans for the North.

4.6 Building on Members comments, the Chair raised a number of issues including service standards and whether the commitment to restore the timetable fully by December 2024 is contingent on anything else. On the issue of rolling stock whilst understanding the reasoning behind the proposal he expressed concern about losing modern stock and it not being replaced. He asked that no final decision be made on the Nova 3s withdrawal until the Committee has been presented with a complete plan for rolling stock across the organisation going forward.

4.7 In response to the Committee's comments Mr Jackson stated that he is happy to be held to account on the delivery and performance against the objectives in the plan.

Addressing concerns on the return to a full timetable by December 2024 he explained that the plan has an element of reliance on rest day working and assumes that the national picture on industrial relations won't deteriorate. He explained that this has been mapped into some of the plans and as long there is stability, he is confident of a return to a full timetable by December 2024. He stated that this may be earlier in late Summer 2024 subject to the completion of training.

The Committee was informed that an agreement had been reached with TfN and the Rail North Partnership for the plan progress to be reviewed every two months.

Mr Jackson stated that incentives will be used to help show the public that there is a stable and reliable service. He highlighted that even if the Nova 3s are removed the fleet is 60% bigger than it was in 2018 with plenty of spare capacity to sell. He explained that capacity modelling has been done to inform the decision making on the Nova 3s.

4.8 The Chief Executive requested that political input be included in the decision making process on the Nova 3s and asked that this matter be brought back to the Committee.

The Chair stated that this reflected his view and highlighted that the current process has not factored in the views of the committee and political leaders. Whilst acknowledging that the ultimate decision may be for Government he wants the Committee to be sighted on any recommendation going to Government.

4.9 Mr Jackson provided further detail on the considerations given regarding the removal of the Nova 3s. He explained that these trains have been underutilised and of the thirteen sets they have they are only ever able to deploy a maximum of six in traffic and because of driver competency gaps, often only two can be

operational in passenger service. He advised that these trains contribute to operational complexity and warned that reintroducing them at the wrong time could destabilise the business.

- 4.10 The Chair noted the comments and stated that the enhancements that have been won for the North will not be given up lightly and the Committee will be unwilling to see standards slip on the railway in the north. He asked which train will be able to deliver the same level of modernity as the Nova 3.
- 4.11 Addressing the issue of the three-car service Mr Jackson stated that these will still be in operation at the start of the December 2023 timetable together with 5 and 6 car trains; however, the number of carriages being used will be linked to demand.
- 4.12 On the issue of rest working Mayor Driscoll sought assurance that this will only be used for training purposes and to cover sickness rather than for routine operation.
- Mr Jackson stressed that rest day working should only be for the short-term, explaining that TPE like other operators will only be using it for service coverage and training. He informed the Committee that it has been built into the plans for beyond March 2024, should an extension be granted, as this will enable them to arrive at December 2024 in an extremely strong position.
- 4.13 The Rail North Partnership Director clarified that the Secretary of State and Minister of Transport want the Committee to be fully involved with any decisions on the Nova 3s and the general rolling stock.
- 4.14 Cllr Mitchell enquired if the removal of the Nova 3s will impact on any particular area disproportionately; Mr Jackson confirmed that the main impact would be between Scarborough and Manchester.

Resolved:

That the presentation and the Committee's comments be noted.

5 Ticket Office Consultation

- 5.1 Members received the report from the Partnership and Programme Manager, who outlined the key points in the report and draft consultation response.
- 5.2 Cllr Browne highlighted the issue of integrated or combined ticketing, explaining that Cheshire East residents can currently buy a ticket from their local station ticket office to a Metrolink station in Greater Manchester, an option which isn't available online, at platform ticket machines or on board trains. If they have been unable to buy at the ticket office when they arrive at Manchester

Piccadilly, they are treated by the Revenue Protection staff as though they've made a conscious decision not to purchase a ticket. He stated that this will get worse when ticket offices close, as this will remove the only way that passengers can buy one of these tickets before they board the train.

- 5.3 Additionally, to the point raised by Cllr Browne the Chair highlighted a point raised by Cllr Gannon at a previous meeting where he informed the Committee that lower cost tickets are often not available on the platform machines. The Chair requested that both of these points be included in the consultation response.
- 5.4 Cllr Hinchcliffe asked if there is a freeze on Ticket office recruitment.

Mr Jackson stated that TPE currently have a number of ticket office vacancies that have been held for some time as they have been expecting industry reform. He further explained that they are now awaiting the outcome of the consultation.

From a Northern perspective Ms Tricia Williams explained that internal consultation has started at the same time as the external consultation. She stated that rather than having a freeze they have taken the decision to backfill on a temporary basis in order to protect roles should there need to be redeployment opportunities for those working in stations. The Committee expressed concern about ticket office opening hours and that operators were staffing offices during the advertised times. The Chair shared anecdotal evidence of closed signs being on ticket office doors when they were meant to be open.

Ms. Williams assured the Committee that they do keep to advertised ticket office times and the only times when this may not happen is when there is sickness.

The Chair requested that a point be included in the document about stealth closures of ticket offices.

The Partnership and Programme Manager noted the points raised and stated that these points would be included in the response document.

- 5.5 The Chief Executive brought to the attention of the Committee his concerns about the way in which the industry assesses future demand. He highlighted that there is a difference in demand between staffed and unstaffed stations and whilst dealing with this in the context of this proposal it will be something that the Committee needs to return to in the future due to the potential implications it has for business cases and future investment.

He further explained that if the rule books do not change then there may be an argument that the potential demand for investment may not be as high as previously thought. He stated that this is part of a bigger challenge in getting the North's opportunities better reflected in forecasting future demand, which has wider unintended consequences which will need to pursue as a board.

- 5.6 Cllr Harker stated that in Tees Valley investment has been made in Darlington and Middlesbrough stations to improve connectivity across the Tees Valley to try to encourage more people to use rail. He explained that if money is spent improving infrastructure to then closing ticket offices would take away help that new passengers to rail may need to navigate the network.

The Partnership and Programme Manager informed the Committee that she had spoken to both TPE and Northern on the issue of third parties having spent significant money in improving stations and whether they would consider not closing the ticket offices at these stations. Both operators responded confirming they would not do so.

- 5.7 The Chair updated the Committee on the current position after receiving a statement from the Rail Minister's Office which he read to the Committee. The Chair suggested that the Committee should consider asking for no cuts to staffing across the rail system and then have open discussion with the Government about what delivers the maximum benefit for the travelling public.

He further suggested that the box in paragraph 1.2 of the report be strengthened by adding into it that any loss of staffing at stations will lead to loss of confidence amongst passengers. Therefore, it is vital that there is no loss of staffing hours and jobs on the railway before any discussions on deployment can take place.

Resolved:

That subject to the amendments outlined, the Transport for the North response to the consultation and next steps be agreed.

6 Rail North Partnership Operational Update

- 6.1 Members received the report from the Rail North Partnership Director who highlighted the key points within the report.
- 6.2 Ms Williams informed the Committee the Mr Nick Donovan will be standing down in the Spring as Managing Director and that she will be his replacement. She then updated the Committee on the current situation at Northern.

- 6.3 The Chair congratulated Ms Williams on her appointment and asked her to convey the Committee's gratitude to Mr Donovan for his leadership as we went through the operator of last resort process. He noted that things have improved significantly from where it was over the last few years and Mr Donovan played a huge part in that improvement.
- 6.4 Mayor Driscoll highlighted that cancellations are now outside of the target set and looked for a guarantee that it will be back below the 4.2% cancellation target at the next meeting.

In response Ms Williams stated that this would be difficult due to the long term nature of the sickness which will take some time to address. She stated there is a robust long term sickness plan in place and whilst the occupational health tender process is concluding, she anticipates that this will take a couple of months to establish. She expressed her hope that this would be the case but was unable to offer any guarantees.

Resolved:

That the report be noted and that the actions that Transport for the North and Rail North Partnership (RNP) are taking to ensure operators have robust recovery plans in place are supported.

7 Future infrastructure and service changes

- 7.1 Members received the report from the Investment Planning Manager who outlined the key points within the report.
- 7.2 The Chair was encouraged that oversight is now taking place and that a North of England integration Board has been set up and requested that there be a placed-based representation from the Committee.
- 7.3 Cllr Hinchcliffe highlighted the Manchester North West Transformation Programme and asked how this will be connected to the rest of the North. She also enquired as to what is in Configuration State 2,3 and 4 and requested that Network Rail be invited to the next meeting in order to provide this information.

The Chair stated that this needs an ambition for how the North returns to that expanded vision of a timetable and how the capacity challenges that come from HS2 and TRU and are dealt with and that the focus of the work should be what is right for the North of England.

In response the Investment Planning Manager stated that TfN is represented on the Board; however, he believes more can be done

to be heard better. He stated that TfN is on some programme boards that are at delivery level but should be pushing to get on the TRU and East Coast Mainline Programme Boards in order to have a greater knowledge as to what is going on as well as being able to influence and shape some of the programmes that are being developed. He also confirmed that Network Rail will be invited to the next meeting.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee welcomes the progress of development and delivery of infrastructure schemes taking place across the North of England including collaborative work using local data and evidence.
- 2) That the Committee supports the proposal by Transport for the North to develop a Blueprint for the North in order to fully understand the complexity of introducing multiple major schemes at different levels of development over the coming years, identifying any points of constraint, when these may occur, where prioritisation may be required and where there are gaps in proposed infrastructure, exploring where there may be a need for further investment.
- 3) That the Committee supports requests from Transport for the North to the industry for greater representation at Programme Boards to provide a complete view of schemes across the North.
- 4) That the Committee endorses the proposed update to Transport for the North's Statutory Advice for Manchester for consideration by Transport for the North's Board.

8 Operators Business Planning

- 8.1 Members received the report from the Partnership and Programme Manager who then outlined the key points within the report.
- 8.2 Cllr Hinchcliffe highlighted the importance of Rail in connecting disadvantaged areas with opportunity as this is often not included in the industry when decision making.
- 8.3 The Chair asked if accessibility and disability can be included in these plans.

Resolved:

That subject to any amendments, the strategic priorities for train operator business plans for 2024/25 be agreed.

9 Rail Strategy and Rail Reform

- 9.1 Members received the report from the Head of Strategic Rail who outlined the key points within the report.

- 9.2 The Chair noted that the country is heading toward a General Election and stressed the importance of talking about ambitions and TfN's long term outlook for railways in the North. He stated that we need to prepare to make arguments prior to the General Election to the main parties that railways need to modernise, expand and improve across the north of England as has been promised and he believes that this work will help in making these arguments.

Resolved:

- 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) That the main rail themes in the STP consultation are considered.
- 3) That the approach to developing a Rail Outlook for the North is endorsed.

10 Rail Accessibility

- 10.1 The Chair moved this item up to item 6 and it was taken after the discussion on the ticketing office. The Chair stated that this was being done as not only did it link into the ticket office closures item but because he also wants the Committee to give a higher focus to the issues faced by disabled and older people on our railways. He wants this issue to be reported to the Committee regularly and discussed early in the agenda.

He stated that he expects to see change and progress on this issue and that the progress should be achieved in the immediate term as many of these issues are rectifiable, and the industry needs to start demonstrating how it is prepared to change so that all residents can see that they are treated equally when it comes to rail travel.

- 10.2 Members received the report from the Rail Strategy Manager who then highlighted the key points within the report.
- 10.3 The Chair highlighted the fact that over half of the train stations in the north of England are not fully accessible to wheelchair users or many disabled people. He was critical of the industry's lack of attention on this issue and questioned whether stations are compliant with the Equality Act. He was also critical of the fact that not all stations have induction loops and that only 87% of stations have ramps for train access.

The Chair suggested that a working group of politicians, business leaders and TfN officers should be set up to look at this issue where target can start to be set for improvement.

- 10.4 Members and officers were supportive of the Chair's suggestion for a working group with Members volunteering to be part of this.
- 10.5 The Rail North Partnership Director suggested that work around this could be incorporated into the operators business plans.
- 10.6 The Chair stated that the closure of ticket offices coupled with the information presented in this report makes this a major risk for so many people and requested that this becomes a standing item and core business for the Committee.

He further stated that he believes the working group needs to look at reasonable targets year after year that can be passed on to the Rail North Partnership Director so they can be used as part of the business planning process allowing for these basics to improve.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Committee notes with concern the sub-standard status of accessibility at railway stations in the North.
- 2) That the Committee supports the need for investment to address this through Transport for the North's Stations Strategy and the "Stations as a Place" initiative.
- 3) That an Accessibility Action Plan be prepared for a future meeting.
- 4) That a working group of political Members, business leaders and TfN officers be established.

11 Date and time of next meeting

Tuesday 14 November 2023
11am