

<b>Meeting:</b>	Transport for the North Board
<b>Subject:</b>	Rail North Committee Update
<b>Author:</b>	David Hoggarth, Head of Strategic Rail
<b>Sponsor:</b>	Darren Oldham, Rail and Road Director
<b>Meeting Date:</b>	Thursday, 14 December 2023

**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 14 November 2023.
- 1.2 To seek Board agreement to the final response on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) timetable for December 2024.

**2. Recommendations:**

- 2.1 That the Board:
  - 1. Notes the feedback from the Rail North Committee including the establishment of an Accessibility Task and Finish Group and the discussions with Avanti West Coast.
  - 2. Following receipt of additional assurances, confirms its acceptance of the ECML timetable change planned for December 2024.

**3. Main Issues:**

**Rail Accessibility Task and Finish Group**

- 3.1 Members agreed to the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to develop a proposition to improve the accessibility of the North's railway stations. The Committee highlighted the unacceptably poor level of full accessibility available at stations in the North. The working group should take on board the experience of train manufacturers in terms of level boarding at stations, learning from best practice on the Merseyrail new trains.

**Ticket Offices Next Steps**

- 3.2 The Government's rejection of all the train operator proposals for closing ticket offices was noted. This was consistent with Transport for the North's strong rejection of the proposals. Members requested assurance that where there are vacancies being held at ticket offices these would now be filled and requested monitoring of unplanned ticket office closures as part of the regular performance dashboard.
- 3.3 Members highlighted that innovative thinking was still needed on stations and that Transport for the North had not suggested there should be no change at all. The Committee endorsed a proposal to work with Northern and TransPennine Express on a ticketing and stations reform programme, including developing Northern's 'Stations as a Place' proposition. A key focus for such a programme is seeking to integrate stations more fully with their local communities and making rail travel more attractive and accessible whilst retaining staff coverage to assist passengers.

**East Coast Main Line December 2024 Timetable**

- 3.4 The Committee considered the rail industry’s proposals to introduce a new timetable on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) in December 2024. The ECML has shown the strongest post-Covid demand recovery of any long-distance route nationally and overcrowding is regularly occurring, particularly at weekends, driven by leisure demand. This reflects the continued strong growth seen in the North. To better meet these demands and to build on investment, the rail industry has developed a new timetable.
- 3.5 The proposed December 2024 timetable accommodates more London to Newcastle services with improvements to other services. It also enables service improvements off the core ECML route including additional Middlesbrough to Newcastle and Sheffield to Leeds services. There are however trade-offs in that the previously twice hourly Newcastle to Manchester service is reduced to hourly and there are some reductions to Cross Country services. In the short to medium term the former service will be affected by works associated with the TransPennine Route Upgrade.
- 3.6 Whilst not meeting Transport for the North’s minimum requirement (in respect of TransPennine Express services between Manchester and the North East), the Committee recognised the wider benefits associated with the recasting of the ECML timetable and was minded to accept the proposal subject to clarification on a limited number of points, set out in the table below. Given the timescales associated with timetable planning, the Committee remitted a final decision to the Transport for the North Board once reassurances have been received.

Written confirmation from the Department that funding is specifically earmarked in its programme for the rail enhancements required to deliver capacity upgrade works on the East Coast Main Line to release a 7th hourly path for passenger services between Northallerton and Newcastle in Control Period 7.	Letter sent to the Rail Minister seeking this commitment.
Written confirmation from TransPennine Trains that it will continue to plan on the basis of operating two trains per hour between Newcastle and Manchester, with the second hourly service to be introduced as soon as the infrastructure is available to deliver the 7th path referred to above.	Letter sent to the Rail Minister seeking this commitment.
Assurances from LNER and other operators that they will pursue options to restore other connectivity to and from North East stations that will be negatively impacted by the proposals, particularly in relation to LNER trains serving Berwick-upon-Tweed and Durham.	Discussions with rail industry partners.

- 3.7 A verbal update on any outstanding issues relating to the ECML timetable will be given to the meeting.

**Rail North Partnership Operational Update**

- 3.8 Members received an update from Mr Andy Mellors, the Managing Director of Avanti West Coast. This was in response to concerns that Members had raised before the Committee regarding changes to the timetable in the period before Christmas.

- 3.9 Mr Mellors explained that planned engineering work taking place over the following 3 weekends was separate to the planned reduction in services between 11 and 18 December 2023. He highlighted that this reduction was necessary because of legacy annual leave agreements in place which they were seeking to amend to avoid a similar situation arising in the future. He highlighted that Avanti has over 600 drivers in total and was working through a plan to put this on a sustainable footing without the need to rely on Rest Day Working. The Committee was concerned about the lack of an assurance that there would be no further recurrence of the service reductions and asked Avanti to return to the February 2024 meeting to provide another update. In a response to a question about increasing the service frequency to/from Liverpool, it was stated that the new trains currently being delivered were, in part, designed to facilitate this.
- 3.10 Ms Tricia Williams from Northern provided an update on Northern's performance and priorities. She outlined that performance levels were not where they want them to be but highlighted the recent agreement to implement Rest Day Working (for drivers) which would be used to address the training backlog and which should in turn lead to an improvement in performance. Ms Williams also provided an update on Northern's new trains procurement which was focused on replacing the older fleet of diesel trains and that they would be multi-modal. Northern is keen to engage with the Committee on the design of the new trains. In addition, Members asked for a discussion on the overall rolling stock strategy for the North.
- 3.11 Mr George Thomas from TransPennine Express highlighted that they were making good progress on their recovery plan with 68% of drivers having the full level of competency required.

#### **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 Any legal implications are included within the report. 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 not 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.

4.6 Passenger rail has an essential part to play in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within Transport for the North's Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around reducing private car vehicle mileage.

***Equality and Diversity***

4.7 Closure of rail station ticket offices would have had 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 was highlighted in Transport for the North's response. More broadly, accessibility of the rail network is being picked up through the proposed Task and Finish Group.

***Consultations***

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

**5. Background Papers**

5.1 None.

**6. Appendices**

6.1 None.

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

a) ECML	<i>East Coast Main Line</i>
b) TPE	<i>TransPennine Express</i>
c) NPR	<i>Northern Powerhouse Rail</i>