
Meeting: Rail North Committee Consultation Call
Subject: Accessibility Task & Finish Group - Initial Output
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Meeting Date: Wednesday 21 February 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

1.1 This paper is intended to report the main outputs of the first meeting of the Rail Accessibility Task & Finish Group (which was held on Thursday 25 January 2024) and outline the next steps which were agreed. The minutes of this meeting are included as an appendix to this paper.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 It is recommended that Rail North Committee support the following next steps for accelerating delivery of station accessibility improvements in the North:

- Recognising that at the current rate of progress it will take over 50 years to bring all our stations up to a desirable level of accessibility (including full step free access), the Accessibility Task & Finish Group will develop proposals to achieve this both within a standard programme of 20 years or an accelerated programme of 10 years. Work already undertaken for TfN indicates an investment cost of circa £1.5 billion (2022 prices) for this programme
- For either option, it is recognised that there will be some less disruptive works which can be undertaken much more quickly than this, and in parallel we should develop proposals for a programme of “quicks wins” to be implemented within 5 years
- These programmes will be outlined in a Transport for the North *Stations Strategy* document to be completed by the end of June 2024, which will incorporate the output from the Accessibility Task & Finish Group alongside the analysis already undertaken for TfN’s *Northern England Station Enhancements Programme: Strategic Outline Business Case* of May 2022, research through Northern Transport Voices, and Northern Trains’ “Stations as a Place” initiative
- The programme outlines shall be accompanied by recommendations for the organisation and governance necessary to achieve them, and the methods by which the necessary improvements can be prioritised (by examining the data that is available for all our stations and balancing the cost effectiveness of enhancements with the impact on users)
- The Accessibility Task & Finish Group shall meet again in mid March to develop these proposals further and build on the details which were discussed at the first meeting in January.

2.2 It is also recommended that Rail North Committee supports the provisional recommendations which were agreed at the first meeting of the Accessibility Task & Finish Group, namely:

- The Terms of Reference of the Task & Finish Group should be expanded to include:
 - Assembling sufficient accurate data about current accessibility provision to enable the prioritisation of future works and the monitoring of their completion

- Considering wider inclusivity issues (such as safety concerns) which may deter some groups from travelling by rail.
- The audit of accessibility provision which was recently undertaken by Atkins on behalf of the Department for Transport shall be the primary source of information as to the current status of our infrastructure (subject to devising technical solutions for simplifying the large amount of data which was gathered)
- In order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of work to improve accessibility, the various parties involved (Train Operating Companies, TfN, Network Rail, Great British Railways, Local Transport Authorities) shall establish joint teams, so that staff with the necessary expertise can co-operate, co-locate and build momentum for the necessary enhancements.

3. Main Issues:

- 3.1 The Rail Accessibility Task & Finish Group met for the first time on Thursday 25 January 2024. All principal participants were able to attend, with the exception of Cllr Eric Forth (WYCA) who became unavailable at short notice; he was represented by a Rail Policy Officer from West Yorkshire Combined Authority. The full minutes of the meeting are appended to this paper.
- 3.2 The group discussed whether any changes should be suggested to their Terms of Reference. Mayor Driscoll requested that the collection of accurate data to assist with the prioritisation and monitoring of work should be added to the scope of the group, while it was reported that Mayor Brabin had supported previous suggestions that the scope should be expanded to consider wider issues (such as safety concerns) which impact on the inclusivity of the rail network.
- 3.3 Presentations were delivered by key organisations in order to explain what they are planning to do in the field of accessibility in the foreseeable future. These comprised:
- Northern Rail discussed the current status of and planned work on their 465 stations
 - TransPennine Trains presented on the accessibility status and current workstreams on their 19 stations
 - Network Rail outlined the Access for All programme
 - Great British Railways Transition Team explained their National Rail Accessibility Strategy.

The contents of these presentations are described in the attached minutes.

- 3.4 The meeting concluded with a discussion of proposals for accelerating accessibility-related work, which resulted in the recommendations described in Sections 2.1 & 2.2 above (and in greater detail in the attached minutes).

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. The actions agreed included some work for the Rail Strategy Manager, but this has been accounted for in the quarterly business plan.

Legal Implications

4.3 The legal implications are contained within the body of this report.

Legal Services notes the following which was set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report, namely: *"In order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of work to improve accessibility, the various parties involved (Train Operating Companies, TfN, Network Rail, Great British Railways, Local Transport Authorities) should establish joint teams, so that staff with the necessary expertise can co-operate, co-locate and build momentum for the necessary enhancements"*

It is recommended that the various parties identified above, enter into a memorandum of understanding which sets out the aims and terms of the proposed collaborative working arrangements.

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. These will both impact making the case for accessibility improvements.

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.

Addressing accessibility of public transport is a fundamental building block of inclusive transport decarbonisation, the focus for Transport for the North within its revised STP and planned up to its Decarbonisation Strategy (expected during 2024/25).

Equality and Diversity

4.6 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for this workstream, and this will be updated to take account of the recommendations at a future meeting.

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, which underpins the strategic and economic case for this work.

5. Background Papers:

5.1 There are no background papers for this report.

6. Appendices:

6.1 The minutes of the first meeting of the Accessibility Task & Finish Group are included as an appendix.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

DfT	Department for Transport
NESEP	Northern England Station Enhancements Programme
STP	Strategic Transport Plan
TPT	TransPennine Trains