

Scrutiny Committee Minutes

Tuesday 21 November 2023

Virtual

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Cllr Paul Haslam (Chair)	North Yorkshire;
Cllr Shorrock	Blackburn with Darwen;
Cllr John Boughton	Blackpool;
Cllr Rod Fletcher	Cheshire East;
Cllr Andrew Cooper	Cheshire West & Chester;
Cllr Roger Dobson	Cumberland;
Cllr Rhys Furley	Hull;
Cllr Matthew Salter	Lancashire;
Cllr Damian O'Connor	Liverpool City Region;
Cllr Barry Flux	North of Tyne Combined Authority;
Cllr James Higginbottom	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority;
Cllr Steve Parish	Warrington;
Cllr Andy Connell	Westmorland and Furness;
Cllr Eric Firth	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Cllr Dave Merrett	York;

Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Katie Day	Director of Strategy, Analysis and Communications
Julie Openshaw	Head of Legal
Danielle Bassan	Principal Policy & Strategy Officer
Darren Oldham	Rail and Road Director
Joanne Barclay	Senior Solicitor

Item No:

1 Welcome & Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed all in attendance and informed Members that the meeting is being streamed live. Apologies were received from Cllrs Hammond, Dixon, Meling, Davison and Hudson.

The Chair apologised to Members for two of the reports being circulated late and explained that this was due to the nature of the papers and that Officers wanted to provide the most up to date information to the Committee.

2 Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 Cllr Merrett declared that he is a member of the Your Bus Forum, Action for Yorkshire Transport and on the Northern Transport Activists Round Table all of which are non-pecuniary.
- 2.2 Cllr Fletcher declared that he is Vice Chair of the Public Transport Consortium.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2023 were considered and their accuracy as a correct record confirmed. The minutes were proposed by Cllr Salter and seconded by the Chair.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2023 be noted as a true and accurate record.

4 Transforming the North

- 4.1 In introducing this item, the Chair stated that this issue is one of the most critical that the Committee is likely to have to review and help shape. He explained that the report is presented because of the Government's announcement on the scrapping of the HS2 leg to Manchester and the subsequent announcement on Network North. The Committee was asked to consider the options in the report and look at how TfN's approach will be led, issues around appropriate governance and the role that TfN will play. He then highlighted that not all the potential work programmes have been released and emphasised the importance of giving priority and focus on delivering for the North.

He stressed the importance of actions needing to be congruent with future developments as well as the need for due process with the Roads and Rail strategies expected imminently.

He explained that the report maps a path through these issues and that the Committee is asked to input in order to shape the final document that will go to Board.

- 4.2 Members received the report from the Chief Executive who before highlighting the key aspects of his report apologised for the lateness of the report. He explained that since the Prime Minister's announcement at the beginning of October many questions have been asked and people wish to understand how TfN's approach fits with the national, regional and local position.
- 4.3 The Chair raised the issue of decarbonisation and suggested that action could be included on the need for modal shift in order to achieve these decarbonisation goals.

The Chief Executive replied that this is implied within the Decarbonisation Strategy which sets out a pathway to achieving nearly net zero by 2045 and the scale of the challenges associated with it. He outlined the work which has taken place on future travel scenarios, which recognise the need to grow the rail offer by between double or triple. He also highlighted the importance of continued investment in the road network as this is a key part of the transport system, not only for private vehicles, but also for public transport, freight and logistics and cycling.

He further explained that within the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) there are headline metrics on growing public transport and maintaining and managing demand on the road network in a way that reflects overall travel.

- 4.4 Cllr Parish sought clarity on what Network North and what “NPR in full” means. He highlighted the impact that the cancellation of HS2 will have on Warrington which would have been central to the line from Liverpool to Manchester via the airport. He suggested the inclusion of Warrington in paragraph 6.5 of the report.
- 4.5 Cllr Firth raised the issue of connections to the Midlands on the Penistone line where connectivity is poor. He stated that a twin track line as well as electrification on the Calderdale line would rectify this issue.
- 4.6 Cllr Fletcher asked whether the costs of the Liverpool to Manchester part of HS3 had increased as a result of the cancellation.
- 4.7 In response to Cllr Parish the Chief Executive reiterated the consistent view of the Transport for the North Board with regard to NPR that it has to be delivered in full. He stated the connectivity benefits that delivery of NPR and HS2 delivered in full would have meant to the North and outlined what delivery of NPR in full means, including connections across the Pennines, connections into Humber and along to Hull, improvements along the East Coast Mainline and opportunities for connections between Manchester and Crewe.

He informed the Committee that TfN will continue to push the case for NPR in full as well as gaining an understanding as to what else is needed to give the level of connectivity required not just in the North, but also to the South and the Midlands. He agreed that Warrington is a key hub and stated that it will be included in the Board report.

Responding to Cllr Fletcher’s question he stated that currently the cost is unknown. Whilst the cost envelope has been identified by Government, work needs to be done to support the Mayors to understand what is possible. Additionally there also needs to be clarity about what outputs and outcomes are required.

He stated that Mayors Burnham and Rotherham have clear expectations and that proposals in Network North should be taken as an indication of

the size of the envelope that needs to be worked within but he expects that work will be needed to achieve accurate figures.

The Rail and Road Director addressed the issues raised by Cllr Firth and explained that TfN is working with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) to justify a second service per hour on the Penistone line; additionally, he informed the Committee that £30-£40 million funding has recently been committed for development work on the line.

He reassured the Committee that across the North TfN is working with constituent authorities and partners on the smaller projects as they have an important impact on the communities they serve.

Building on the comments of the Rail and Road Director the Chief Executive stated that he will include in the Board report information on the strength of the rail recovery in the North which has been faster and stronger than other areas. He stated that if the North is going to grow, and reduce demand on the public sector, then it will need to grow its product and recognise that there needs to be investment in rail services which will deliver wider environmental and social benefits. He then stated that the challenge for the North is using the existing appraisal system to best effect. He emphasised the importance of developing the new playbook using the experience that exists within TfN together with the knowledge of partners. This work and knowledge can then be used to support the case for additional investment in the North.

- 4.8 Cllr Dobson raised awareness of the issues existing in the far north of the area stating that there are some 'low hanging fruits' that could dramatically improve railway services and economic benefits for a modest expenditure. He also highlighted the importance of connectivity to Scotland whilst Cllr Merrett stressed the importance of working with the Midlands and other areas to the south.
- 4.9 On the issue of HS2 rolling stock Cllr Salter highlighted that he believed that these were non-tilting trains. He questioned the impact that this would have on the West Coast Mainline as these trains are slower than the current rolling stock. He also asked about the HS2 safeguarded land and how long this it would remain protected.
- 4.10 The Chief Executive responded that TfN needs to strengthen working relationship with Transport Scotland and believes that this is an ideal opportunity to reach out to them. He then highlighted the importance of East West connectivity and how TfN has been supportive of this connectivity and the consistent support of the A66 improvement which is fundamental to achieving connectivity in that part of the North.

On the more general point of connectivity along the Cumbrian coastline he explained that TFN needs to use the practical experience gained from working through the Rail North Partnership where the importance of investing in services has been highlighted. Furthermore, he stressed the

importance of making the case for additional investment, and specifically revenue investment which will support the delivery of these services.

He reassured the Committee that TfN is working closely with the other established Sub-national Transport Bodies as well as highlighting the analytical ability that exists within TfN. He informed the Committee that TfN has offered to work with the National Infrastructure Commission in order to bring a more regional level of detail to the work.

In response to Cllr Salter, he stated that the questions he raised needed to be explored further. Network North will provide opportunities, but these opportunities will give a number of questions that will need to be explored and resolved.

In relation to the safeguarded land he was unable to give exact timescales, but emphasised the importance of TfN providing a clear message on the importance of improving connectivity. He explained that HS2 would have given a level of connectivity that was going to be important for connections in the North and elsewhere and now it needs to be understood how this can be achieved differently. If the way to achieve this involves the land that has been safeguarded, then TfN needs to be clear that discussions have taken place and the land is needed but whichever way decisions around the land need to be made quickly.

- 4.11 Cllr Furley highlighted the lack of timescales included in the proposed works and believes that their inclusion will help to give local authorities some reassurance. Additionally, he raised the York and Beverly lines as possible quick wins where connectivity to divided and separated areas can be increased.
- 4.12 Cllr Hornby was pleased to see that transport related social exclusion (TRSE) is one of the key outcomes in the report and believes that this is often an area that is overlooked. She enquired as to what the expected minimum standard would be that stations would need to reach by 2025.
- 4.13 On TRSE the Chief Executive informed the Committee that the Rail North Committee has been leading on this issue with the Chair (Mayor Burnham) making it a standing item on the agenda that also has high priority at the meeting. The Chief Executive added that by making stations accessible for those that have particular requirements stations become accessible to all. He anticipates that this will be one of the important issues over the next 12 months.

He explained that the work that has been done by TFN on understanding the extent of social exclusion as a result of not having access or not being able to afford transport or often a combination of both is being built into the appraisal work on Northern Powerhouse Rail. He recognised the need to get better at embedding them into the appraisal so that it's part of the understanding and that the work being done not only improves the economy but also social inclusion.

In response to Cllr Furley's comments on timelines the Chief Executive stated that within the final report he will include something on monitoring and evaluation and ensure that focus is maintained and that there is a level of transparency and accountability.

- 4.14 Cllr Parish asked the Chief Executive if h the government has firmly committed to connecting HS2 phase one to the West Coast Mainline as well as enquiring what the new station at Bradford will do.
- 4.15 Cllr Fletcher requested that the words 'increased capacity' be included in section 2.1a of the report.
- 4.16 In addressing Cllr Fletcher's point the Chief Executive stated that he will include in the report for Board information on the growth in passengers on the rail network and the importance of growing the capacity of the transport system to improve connectivity.

In addressing Cllr Parish's questions, he confirmed that he understands that the Handsacre Junction will be built and what needs to be done to make that connection to the West Coast Main line is being explored. Regarding Bradford station, he explained that this was always a part of the Integrated Rail Plan and the Rail Minister had wanted to re look at the decision and reopen the question about how access to Bradford can be improved.

He then reinforced the importance of making the case that it's about connectivity as rail connectivity has a catalytic effect that boosts the economy, that makes it easier for the private sector to decide to locate and it encourages greater access to labour markets and opportunities for the community.

He the informed the Committee that now that Network North has been confirmed TfN are working with the DfT about how evidence can be put together to support proposals.

- 4.17 In summing up the Chair stated that some additional points needed to be included in the next steps of the report for Board. These include the need for TfN to take a leadership role in the governance and accountability and providing a co-ordination role to ensure that the rail network remains resilient whilst work is being undertaken. It is also an opportunity for measuring, monitoring and RAG rating projects so that constituent Members know exactly where projects are at. He added that the Committee believes TfN should also be looking to co-ordinate things on a regional level, working together on trying to get things done, as well as working on shared challenges to deliver projects in a more cost-effective manner.

He reinforced the idea that this is about increased capacity, which will help with decarbonisation as well as providing improved social benefits.

He stated that lessons need to be learnt from project management of HS2 and what the potential costs are to Network North as a result of it being scrapped. He also requested the inclusion of something on small service changes (and the big difference that these can make to communities), economic generation, the need for indicative timescales for projects in order to create certainty and the importance of working together and speaking as one voice for the North.

Resolved:

That the comments of the Committee be noted and included in the report to the December Board.

5 Strategic Transport Plan Update

5.1 Members received the report from the Director of Strategy, Analysis and Communications who highlighted the key points within it.

5.2 Cllr Salter highlighted that there is mention in the report of HS2 needing to be built in full and questioned whether this needed to be removed.

In response the Director of Strategy, Analysis and Communications explained that the position of Board has been NPR and HS2 are needed in full and that position is the one that features in the Strategic Transport Plan (STP). As a result of the Government's announcement the Board, the previous paper (presented by the Chief Executive) is intended to clarify the next steps and the position in the STP will be adjusted accordingly.

5.3 Cllr Merrett referenced a possible change of Government in the next year and whilst stating that Labour hasn't committed one way or the other, he believes that TfN should continue to support HS2.

Resolved:

- 1) That the committee endorses the decision to defer the adoption of the STP (until March 2024) to enable TfN to work with partners to fully consider the implications of the Network North announcement.
- 2) That the Committee notes the work to date to amend the document post consultation.

6 Strategic Transport Plan Implementation

6.1 Members received the report from the Director of Strategy, Analysis and Communications who then highlighted key aspects of the report.

6.2 Cllr Merrett addressed the issue of the need to double or treble rail freight over the next 30 years or so and enquired about how detailed the look at the implications of this has been. He expressed concern that such an increase may cause additional bottle necks in the system. He asked when this work is likely to be complete in order to have that strategic view of what needs to be delivered.

The Director of Strategy, Analysis and Communications explained that the ambitions set within the STP on the doubling or tripling of rail freight over the long term comes from the work that been done on through the TfN future travel scenarios, which look at use of the transport system across different plausible futures. Additionally, the TfN Strategic Rail Report, which forms part of the evidence base for the STP, has identified a lot of the key bottlenecks and issues on the network and where those would need to be addressed, including the need for additional capacity.

The Rail and Road Director stated that in order to achieve a doubling or tripling in rail freight capacity across the North other things would need to happen in order to achieve this and freight needs to be brought more into the mix. He stated that the rail network is heavily constrained and there are difficult choices to be made. He added that it is not viable to continue to squeeze more and more traffic through the same infrastructure.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

7 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 27 February 2024
11am