

# Rail North Committee Minutes

**22 February 2023**  
**Microsoft Teams**

**Present:**

Lord Mcloughlin (Chair)

**Attendee**

Mayor Andy Burnham

Cllr Rupert Swarbrick  
Cllr Keith Little

Cllr Cllr Steve Foulkes  
Mayor Steve Rotheram  
Mayor Jamie Driscoll  
Cllr Richard Hannigan  
Mayor Oliver Coppard

Cllr Jonathan Dulston  
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe  
Mayor Tracy Brabin

**Local Authority**

Greater Manchester Combined  
Authority

Lakeland  
Lakeland

Liverpool City Region

Liverpool City Region

North of Tyne Combined Authority

South of Humber

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined  
Authority

Tees Valley

West Yorkshire Combined Authority;

West Yorkshire Combined Authority;

**Partners in Attendance:**

Steve Montgomery  
Nick Donovan  
Matthew Golton

First Group  
Northern  
Transpennine Express

**Officers in Attendance:**

**Name**

Gary Rich  
Charlie French  
Adam Timewell  
Chris Roberts  
Charlie French  
Gary Bogan  
Darren Oldham  
David Hoggarth  
Emma Young  
Caroline Young  
Jonathan Brown

**Job Title**

Democratic Services Officer  
Investment Planning Manager  
Head of Programme – Northern Trains  
Head of Programme - TPE  
Investment Planning Manager  
Rail North Partnership Director  
Rail and Road Director  
Head of Strategic Rail  
Senior Solicitor  
Senior Project Manager  
Strategic Rail Lead

**Item   Item**  
**No:**

## **1. Welcome and Apologies**

- 1.1 The Deputy Monitoring Officer proposed that as the previous Chair of the Committee had stepped down from Transport for the North and as there is no Vice Chair and a new Chair is yet to be appointed, the Chair of the Transport for the North Board Chair this meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed to this proposal.

- 1.2 Apologies were received from Cllrs Brown, Shore, Duncan, Waltham and Gannon.

- 1.3 The Chair placed on record his thanks to the outgoing Chair, Cllr Robinson, for all his hard work and commitment to the Committee and Transport for the North during his time as Chair and a Member.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

## **3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

- 3.1 The minutes of the Consultation Call held on 15 November 2022 were considered for their accuracy.

### **Resolved:**

That the minutes of the Consultation Call held on 15 November 2022 be noted.

## **4. Chair and Vice Chair of Rail North Committee and Rail North Partnership Board Membership**

- 4.1 Members received the report of the Head of Legal. The Chair anticipated that this matter would be resolved by the time the Committee meets again in June.

### **Resolved:**

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That Rail North Committee approves the change of one of the Transport for the North's representatives on the Rail North Partnership Board from David Hoggarth to Darren Oldham.

## **5. Rail North Partnership Operational Update**

- 5.1 Members received the report from the Director of the Rail North Partnership. Representatives from each of the Train Operating Companies were then invited to provide an update.

- 5.2 Mr Steve Montgomery provided an update on the current situation regarding Avanti. A recovery plan had been put in place last year and improvements are being seen, although there are challenges. He explained that the three trains an hour between Manchester and London had been restored. He informed the Committee that attempts are being made to bring more stability to the timetable although there is volatility on certain days and difficulties at the weekends due to terms and conditions. Avanti is working with the Trade Unions on these issues.

He then addressed the issue of drivers and stressed that rather than simply a shortage of drivers, the issue is a shortage of drivers who are deemed competent on the routes and drivers who have been restricted from duties due to long term sickness. He stated that the number of productive drivers is however increasing and that this is leading to a reduction in the number of cancellations. He added that the next issue they needed to address is punctuality and delays to services.

- 5.3 Mr Matthew Golton provided an update regarding Transpennine Express. He informed the Committee that the recovery plan has been submitted to the Department for Transport and explained that it sets out how TPE intends to resume reliable services. The plan sets out a series of actions and interventions across TPE which need to be delivered to return long term stability and reliability back to services. This includes measures to increase the number of available train crew to complete essential training, improving workforce relations, restoring reliability and rebuilding customer and stakeholder confidence.

The recovery plan assumes that there is no driver overtime working available and the target without that is to reduce crew related cancellations by up to 60% until the end of June. He pointed out that should there be any further industrial action then this will impact on the rate of training as well as the recovery.

He acknowledged that he and his team recognise that the current situation is unacceptable, and that faster improvement and recovery is required.

Regarding Sunday services, he explained that TPE is in discussion with the Department for Transport and the Rail North Partnership about how they can be restored to an acceptable level.

- 5.4 Mr Nick Donovan provided an update on Northern. Following the December 2022 timetable change approximately 3,000 additional services per week have been running and these are not reliant on rest day working. He then highlighted that during period 11 only 3.8% of services had been cancelled, including "on the day" cancellations, which is commensurate with the England and Wales average.

Mr Donovan updated on the current sickness levels within Northern; there are some local hot spots with high levels of sickness,

which is causing some issues on delivery. On Sunday services, he explained that 95% of crews on the west side of the business do not have Sundays included in the working week which impacts on the resilience of delivery on Sundays.

He stated that the resourcing position of Northern is in a healthy, with 1,790 competent drivers and a further 160 drivers in training.

- 5.5 Mayor Driscoll criticised the number of cancelled services by Transpennine Express (TPE) and the length of time it has taken to put a recovery plan in place. He also questioned whether the Government should renew its contract, highlighting the operational issues within TPE. Concerns were expressed that the situation is discouraging people from using the railways.
- 5.6 Mayor Coppard supported Mayor Driscoll's comments, questioned the confidence that communities can have in the recovery plan and requested regular updates on this. He questioned why a modern day railway is so reliant on rest day working in order to deliver services.
- 5.7 Mayor Rotherham highlighted the economic impact that unreliable train services have on northern economies. He commented that people no longer visit Liverpool at weekends because they cannot be certain of their return journeys. The economic problems are being created by a lack of a recovery plan and he questioned whether this is being built into the thinking, and how the plan will be monitored.
- 5.8 Mayor Brabin also highlighted the impact on the economy and the cost to the West Yorkshire economy of £2 million per week and the wider northern economy of £8 million per week. She had attended a presentation delivered by Mr Golton and stated that there was nothing in the 75 page document which convinced her that there is a recovery plan which would serve the people of West Yorkshire in the way they need to be served. She asked Mr Montgomery whether he is confident with the plan.
- 5.9 Mayor Burnham stated that this is not first time there has been these issues with TPE and that this illustrates structural issues within the organisation. He highlighted a similar timetable collapse in late 2019 where there was a huge loss of service. He observed that the parent company has never prioritised TPE and provided it with adequate resources and a plan to deliver what is required.

He stated that in the previous week prior approximately one third of timetabled services were cancelled which has a massive impact on lives. He expressed concern at the damage that this is causing with people more likely to use their cars causing irreversible behaviour change and creating greater congestion.

He added that this situation is also one for the DfT to address, as operators are working within their parameters and that better is achievable if everyone including government work together.

5.10 The Chair stated that the eyes of world will be on Liverpool during the Eurovision song contest and how people are serviced over that particular time will be of great importance.

5.11 In response Mr. Montgomery stated that TPE is also unhappy with the current situation and apologised for the current levels of service. Driver training is an area which is particularly challenging for them.; drivers were recruited in the lead up to the planned timetable changes but delays occurred due to the Covid pandemic . He offered reassurance that they are trying to act as quickly as possible and expedite matters but improvements are unlikely to be seen until the drivers currently undertaking training complete their training and begin to become available.

Regarding Liverpool, he stated that services are more reliable but more intermittent than previously. Plans are being made for the Eurovision Song Contest and they have been working with officers to make sure services are better for this time.

On rest day working Mr Golton explained that they want to move away from reliance on this. On customer care, he said that he is in discussions exploring what can be done to put additional presence in places that require more.

5.12 Cllr Little asked if a full timetable is to be resumed in May and if so, can be sustained. He thanked Northern for their solid performance in the area.

Mr Golton stated that that the increase from 35-40 services on a weekday would be deferred until December.

5.13 Cllr Hinchcliffe asked if TPE has been "hollowed out" by the parent group.

Mr Montgomery stated that TPE has had a lot of additional resources in and this had been the case for the last year.

5.14 The Chair stated that the discussions had been frank and the Committee had expressed their concerns and the very strong feelings of the people of the North about the service they are currently receiving. He stated that the service has not been acceptable.

5.15 The Head of Strategic Rail stated that following these discussions a recommendation could be formulated for the March Board which will focus on getting the recovery plan contractualised as the key driver to getting more progress, a desire for quicker timelines to restore services, monitorable and measurable milestones, compensation for passengers and the longer term actions around the training academy to

get that pipeline in place as well as having sufficient funding for TPE and the flexibility to develop and grow new markets.

- 5.16 Mayor Burnham stressed the urgency of this matter and that the Committee's concerns should be escalated particularly in view of the fact that the plan can be improved.

**Resolved:**

That the Committee notes the information in the report and the actions that Transport for the North and Rail North Partnership (RNP) are taking to ensure operators have robust recovery plans in place and to provide them with support and guidance to respond to current issues in the best way possible for passengers.

**6. Manchester Task Force Update**

- 6.1 Members received the report of the Investment Planning Manager who highlighted the key points within the report.

- 6.2 Mayor Burnham expressed concern about the bottleneck in Manchester City centre which is major concern for the whole of the North and has been flagged as a concern by the Greater Manchester Transport Commissioner and officers at Transport for Greater Manchester.

He explained that the improvements proposed to infrastructure in Manchester City centre are not keeping pace with the extra services that Transpennine Route Upgrade will feed into the city centre, so there are additional passenger and freight services that will come into the city as a result of the TransPennine Route Upgrade.

He stated that there is little confidence that the necessary work will be done to enable those services to be absorbed without displacing local services or causing major disruption. In order to illustrate his point he likened on the situation to a new motorway ending in a car park. Whilst supporting the Transpennine Route Upgrade, he stated it will only be of benefit if Manchester City Centre can safely and reliably accommodate the extra traffic that it will generate, but a plan has not been seen for this.

He stated that the plan has not been thought through and that it impacts on existing parts of the railway with the result that the big step forward does not arrive, but see massive disruption and which could lead to history repeating itself.

- 6.3 Mayor Coppard raised the issue of capacity and specifically the upgrade to the Hope Valley line stating that it will not deliver the improvements in service required for the people of South Yorkshire, particularly the third fast train to Manchester and the connectivity between Sheffield and Manchester Airport. He highlighted the importance of the connections

between Sheffield and Manchester and was concerned that these would not be resolved until late 2020s or early 2030s which is not good enough. Cllrs Hannigan and Hinchcliffe also raised the issue of lack of connectivity between their areas and Manchester./Mr Golton stated that he has asked for a fresh look at how greater connectivity is restored to Manchester Airport and will reach out to Members.

- 6.4 The Head of Strategic Rail stated that an invitation to the next Committee will be issued to the industry to allow provision for an update on the current position with the Manchester task force proposals. Network Rail is working on a piece of advice which is due to be completed in March. He hoped that this will provide clarity to the Committee and allow it to measure the position against the set objectives. He also suggested revisiting the advice made several years ago due to there now being more schemes in the pipeline and much more information about the schemes; now is a good time to refresh the long-term strategy for Manchester.
- 6.5 The Chair stated that the capacity at Manchester will be essential. He highlighted the excessive problems with Leeds station and is keen to avoid the same problems building up in Manchester.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That the early positive indications from the implementation of the December 2022 timetable change, with recognition of the significant effort by all parties to enable its introduction be noted
- 2) That the Committee notes that the Department for Transport has advised Ministers to move the Configuration State 2 infrastructure schemes into delivery
- 3) That the progress with the development of infrastructure upgrades at Manchester Oxford Road and Manchester Airport in Configuration State 3 be noted.

**7. East Coast Mainline**

- 7.1 Members received the report of the Strategic Rail Lead. The Chair informed the Committee that the paper is for information.
- 7.2 Cllr Hinchcliffe commented on the Leeds Study terms of reference and as the delay in their publication is delaying progress she requested that the Government be pressed to publish them because this is vital for the economic future.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That the Committee notes the updated East Coast Main Line Blueprint

- 2) That the views of the Committee be noted on the future use of the Blueprint so that it achieves maximum value
- 3) That the Committee notes the position on the Leeds HS2 Study and other East Coast Main Line issues.

## **8. Strategic Rail Report**

- 8.1 Members received the report of the Rail Strategy Manager who highlighted the key elements of the report.

### **Resolved:**

That the approach to the Strategic Rail Report be noted and the Committee endorse it as a supporting document for the Strategic Transport Plan.

## **9. North West Regional Business Unit Proposal**

- 9.1 Members received the report from the Head of Strategic Rail who highlighted the key points within the report.

### **Resolved:**

- 1) That Committee approves the establishment of a North-West Regional Business Unit
- 2) That the Committee notes that the establishment of Business Units was highlighted to the December 2022 Transport for the North Board consultation call as one of the 'quick wins' on rail reform that the North can take ahead of full implementation of the planned rail reform.

## **10. Transport for the North Rail Business Plan and Member Contributions 2023/24**

- 10.1 Members received the report and the Head of Strategic Rail highlighted the key points of the report.

### **Resolved:**

- 1) That the Committee endorses the approach set out in the report to the 2023/24 draft Rail Business Plan
- 2) That the Committee notes the Department for Transport funding allocation for 2023/24 and 2024/25
- 3) That the Committee approves the approach to the 2023/24 Member Contributions as outlined in this report.

## **11. Exclusion of the Press and Public**



To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of items 12 and 13 on the grounds that:

(1) It is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during such item(s), confidential information as defined in S100A(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) would be disclosed to them in breach of the obligation of confidence; and/or

(2) It/they involve(s) the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in the Paragraphs [where necessary listed below] of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

## **12. Private Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

12.1 The private minutes of the Consultation Call held on 15 November 2022 were considered for their accuracy.

### **Resolved:**

That the minutes of the Consultation Call held on 15 November 2022 be noted.

## **13. Train Operator Business Planning**

13.1 The report was received by Members who were then invited to ask questions and make comments.

### **Resolved:**

That the report of the Rail North Partnership Director be noted.