
Meeting:	Rail North Committee Consultation Call
Subject:	East Coast Main Line Timetable
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Sponsor:	Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive
Meeting Date:	Wednesday, 20 November 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 This report updates the Rail North Committee on the work of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) Task Force established to determine when and if a new timetable should be introduced. The Task Force has recommended to Ministers that this should now happen in December 2025. A briefing for Committee members was held in October 2024 with the Task Force Chair after which the Chair wrote to the Rail Minister setting out the Committee's position.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 The Rail North Committee is recommended to:
- a) note the rail industry's intention to introduce a new timetable on the East Coast Main Line in December 2025;
 - b) reaffirms its conditional support to the timetable change subject to a satisfactory response from the Rail Minister to the conditions set out in the Chair's letter;
 - c) note that to realise the full benefit of the investment in Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) there will be a need to revisit the East Coast Main Line timetable and requests the Transport for the North (TfN) executive to work with the rail industry to identify any additional infrastructure requirements and/or changes to service patterns that might be required; and
 - d) reaffirms its request to the rail industry that given the significance of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) it is appropriate for TfN to be represented on the ECML Programme Board.

3. Context

- 3.1 The East Coast Main Line is the primary rail route between London and Edinburgh, via the East Midlands, Yorkshire and the Northeast of England. In addition to long-distance high-speed services, the route is also used by trains between the Northeast and Northwest and Midlands and by other local and regional routes, in addition to being a significant freight artery. As the work associated with the timetable has shown, choices made in respect of the ECML affect the wider pan-regional network, including areas west of the Pennines.
- 3.2 As this Committee will recall the rail industry had developed a new timetable for introduction in December 2024 that would have provided additional long-distance trains to provide additional capacity to match the strong growth in passenger numbers observed. This timetable would also have led to increased revenue for the rail industry, which (subject to government agreement) could be used to support further investments.
- 3.3 During April 2024, it became clear that there were a considerable number of issues and conflicts still to be resolved, including but not limited to how to deal

with existing freight paths. The independent PMO (Programme Management Office – established in the wake of the May 2018 timetable) concluded that proceeding to implement the timetable without these being resolved would have led to an unacceptable level of risk of poor operational performance.

- 3.4 As a result, the current ECML timetable will rollover in December 2024. This will see restoration of Transpennine Express (TPE) services temporarily withdrawn in December 2023, and the introduction of a temporary LNER shuttle service between York and Newcastle to maintain connectivity at Northallerton as the TransPennine Express Liverpool – Newcastle service will no longer be able to call. Due to a combination at weekends of resource constraints and the impact of engineering works associated with the Transpennine Route Upgrade, this shuttle service will only operate on Mondays to Fridays. As a result, weekend connectivity at Northallerton will be reduced until the new timetable is implemented in December 2025.

4 Consideration

- 4.1 In order to consider when, or if the proposed timetable should be introduced on the ECML, a Task Force was established. This is comprised of senior rail industry figures and includes Transport for the North and Transport Scotland in addition to the Department for Transport. The Chief Executive represents TfN on the Task Force and they in turn liaise regularly with senior officers from partner authorities along the ECML.
- 4.2 The Task Force has recommended that the originally proposed December 2024 timetable should be introduced in December 2025 and the Task Force Chair has written to Ministers to confirm this position. The Task Force was not able to reach a unanimous position. Freight Operating Companies are not supportive due to the inability to accommodate growth in traffic and other changes; and Transport Scotland has reservations over capacity and power supply issues in Scotland. Transport for the North was clear that it would take a position following engagement including with elected Members. The Task Force Chair briefed the Rail North Committee on 21 October 2024.
- 4.3 The benefits of the proposed timetable include:
- Around 100 extra services per day, including an additional LNER service each hour between Newcastle and London;
 - A new fast Northern service each hour between Sheffield and Leeds;
 - Increased TPE services between Newcastle and Edinburgh;
 - Provision for additional Northern services on the Durham Coast and allowing other improvements for example on the Esk Valley Line; and
 - Faster journey times from London to Edinburgh (just over 4hrs) and Leeds (just over 2hrs).
- 4.4 The timetable does however have some negative impacts on the North. These include fewer London services calling at stations in Northumberland and Durham. The introduction of additional services to the ECML will result in a forecast decrease in train punctuality. The proposed timetable does not require additional infrastructure schemes, although these are needed for further enhancements including restoration of 2 trains per hour between Newcastle and Manchester. The previous Rail Minister gave a commitment to this Committee that the restoration of this service would be prioritised once works associated with TRU allow. However, the status of planned infrastructure improvements between York and

Newcastle is unclear. The scheme to provide a third track north of York station has been paused.

- 4.5 Since the briefing to Committee Members in October, two further issues have emerged. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) has written to Network Rail requiring it to develop a plan to improve performance on its Eastern Region. This is in response to poor performance on some routes including the ECML. ORR requires Network Rail to produce this plan by 20 December 2024. This is a material consideration given the proposed December 2025 timetable is forecast to lead to a reduction in performance.
- 4.6 In addition, technical work on the TRU concept timetable shows that the ECML as currently configured north of York will not be able to accommodate the TRU service specification given the available infrastructure and the planned new timetable structure.
- 4.7 With works on TRU on schedule to be completed in the early 2030's there is merit in implementing an ECML timetable that allows the benefits of the recent £4bn investment to be realised. The investment in TRU will be more than £10bn. It is therefore essential to acknowledge that to fully realise the benefits of that investment the base timetable for the ECML will need to be revisited (together with the need for additional infrastructure improvements on the ECML). Given the timescales associated with such exercises (for example work on this current revision to the ECML has been underway for over 6 years) TfN is seeking a commitment from the rail industry that the necessary work will be commissioned in time to enable a revised ECML timetable to be introduced upon completion of TRU.
- 4.8 Following the briefing by the Task Force Chair, the Chair of this Committee wrote to the Rail Minister setting out the Committee's conditional support for the proposed timetable subject to a series of issues being addressed. That letter is attached as Appendix 1. Any response will be reported to the Committee.
- 4.9 The rail industry is seeking a decision from Ministers on whether to introduce the timetable by 22 November 2024. This is to allow the industry and particularly operators to plan for its introduction and avoid issues that have occurred with new timetables elsewhere, e.g. May 2018.
- 4.10 If Ministers agree to the introduction of the timetable, the industry will continue to develop its plans to minimise the likely performance impact and undertake the normal timetable readiness assurance process. Should the introduction of the timetable not be approved, operators would revert to planning based on existing timetables. In this context December 2025 is arguably the last clear opportunity for the proposed Timetable to be introduced before the Transpennine Route Upgrade's disruptive works start in 2026.

5. Corporate Considerations

Financial Implications

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

Resource Implications

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

Legal Implications

- 5.3 The legal implications are contained within the body of this report.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 5.4 Corporate risk 311 refers to reduction in rail connectivity due to future timetable changes.

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.
- 5.6 Passenger rail and rail freight play an essential part in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within Transport for the North's Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around reducing road vehicle mileage.

Equality and Diversity

- 5.7 Those train operating companies that are managed by the operator of last resort through DfT OLR Holdings Ltd (DOHL), including Transpennine Trains Limited, Northern Trains Limited and LNER, are covered by the public sector equality duty and therefore should be undertaking Equality Impact Assessments as part of their decision making process. Train operating companies that are owned by private sector organisations are not covered by public sector equality duty, however these organisations should still be assuring themselves that any changes are considered against the duties set out in the Equality Act 2010. Transport for the North would expect all operators to pay due consideration to these duties, and take these into consideration when developing and recommending changes to operations.

Consultations

- 5.8 The Transport for the North executive has kept senior officers within each authority briefed on progress, and their views sought as work progresses. The Rail Industry briefed Committee Members on the proposed timetable on 21 October 2024 and the Chair wrote to the Rail Minister summarising the Committee's views after that session.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 There are no background papers.

7. Appendices

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Transport for the North Letter to the Rail Minister

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

a)	<i>ECML</i>	<i>East Coast Main Line</i>
b)	<i>DOHL</i>	<i>DfT OLR Holdings Limited</i>
c)	<i>LNER</i>	<i>London North Eastern Railway</i>
d)	<i>TPE</i>	<i>TransPennine Express</i>
e)	<i>TRU</i>	<i>Transpennine Route Upgrade</i>
f)	<i>TfN</i>	<i>Transport for the North</i>
g)	<i>PMO</i>	<i>Programme Management Office</i>
h)	<i>ORR</i>	<i>The Office of Rail and Road</i>