
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Rail North Committee
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Sponsor: Chief Executive, Chief Executive
Meeting Date: Monday, 16 September 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Board with feedback on the matters discussed at the Rail North Committee Consultation Call on 3 September 2024.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Board notes the feedback from Rail North Committee including:
- Work to bring together infrastructure programmes into a single 'State of Play' document and that the Committee has agreed a series of initial actions to address gaps identified by the work.
 - parallel work on a new 10-year service specification for Northern and TPE through the Rail North Partnership, allowing TfN to join up services with infrastructure.
 - continued risks around the implementation of a new timetable for the East Coast Main line, including the likely impact on performance; and
 - A continued focus on holding industry to account for performance and service changes, including Northern's recovery plan.

3. Overview:

- 3.1 This report covers all the items considered by Rail North Committee on 3 September, except Rail Accessibility, which is covered elsewhere on this agenda.

4. Infrastructure Update including State of Play:

- 4.1 Building on previous work on blueprints for Manchester and East Coast, the TfN executive has, first time, brought together into a single 'state of play' tool all the rail infrastructure investment underway or planned in the North. The Committee heard how there is a substantial programme of investment underway across the North's rail network with over half the national Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline funding currently allocated to the North (supporting schemes including Transpennine Route Upgrade). Whilst this is managed by individual programmes, a single and clear representation of the overall programme has been lacking. The Committee heard that reaction from DfT, Network Rail and the wider industry had been positive. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the overview would evolve over time.
- 4.2 TfN's State of Play maps out individual programmes, timelines, and funding status in a single, consistent format. Critically, TfN's mapping allows easy identification of where there are issues which, without intervention, could jeopardise the intended outcomes. In particular critical points include:
- West Coast Main Line capacity following the cancellation of HS2 Phase 2;
 - East Coast Main Line capacity; and

- regionally and nationally significant hubs where further interventions are needed.

4.3 The Committee endorsed some specific actions including establishing a series of Task Forces (focussed on nationally and pan-regionally significant hubs) and Place-Based groups around the key regional interchanges. In addition, TfN will now use the State of Play to develop a clear long-term output statement for the North, based on the Strategic Transport Plan objectives members have agreed and provided to the Secretary of State as Statutory Advice.

4.4 Committee welcomed the work and endorsed the establishment of the Task Forces and Groups with the addition of a Task Force for the Liverpool area (recognising the national significance of the Port of Liverpool).

5. Outline Service Specification for Northern and TransPennine Express

5.1 Through the devolved Rail North Partnership arrangements, TfN members continue to be able to shape the Northern and TransPennine operations (for example securing investment in the previous franchises including new rolling stock for both operators).

5.2 Post-Covid, and with both operators under the government's Operator of Last Resort, there is currently no long-term specification for the operators with priorities, instead being managed through the Annual Business Plan process.

5.3 Committee endorsed work by the Rail North Partnership to create a new outline service specification for Northern and Transpennine Express that will support both the delivery of TfN's Strategic Transport Plan and the government's growth objectives. The specification will look ahead for 10 years and will remain appropriate as the new integrated structure under Great British Railways is established.

5.4 Committee members welcomed the opportunity to shape future operations in their role championing the needs of passengers. They emphasised the opportunity to develop the ambitions of individual City Regions (e.g the roll out of the Bee Network). In endorsing a strengthened vision statement, they also requested that it reflects explicitly the importance of addressing Climate Change in line with TfN's Strategic Transport Plan. Committee will be able to shape the work at all key stages over the next 2 years.

6. East Coast Main Line Next Steps

6.1 The Chief Executive provided an update based on his participation in the East Coast Task Force. This is overseeing work to introduce a new timetable for the East Coast Main Line following previous deferrals and is now focussed on the opportunity to introduce the timetable in December 2025.

6.2 In updating on the work, the Chief Executive highlighted the previous concerns expressed by the Committee and TfN Board around loss of local and regional connectivity as a result of the new timetable. Whilst there are a number of benefits associated with the new timetable, the need for compromises arises from earlier decisions to reduce the scale of investment in infrastructure on the East Coast Main Line. In addition, it was noted that past decisions to grant additional access rights on the presumption that the additional infrastructure would be provided further complicates the issue. He highlighted concerns about performance impacts on the route as a consequence of a timetable change particularly given the Committee's focus on holding the industry to account for poor performance and the new government's priority of improving performance.

6.3 Members highlighted the importance of restoring the Cross Country Newcastle to Reading (via Doncaster) service to its previous frequency, facilitating direct

services from Cleethorpes to London and the proposed fast Leeds-Sheffield service (which is unlocked by the proposed new timetable). The Committee will be provided with further briefings ahead of an expected decision-point in November 2024.

7. Rail North Partnership Operational Update

- 7.1 The Committee was informed that operational performance had been mixed. Whilst TransPennine Express was performing better and on-track to meet its commitment to restore services from December 2024, concerns remained with both Avanti's operation and infrastructure on the West Coast Main Line. On the latter Network Rail had written to TfN setting out the initiatives they were taking to improve performance.
- 7.2 Members expressed strong concerns about CrossCountry's recent reduction in services (particularly impacting on Doncaster) which had been imposed with little notice and without consultation with TfN or local partners. CrossCountry's Director was in attendance and provided an assurance to members of the Committee that the change was temporary and that services would be restored to their previous level in November 2024. He highlighted that CrossCountry had re-allocated capacity to other services and put in place a plan with other operators to carry CrossCountry passengers.
- 7.3 It was previously reported that Northern had breached its contract in relation to cancellations caused by the operator (mainly due to staffing issues). The Chief Operating Officer acknowledged that performance had been unacceptably poor, particularly at weekends. He went on to set out some of the staffing challenges contributing to this and outline some of the initiatives that Northern is taking. He highlighted that despite the poor performance the underlying growth (in passengers) was still strong, and that ticketless travel had been reduced. Members highlighted the scale of the impact of cancellations, particularly at weekends and expressed the view that the issues must be fixed. In private session, Committee went on to discuss Northern's formal Recovery Plan in more detail and will consider it further at their next meeting in November 2024.

8. Corporate Considerations

Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications for Transport for the North as a result of this report.

Resource Implications

- 8.2 There are no direct resourcing implications as a result of this report.

Legal Implications

- 8.3 The Rail North Committee on behalf of Transport for the North, manages the agreements with the train operators (Northern and TransPennine Express) in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Partnership Agreement between Transport for the North and the Secretary of State.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 8.4 This paper does not require a risk assessment, however, risks relating to the future of rail services were highlighted in the Committee meeting. A risk has been included on the Transport for the North Corporate Risk Register in relation to the viability of train services and future investment decisions.

Environmental Implications

- 8.5 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. Any infrastructure proposals to improve the capacity and reliability of the system will be subject (where appropriate) to EIA Screening, conducted by Network Rail as part of the consenting process for those projects.
- 8.6 Passenger rail has an essential part to play in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within Transport for the North's Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around reducing private car vehicle mileage

Equality and Diversity

- 8.7 There are no specific implications as a result of this report. Industry will undertake appropriate assessments on individual projects and proposals.

Consultations

- 8.8 There are no specific consultations required as part of this report.

9. Background Papers

- 9.1 None

10. Appendices

- 10.1 None

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

a) TfN	<i>Transport for the North</i>
b) TPE	<i>TransPennine Express</i>
c) DfT	<i>Department for Transport</i>
d) HS2	<i>High Speed 2</i>
e) EIA	<i>Environmental Impact Assessment</i>
f) SEA	<i>Strategic Environmental Assessment</i>