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**Meeting:** Rail North Committee Consultation Call

**Subject:** Accessibility Task & Finish Group - Update

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**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, 20 November 2024

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## **1. Purpose of the Report:**

1.1 To provide the Committee with an update on the Rail Accessibility Workstream.

## **2. Recommendations:**

2.1 It is recommended that Rail North Committee endorses the approach to prioritisation outlined in this paper and which will be discussed at the Accessibility Task & Finish group meeting on 19 November 2024. This includes prioritising accessibility improvements to be delivered through a multi-criteria framework taking account of:

- The number and proportion of people with disabilities or long-term health conditions living in station catchment areas;
- The benefits to all passengers provided by the proposed enhancements (as assessed using standard Department for Transport (DfT) appraisal methods); and
- The condition of the existing facilities, as indicated by the number of enhancements needed to bring each station up to Transport for the North's "Desirable" standard.

2.2 It is proposed that this prioritisation has been provided to Northern Trains Limited and TransPennine Trains to inform their Annual Business Plans for 2025-26.

## **3. Main Issues:**

3.1 Rail North Committee on 3 September 2024 approved an approach to progressing Transport for the North's stations enhancement programme based on using multiple methods and sources of funding to deliver improvements, including:

- Inclusion of "quick wins" enhancements in the Annual Business Plans for Northern Trains and TransPennine Express;
- Influencing the 10-year Outline Service Specification for Northern and TransPennine Express; and
- Proposing that the remainder of the Control Period 7 funding for the "Access for All" programme be devolved to pan-regional control in the North.

3.2 In order to assist Northern Trains and TransPennine Express with determining which stations to prioritise in their business plans, a multi-criteria analysis framework has been developed which uses many sources of information. Data about the status of the existing assets has been drawn from the Rail Delivery Group's website and the results of the DfT's 2022 Accessibility Audit programme. These were compared to the various levels of standards devised as part of the Strategic Outline Business Case for the Northern England Stations Enhancement Programme, and from this it is possible to

judge which stations are furthest from complying with our standards. Standard appraisal techniques have also been applied to the “quick wins” elements of the programme in order to assess which enhancements generate the best return on investment in terms of providing benefits to all passengers, thereby encouraging modal shift and some additional rail industry revenue.

- 3.3 The use of this information is due for discussion at the meeting of the Accessibility Task & Finish Group on Tuesday 19 November 2024. As an example, the results of using a multi-criteria analysis framework will be presented, where equal weight is given to the following 4 factors:
- The number of people (according to the 2021 census) living within 800 metres of the station who have disabilities which limit their day-to-day activities “a lot”;
  - The proportion of people (according to the 2021 census) living within 2 kilometres of the station who have disabilities which limit their day-to-day activities “a lot” or “a little”, plus those with long-term health conditions;
  - The benefit-to-cost ratio calculated by a standard appraisal (i.e. looking at the benefits that the enhancements provide to all passengers); and
  - The relative condition of the existing facilities, measured by the number of enhancements needed to bring the station up to TfN’s “Desirable” option.
- (It is recognised that the catchments of 800m and 2km which were used were developed for assessments in urban areas, and a wider radius may be more appropriate for rural areas.)
- 3.4 These criteria have been used to develop priority lists for which stations most immediately require investment, which can be sorted by local government area or Train Operating Company. The precise stations which will be categorised as priority are subject to any changes to the weighting of criteria agreed by the Accessibility Task & Finish Group, but the use of data about disabilities and long-term health conditions tends to give coastal areas high scores. However, the stations indicated are fairly evenly spread between the North East, North West and Yorkshire & the Humber.
- 3.5 The prioritisation system has given relatively high scores to two stations (Rock Ferry & Thirsk) which have been included in the first tranche of stations covered by the Control Period 7 “Access for All” funding. Stations not covered by this central programme will have to be addressed through other budgets and processes, so the assessment has been shared with Northern Trains and TransPennine Express to inform their 2025-26 Annual Business Plans. TfN also note that our Partners have their own local programmes to promote facilities enhancements, and as the accessibility workstream progresses, we will take account of that and co-ordinate our proposals.
- 3.6 This method of prioritisation can be used to inform how any source of available funding can be distributed in pursuit of meeting Transport for the North’s accessibility objectives. At present, TransPennine Trains and Northern Trains are undertaking their business planning process for 2025-26, and the delivery of the requirements of the Accessibility Task & Finish Group has been marked as a Strategic Priority in the Request for Business Plan (RfBP) process. In their responses, the Train Operating Companies will have to provide the scope and budget of their works, and the operators are being provided with Transport for the North’s data in order to assist with this process.
- 3.7 With regards to the immediate accessibility problems caused by difficulties with Northern’s Passenger Assistance service, TfN recently attended a round table discussion with the Office of Rail & Road, DfT, Northern Trains and Rail North Partnership. This meeting discussed the poor feedback received by ORR on Northern’s Passenger Assistance performance, which led to ORR formally writing to Northern. There was open constructive discussion regarding the issues and challenges, and

Northern's proposals were developed into a Passenger Assistance Improvement Plan. The plan was submitted on time to ORR on 28 October, and ORR feedback is awaited.

#### **4. Corporate Considerations:**

##### ***Financial Implications***

- 4.1 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***

- 4.2 There are no direct resourcing implications to Transport for the North as a result of this report. The actions agreed have 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***

- 4.3 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***

- 4.4 Transport for the North is currently managing one corporate risk which relates to this report. [Risk 647: Individual programmes are not aligned and expected benefits not realised.]

##### ***Environmental Implications***

- 4.5 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***

- 4.6 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***

- 4.7 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

#### **5. Background Papers:**

- 5.1 There are no background papers for this report.

#### **6. Appendices:**

- 6.1 There are no appendices for this report.

**Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used**

a) DfT	Department for Transport
b) NESEP	Northern England Station Enhancements Programme
c) ORR	Office of Rail & Road
d) RfBP	Request for Business Plan
e) STP	Strategic Transport Plan
f) TPT	TransPennine Trains