
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Accessibility Task Force
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Meeting Date: Monday, 16 September 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Board with an update on the work of the Rail North Committee focused on improving accessibility to the rail system.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Board notes and endorses the work of the Rail North Committee in making the Rail network more accessible for all.

3. Context

- 3.1 The TfN Board delegates its role in relation to rail matters to the Rail North Committee. The Board receives a report on the work of the Committee at each meeting. A focus for the Committee over the last 12 months has been the need to improve access to rail stations and services. The significance of this to the Committee is reflected by the fact that Members have determined that it is the first substantive item on the agenda of each meeting.
- 3.2 Given the wider significance of improving accessibility and given where the work of the Committee has got to at its most recent meeting, now is an appropriate time to provide a more detailed briefing to the main Board.

4. Current State of Play

- 4.1 The work of the Rail Accessibility Task & Finish Group has demonstrated the strength of the economic and strategic case for improvements to station accessibility and other facilities across the North. TfN has set standards for the facilities that we expect stations to meet regarding accessibility and other features, under minimum, acceptable and desirable scenarios. TfN will now focus on making the most efficient use of available funding to implement accessibility improvements.
- 4.2 At its meeting on 3rd September the Rail North Committee on 3rd September agreed its approach to shaping the implementation of works which progress delivery of TfN's accessibility requirements, including:
- 1) Using TfN's preferred approach to develop the scope of station accessibility enhancements to be developed and delivered by:
 - a. Northern Trains (Annual Business Plan for 2025-26 and 10-year Outline Service Specification);
 - b. TransPennine Express (Annual Business Plan for 2025-26 and 10-year Outline Service Specification);
 - c. Network Rail (Stations covered by the Rail Network Enhancements Programme including the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) programme); and
 - d. Network Rail (Access for All in Control Periods 7 & 8).

- 2) Aligning delivery generally to the proposals of Mayoral Combined Authorities and their aspirations for local devolution;
- 3) Specifically developing a new approach to bringing together local funding (from Local Transport Authorities and Mayoral Combined Authorities) and work planned by train operators – starting with their 2025/26 Annual Business Plan Programmes and continuing for the next 10-years, through the new Outline Service Specifications;
- 4) Seeking devolution of the Access for All programme in the North to be administered through the Rail North Partnership Agreement, with funding devolved and 'ring fenced' for investment in improved accessibility. This submission should be made swiftly in order to expedite delivery and support the Government's growth agenda;
- 5) Seeking opportunities to fund this work through planning gain (e.g. Section 106 agreements); and
- 6) Developing prioritisation criteria that recognise the diverse nature of the North and the need to ensure that it is not just the areas with the greatest economic returns that are prioritised. This shall be considered at the next Rail North Committee.

5. Making Progress with Implementation

- 5.1 The most straightforward method for delivering additional stations facilities enhancements would be to expand programmes of work which exist and that have demonstrated as being able to deliver the outcomes required to improve accessibility. TfN has worked with Northern Trains and TransPennine Express on their 2025-26 Business Plans, which both address aspects of accessibility. At the business planning workshop and follow-up meeting held in June and July (leading up to the September Request for Business Plan), TfN specified that the requirements endorsed by Rail North Committee on 15 July 2024 should be implemented. With regards to accessibility, this includes these items:
- Through the delivery of initiatives (including the Committee's Accessibility Task & Finish Working Group programme, Stations as a Place and rolling stock procurement and refurbishment) the operators shall improve the level of accessibility, facilities, and passenger safety whilst in and around the network;
 - The operators shall work closely with partners to ensure that joint funding of schemes is a priority and that the quick wins are deliverable and achievable. This shall include consideration of the use of 3rd-party providers to reduce costs; and
 - The operators shall identify opportunities to undertake enhancements at little or no cost (e.g. short ramps to make areas step-free) and work with local partners to identify opportunities to obtain Section 106 funds as part of development agreements if station facilities have been included in such arrangements.
- 5.2 Another method by which significant stations improvements are planned (and in some cases already delivered) is the Transpennine Route Upgrade programme, which encompasses rail routes between Manchester and York, and includes its own bespoke requirements for stations facilities and TRU programme accessibility standards. TfN has already helped to secure the TRU programme's commitment to ensuring that all 35 stations affected by TRU will have full step-free access. A list of additional planned accessibility enhancements to meet TfN's full requirements for this programme has been requested from Network Rail. It is anticipated that the stations covered will include Stalybridge, Huddersfield and Dewsbury from the TPE portfolio, along with Mossley, Greenfield, Marsden and Slaithwaite (which are currently managed by Northern). Including diversionary routes, the total number of

stations impacted by TRU is 35, and the TRU programme team is developing programmes for all of these.

- 5.3 Building on the success achieved with TRU, the Committee has supported TfN using its powers to ensure that all capital programmes in the North should implement our standards for station accessibility. TfN will use its status as a Statutory Partner for investment planning in the North (as set out in the Rail North Partnership Agreement) to achieve this by making advice to the industry and DfT. This is also likely to involve seeking funding from the DfT's Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline (RNEP) for CP8, which could be used to fund the more expensive element of the main programme from 2029 to 2034, after the "quick wins" have been delivered.
- 5.4 TfN will look to establish a new process for bringing together various sources of funding to support accessibility improvements, linked to the train operators' Annual Business Plans from 2025/26 onwards. This is likely to include:
- Local funding, including the Local Transport Fund allocations for 2025 to 2032 (which have allocated £2.5 billion to Local Transport Authorities), Transforming Cities Fund and City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements with a focus on ensuring a good fit with local integrated transport priorities;
 - Commercialisation of station assets (e.g. conversion of disused buildings to leasable office space, retail or community facilities). This is one of the objectives of Northern's "Stations as a Place" initiative, which identified the potential to raise £12m in annual revenue (and provide £10m per year or more in monetised social benefits), alongside the opportunity to deliver investment desired by TfN concurrent with Northern's works in the operator business plan; and
 - Planning gain (i.e. Section 106 agreements).
- 5.5 Since 2006 the principal mechanism for improving station accessibility has been Network Rail's Access for All (AfA) programme. However, the elements of this programme which were due for delivery in Control Period 6 were significantly delayed; at the end of CP6 in March 2024, only 9 of the 22 stations in the main AfA programme for our region had been completed, with 7 in the implementation phase and 6 still in design. Meanwhile, from the smaller "mid tier" works, 8 stations had been completed, but 2 were still in the design stage. The budget for CP7 has been set at £350 million (the same as CP6) and to date ten stations in the North (along with Chinley in Derbyshire, which is a Northern Trains station) have been selected to receive funding, which is slightly fewer than the 12 which would be expected if all stations were equally likely to have been chosen. In order to prevent the CP7 AfA programme being similarly delayed, the Committee supported the proposal that it should:
- a) Seek to devolve funding for Access for All for delivery through the Rail North Partnership Agreement. This will enable local partners to become involved in the planning and delivery of works, and ameliorate local blockers such as planning permission and asset protection issues; and
 - b) Seek a proportionately higher share of the remaining CP7 funding, to close the gap between provision of station facilities in the North and elsewhere.
- 5.6 Based on the discussion at the Rail North Committee on 3rd September further work will be undertaken by the TfN executive, working with constituent authorities to allow the proposed stations improvements to be assessed by line of route. This will be overseen by the Accessibility Task and Finish Group who have also been tasked with developing prioritisation criteria that recognise the diverse nature of the North and the need to ensure that the social value of improving accessibility is given due regard.

6. Corporate Considerations:

Financial Implications

6.1 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

6.2 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. 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

6.3 The legal implications are contained within the body of this report. The previous RNC 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

6.4 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

6.5 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

6.6 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

6.7 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.

7. Background Papers:

7.1 There are no background papers for this report.

8. Appendices:

8.1 There are no appendices for this report.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

a) AfA	Access for All
b) CP6	Control Period 6
c) CP7	Control Period 7
d) CP8	Control Period 8
e) DfT	Department for Transport

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

f)	GBRTT	Great British Railways Transition Team
g)	NESEP	Northern England Station Enhancements Programme
h)	RNC	Rail North Committee
i)	RNEP	Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline
j)	STP	Strategic Transport Plan
k)	TPT	TransPennine Trains
l)	TRSE	Transport-related social exclusion
m)	TRU	Transpennine Route Upgrade