

Meeting: Accessibility Task & Finish Group (Rail North Committee)
Date: 25 January 2024
Venue: Microsoft Teams

Attendees:

| | Representing | Name | Role |
|-----------------------------------|--|---------------------|---|
| Elected | North East | Jamie Driscoll | Mayor of the North of Tyne Combined Authority |
| | North West | Rupert Swarbrick | Councillor (Lancashire) |
| Industry representative | Great British Railways Transition Team | Craig Alexander | Accessibility: Infrastructure, Station & Rolling Stock Lead |
| | Network Rail | Duarte Silva | Strategic Planner (Eastern) |
| | | Laura Hawcroft | Strategy & Planning Assistant (NW&C) |
| | | Emily Haslett | Senior Strategic Planner (NW&C) |
| | | Jon Ratcliffe | Programme Sponsor (Stations) |
| | Northern Trains Limited | Matthew Wilson | Travel Integration & Accessibility Manager |
| | Rail North Partnership | Adam Timewell | Head of Programmes (Northern Trains) |
| | TransPennine Trains | Chris Jeffery | Accessibility & Transport Integration Manager |
| | Transport Focus | Yvonne Fox-Burmby | Stakeholder Manager |
| | Transport for the North | David Worsley | Rail Strategy Manager |
| | | Darren Oldham | Deputy Chief Executive |
| | | James Mills | Head of Stakeholder Engagement & Communications |
| | | Tony Belshaw | Stakeholder Manager |
| West Yorkshire Combined Authority | Dave Powell | Rail Policy Officer | |

Apologies:

Cllr. Eric Firth (Kirklees Metropolitan Borough & West Yorkshire Combined Authority)

Minutes:

| Item | Minute | Action | Owner | Target date |
|------------|--|--|-------|-------------|
| 1.0 | Welcome, apologies & introductions | | | |
| | It was noted that Cllr. Eric Forth was unable to attend today's meeting to represent Yorkshire & the Humber. Dave Powell of West Yorkshire Combined Authority is representing Cllr. Firth. | DW will draft minutes of this meeting and send them to all attendees, plus Eric Firth. | DW | 29/1/24 |

| Item | Minute | Action | Owner | Target date |
|------------|--|--|-----------|-------------|
| 2.0 | Review of Terms of Reference | | | |
| | DW reiterated that the objective of the group was to develop a detailed and realistic proposition for the future of accessibility at the North's railway stations, supported by an action plan and timeline. | DW will collaborate with subject matter experts in order to produce a document fulfilling these goals. | DW | June 2024 |
| | JD noted that the objectives could be interpreted flexibly, and that the variety of organisations involved in accessibility work means that engagement with the public has been fragmented. This in turn means that the list of what stakeholders and users desire is extensive, and good information about what user priorities are is sometimes scarce. JD suggested that we change the Terms of Reference to include prioritisation. | DW agreed to amend the Terms of Reference if possible. | DW | Feb. 2024 |
| | | YFB noted that Transport Focus have undertaken some research on accessibility priorities, and she will share it with TfN and the wider group. | DW YFB | Feb. 2024 |
| | | DW noted that TfN's research team are using our Northern Transport Voices forum to research passenger priorities, and this will inform the output. | DW | June 2024 |
| | RS argued that this group must develop proposals which are realistic and deliverable, and avoid producing a report which will simply be filed and not actioned. RS noted that this may mean the membership of this group will have to change as we move from strategy to delivery, to bring the right people together. | DW noted that his preparatory meeting with MW had left him hopeful that practical solutions could be developed, and all participants should remain focussed on this outcome. | All | Ongoing |
| 3.0 | Presentations on current plans | | | |
| | MW presented on Northern's policies and future plans, with the main points being: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Northern's assessment of its own 465 stations is that 32% are fully step-free, 57% are partially step-free (including stations which are accessible in one direction only), and 11% are totally inaccessible; 2) The training and attitude of staff is seen as a key area (although it is generally good at the moment); 3) Specific areas in which Northern are intending to improve the infrastructure include tactile surfaces (on platforms and handrails), CCTV coverage, public address systems, customer information systems, smart beacons, and accessible toilet pods (which will be useful for everyone); 4) Northern are intending to prioritise their 160 busiest stations for such improvements; 5) Northern will keep pace with other organisations who are making the railway network more accessible for users of British Sign Language; and 6) Encouraging groups who are currently less likely to use the train to do so (through the "Try the Train" initiative) will continue. | | | |

| Item | Minute | Action | Owner | Target date |
|------|---|--------|-------|-------------|
| | <p>CJ presented on TransPennine’s policies and future plans, with the main points being:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Of TPT’s 19 stations, 17 are now assessed as being step-free without assistance; 2) The number of requests for assistance was 16,210 in the planning year 2022-23, but this is on course to grow 30% in the current year; 3) TPT are executing a portfolio of minor works to improve accessibility, including adjustments to steps and ramps, tactile handrails, modified seating and wayfinding measures; 4) The front entrance to Huddersfield Station is a major priority; and 5) Future activity will focus on making the entire journey as seamless as possible for passengers with mobility impairments, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Software to convert conductors’ announcements into text on the on-board display screens; b. More comfortable passenger assist meeting points; c. Better support for neurodiverse passengers; and d. Better support for passengers travelling with children. | | | |
| | <p>JR presented on Network Rail’s “Access for All” (AfA) programme, with the main points being:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The programme (which started in 2006) is concerned with all impairments to mobility, including age, luggage, buggies & prams, and disabilities; 2) To make a station accessible, the programme aims to provide an obstacle-free route “from at least one station entrance (usually the main one) and all drop-off points associated with that entrance, to each platform and between platforms served by passenger trains”; 3) Applications for inclusion in the AfA programme are based on multiple criteria (including overall footfall, incidence of disabilities in the local population, proximity of destinations likely to be used by people with mobility impairments, distance to the next nearest accessible station, and overall geographical spread and synergies with other projects) and signed off by the relevant Minister of State (in consultation with the Cabinet Office and Treasury); 4) Stations to be included in the AfA programme for a particular Control Period are normally nominated one year before the start of that Control Period; 5) The AfA programme doesn’t cover the rectification of existing non-compliances, maintenance or renewals; 6) 56 stations in the North have been nominated for the CP7 AfA programme, but it is not clear exactly when the final list will be published; 7) The CP6 programme is still in delivery, with 13 stations as part of the main programme (of which 7 are on-site), and 8 stations in the “mid tier” programme of smaller works (of which 6 are on site); and 8) Network Rail view “first and last mile” issues as a key area of improving rail accessibility (especially interchange with other modes of transport) and in 2020 they established the First and Last Mile Network with other stakeholders to share best practice. | | | |

| Item | Minute | Action | Owner | Target date |
|------------|---|--|-------|-------------|
| | <p>CA presented on GBRTT's National Rail Accessibility Strategy, with the main points being:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Accessibility is a key part of GBRTT's desire to focus on the customer and make decisions as close to the end user as possible; 2) The National Rail Accessibility Strategy (NRAS) is intended to provide "a robust, joined-up, system-wide approach to accessibility" during CP7; 3) Accessibility legislation is not a devolved matter, so the scope includes Scotland and Wales; 4) The NRAS is intended to address 5 key priorities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Infrastructure barriers (i.e. physical issues, including rolling stock); b. Information and assistance; c. Inclusive design (incorporating lessons from lived experience); d. Training and awareness (for front-line and managerial staff); and e. Insight and monitoring (to inform prioritisation). 5) GBRTT are consulting on the NRAS, in partnership with Transport for All; 6) It was noted that DfT had funded the recent in-depth accessibility audit undertaken by Atkins. | | | |
| 4.0 | Discussion of policy proposals | | | |
| | JR suggested that Sam Cullen from Network Rail could address a future meeting of this group on first and last mile issues. | DW will arrange this for a future agenda. | DW | Feb. 2024 |
| | DW noted that policy suggestions could include items relating to the management, organisation, governance, funding, monitoring & evaluation (i.e. metrics) and statutory advice relating to accessibility issues. | | | |
| | DO reiterated that despite the good work described in the presentations, it will still take several decades to make all our stations compliant; the objective of this group is to devise a practical means of reaching this goal in 1 to 2 decades or sooner. | | | |
| | JD noted that the exact current state of accessibility (and who is responsible for each station at which there are accessibility issues) is not readily available information. If this information was available, we could more easily devise realistic targets for what could be done by when, and also more effectively lobby for funding. MW later noted that such information would be necessary for us to understand what works would still be outstanding after what is planned for CP7. | DW will investigate whether the Atkins audit gives us this information adequately. | DW | Feb. 2024 |
| | RS noted that a lot of accessibility enhancements (e.g. signage, wayfinding, neurodiversity measures) could be done at lower cost and in a less disruptive manner than those which could require some civil engineering. These "quick wins" could be identified and managed separately and promptly. | DW will record this as one of the main recommendations of this meeting, to be reported back to Rail North Committee. | DW | Feb. 2024 |
| | RS also suggested that funding could come from the wider transport, regional development or health budgets under some circumstances. | | | |

| Item | Minute | Action | Owner | Target date |
|------|--|--|-------|-------------|
| | JR supported the usefulness of the Atkins audit, and noted that delivery of the improvements could be divided between many parties, choosing the best organisation for each task. | CA suggested that good IT would enable the vast quantity of data collected by Atkins to be interpreted effectively; DW will investigate this question. | DW | Feb. 2024 |
| | DP agreed that good information is useful for prioritising improvements and identifying possible efficiencies in delivery, and WYCA have done some work in this area themselves. | | | |
| | CA noted that an agreed definition of "full accessibility" would be helpful, though MW doubted whether "full accessibility" was possible due to trade-offs between some objectives. | | | |
| | AT noted that the exact mechanism chosen for delivery can make a big difference to both costs and impact, with efficiencies normally being generated when clusters of improvements at a single station (or group on a line of route) are undertaken together. | | | |
| | <p>DW suggested that the key consensus points from this meeting are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The recent Atkins audit is the most promising source of the accurate information that we need to plan next steps, but good IT may be required to interpret it usefully; 2) Different organisations will have to work seamlessly in order to deliver items more promptly and efficiently, and this may involve joint teams (possibly co-located); and 3) It would be advisable to separate "quick wins" from more disruptive works in order to expedite delivery of the former (though this will require some work to separate the two types of accessibility improvement). | DW will report this back to Rail North Committee on 21 st February. DO requested that an initial assessment of the Atkins dataset could be used to generate options for discussion at the next meeting of this group; DW will arrange this. TfN will continue to lead this workstream for the foreseeable future. | DW | Feb. 2024 |
| | DO noted that Mayor Brabin had supported the aspiration that this workstream should consider safety and perceptions of safety as well as accessibility, in order to reinforce a wider inclusivity agenda. | DW will reflect this in the recommendations. DW noted that this had been mentioned at Rail North Committee. | DW | Feb. 2024 |