

Meeting: Rail North Committee

Subject: Accessibility Task & Finish Group - Update

Author: David Worsley, Rail Strategy Manager

Sponsor: Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive

Meeting Date: Monday, 15 July 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

1.1 To provide the Committee with the output from the Rail Accessibility Task & Finish Group. It also highlights that additional information regarding passenger experience was gathered through our Accessibility Survey, which closed on 7 June.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 It is recommended that the Rail North Committee endorses the work of the Task & Finish Group, including the indicative 10-year programme, as shown below:

	Control Period 7					Control Period 8					CP9	
Year	2024-5	2025-6	2026-7	2027-8	2028-9	2029-30	2030-1	2031-2	2032-3	2033-4	2034-5	
Programme	Preparatory period		Quick wins			Main programme						
By CP			Up to £387 million over 3 years			£918 million over 6 years						
Stations			157	181	271	115	112	126	127	87	32	Total:
Enhancements			1,787	2,001	2,706	479	454	483	422	331	141	2024 prices
Approximate annual spend			£102m	£125m	£162m	£194m	£197m	£169m	£177m	£127m	£56m	£1.304 billion

Note: CP = 5-year Control Period

2.2 It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) Endorse the key messages from the Accessibility Task and Finish Group as set out in paragraph 3.5.
- b) Agrees the proposals for taking forward work to accelerate the delivery of station accessibility improvements as set out in paragraph 4.5.
- c) Endorse the 'quick wins' programme as set out in paragraph 4.6.

3. Context

3.1 The Rail Accessibility Task and Finish Group was set up by the Committee in recognition of the importance of having a rail system accessible to all. It was also in part a reflection of the need for strategic leadership to ensure that investment and activities being undertaken by the various actors in the rail industry are aligned to achieve that outcome.

3.2 At the first two meetings of the Task & Finish Group, several issues were raised which have been incorporated into their work and are reflected in outputs, namely:

- The Terms of Reference have been expanded to include inclusivity in a wider sense than merely impairments, as we noted that not all demographic groups feel equally

safe travelling by train. The inclusion of CCTV and lighting improvements in order to enhance passenger security was therefore reaffirmed;

- In order to maximise deliverability of the programme, the group agreed that the works should be split into a programme of “quick wins” (which can be delivered without major disruption and could be commenced during this control period) and a main programme that would involve disruptive possessions and would be deliverable during Control Period 8 (i.e. 2029 to 2034);
- It was noted that the stations facility information that Mott MacDonald used for their business case work was publicly available data from the National Rail website. This was widely thought to be out-of-date, and has been superseded by the data collected by Atkins for DfT during the recent Accessibility Audit Programme. This has been provided to TfN, and it gives more accurate information on current facilities and more detailed information about how each station accommodates passengers with specific requirements, such as those with visual or auditory impairments, those experiencing dementia and autism, wheelchair users, etc.; and
- Northern Trains informed the group that, in recent years, many innovative facilities have become available that can enhance accessibility for passengers with various impairments, including many that use modern information technology (e.g. Bluetooth). Capital investment prices were subsequently provided for this equipment. It should be noted that whilst responsibility for investment in major station infrastructure (such as lifts and platform extensions) remains with Network Rail, the Train Operating Companies (through their contracts) are responsible for items such as signage, handrails, cycling facilities and seating, and in some cases have existing programmes of improvements which will have to be taken into account.

3.3 Further meetings of the Task & Finish Group were held on 8 March and 17 May 2024. In addition, technical working group meetings were held on 22 April and 11 June, which discussed issues relating to the financial, managerial, and commercial aspects of improving accessibility. Substantial progress has been made on updating the business case for a programme of station enhancements across the North, which will underpin Transport for the North’s forthcoming ‘Stations Strategy’. Partner organisations have offered useful guidance on clientship and governance issues, and management of the supply chain.

3.4 The recently completed Rail Station Accessibility Survey received over 2,200 responses. The output from this will be incorporated into the ‘Stations Strategy’, and interim findings indicate that issues such as the steepness of ramps, the provision of seating and toilets, and general feelings of feeling unsafe have featured highly in responses to date. The output from the work will be used to develop the business case further.

3.5 Key messages from the work of the Task and Finish Group are:

- An updated analysis of the status of station facilities has indicated that the estimate of the overall cost for bringing the North’s stations up to a desirable standard (including step-free access at all stations) remains circa £1.3 billion. (To put this figure in context, the combined total buildings budget in Control Period 7 for Network Rail’s Eastern and North West & Central Regions is £756 million.)
- The proposed programme of work required now includes additional enhancements (e.g. Braille maps, high contrast stair nosing, Smart Beacons) which will further improve accessibility for passengers, whilst also including enhanced CCTV or lighting at the majority of stations in order to improve confidence in travel safety for all social groups;

- Our reassessment of the scope of the programme has indicated that a much higher proportion of the overall costs would fall within the “quick wins” category of works, which could be implemented without significant disruption to passengers, and thus may be possible to commence within the current Control Period (i.e. before March 2029). This will allow increased flexibility in devising a programme of work which could realistically be completed within 10 years;
 - Our partners involved in the Accessibility Task & Finish Group have provided updated cost data and suggested additional means of strengthening the business case; and
 - Additional information regarding the passenger experience was gathered through our Accessibility Survey, which closed on 7 June 2024.
- 3.6 The key output from the Task and Finish Group is the indicative programme to ensure that stations are fully accessible.

4 Implementation

- 4.1 The key focus of the Committee is to ensure that the indicative programme is implemented. As has already been noted, several actors in the rail industry – Network Rail, the train operators – already deliver investments that improve station accessibility. The opportunity moving forward is to improve the alignment of the levels of investment already being made in support of the indicative programme to maximise benefit for the passenger, even though there is likely to be a need to make the case for additional funding to complete the programme.
- 4.2 Since 2006, the principal means of improving station accessibility has been the DfT’s “Access for All” programme. During Control Period 6 (2019-2024), a total of £350 million across Great Britain was allocated to “Access for All” (including £20 million for smaller projects as part of the “Mid Tier” programme). In the North, a total of 7 stations benefitted from this main programme during Control Period 6, with a further 7 in implementation (as of January 2024) and 6 still in design stage (and therefore due to be delivered after the Control Period finished). Meanwhile, 8 stations in TfN’s area had benefitted from completed “Mid Tier” works, with 2 still in the design stage.
- 4.3 Only 15 stations across the North had benefitted from completed works in Control Period 6 (i.e. 3 per year). At this rate it would take circa 80 years to address approximately 250 stations in the North without step-free access.
- 4.4 The DfT has announced that the “Access for All” budget for Control Period 7 is also £350 million. Only 50 stations across Britain have been confirmed as being within scope for this funding, including only 10 in the North. Evidence suggests that the “Access for All” programme, as currently managed, is failing to utilise the funding identified at the start of a Control Period. Unallocated funding within a Control Period is not capable of being carried forward, meaning that opportunities to deliver improved access to stations are being lost. There is a good argument to be made that the way the “Access for All” programme is currently managed – as a centrally controlled Network Rail programme – is devolved to avoid such a situation continuing into the new Control Period.
- 4.5 In addition to arguing for reform to the “Access for All” programme, the Task and Finish Group’s work identified a few next steps for accelerating delivery of station accessibility improvements in the North:
- Incorporate the output of the Task and Finish Group into a TfN ‘Stations Strategy’, that can be used to support further development and funding bids;
 - TfN to work with partners across the rail industry and with its constituent authorities to align existing investment and identify possible additional sources of funding for the stations enhancement programme, including:

- Sources controlled by central government (i.e. successors to Transforming Cities Fund, City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements, Access for All);
 - Investments made by train operators – including using TfN’s input into the annual business planning process to align such investment; and
 - Other sources such as commercialisation of assets, transit-oriented developments, and train operator annual business plans.
- Inclusion of the output from Rail Station Accessibility Survey into the ‘Stations Strategy’;
 - TfN to continue to work with Great British Railways Transition Team on using the output from DfT’s Accessibility Audit Programme to clarify the current status of stations facilities and user experience across the North;
 - TfN to work with the industry to develop a sequenced programme, including identification of the skills and resources needed to deliver the programme in the planned timescale;
 - TfN will work with constituent members to identify how the investment they make in their communities might accelerate the delivery of the program, given that much of the work will need to be managed as a portfolio of local programs rather than a centralised one.
- 4.6 The “quick wins” sub-programme would cost circa £390 million (at 2024 prices) for the Desirable option, and £320 million for the Acceptable, whilst the main sub-programme would cost circa £920 million for the Desirable option, and £650 million for the Acceptable option. The contents of these programmes are summarised below, indicating all stations at which it has been estimated at least some improvement is needed in each topic area in the Desirable option:

Quick wins		Main programme	
Item	Number of stations	Item	Number of stations
CCTV security (covering the stations)	473	Step-free access to all areas (lifts)	230
CCTV security (covering surrounding areas)	473	Step-free access to all areas (ramps)	178
Platform lighting	79	Better lighting for surrounding public realm	94
Customer information screens (on platforms)	104	Ticket vending machines	83
Customer information screens (in station buildings)	163	“Sunflower rooms” for those with sensory sensitivities	21
Public address systems	211	Covered cycle parking	383
Help points	273	Cycle hubs	37
Enclosed canopy shelters	264	Additional waiting rooms	5
Accessible toilets and baby changing facilities	175	High contrast stair nosing for the visually impaired	549
Braille station maps	549		
Additional hearing induction loops	464		
Smart beacon technology	609		
Additional seating	86		

- 4.7 There are a number of programme risks, of which the main ones to be noted are:
- Addressing station infrastructure does not alleviate any issues relating to rolling stock, which can only be addressed over a longer timescale due to vehicle procurement processes. A comprehensive solution to all accessibility issues will require coordination of infrastructure and vehicles at a national level;
 - There are a considerable number of permissions and bureaucratic processes involved in some aspects of this type of work, especially asset protection procedures;
 - High rates of inflation impact on any agreed budgets (especially regarding staff and raw materials costs);
 - The involvement of multiple organisations as clients could lead to inefficiencies in managing the supply chain, incurring unnecessary costs;
 - There remains a shortage of engineering skills in the railway industry, which could make assembling the resources for completion in 10 years challenging. However, this programme would be less affected by the most acute shortages, such as signalling and electrification engineers;
 - There is a degree of uncertainty around the costs and timescales for installing power supplies for those facilities that require electricity; and
 - The cost estimate includes an uplift for the possibility of having to undertake geotechnical works when installing ramps or lifts in areas where the station is located in a cutting or on an embankment. It has been assumed that there is a 30% risk of each of these at each station, but as the programme is developed, this may alter.
- 4.8 Ways of mitigating risks have been discussed at the Task and Finish Group (including amending industry processes where they are a potential barrier) and will be incorporated in the development and delivery of the programme. It is proposed to establish appropriate governance to oversee the next phases of work with oversight continuing to be provided through the Rail North Committee.

5. Corporate Considerations:

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications for Transport for the North relating to this report. The financial implications of the proposed programme are substantial, and funding will need to be sought as set out in the report.

Resource Implications

- 5.2 There are no direct resourcing implications to Transport for the North as a result of this report. There are significant resource implications for delivery of the programme itself and these will be identified as part of the next stage of work.

Legal Implications

- 5.3 The legal implications are contained within the body of this report. The previous committee paper on this topic recommended that when significant collaboration between partners begins in relation to this workstream, a Memorandum of Understanding will be required.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 5.4 Transport for the North is currently managing one corporate risk which relates to this report. [Risk 309: Changed travel patterns and behaviours could impact on train services and investment decisions and which therefore will need to reflect new markets, emerging evidence of demand and requirements of the STP.]

Environmental Implications

5.5 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 forthcoming Decarbonisation Strategy (expected during 2024/25).

Equality and Diversity

5.6 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. The assessment identified a risk that the enhancements considered may not be comprehensive enough to fully address accessibility issues. This has been mitigated by including relevant experts in the Task & Finish Group, who have broadened the scope of the programme.

Consultations

5.7 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.

6. Background Papers:

6.1 There are no background papers for this report.

7. Appendices:

7.1 There are no appendices for this report.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

a) DfT	Department for Transport
b) TfN	Transport for the North
c) STP	Strategic Transport Plan
d) CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
e) SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
f) EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment