
Meeting: Transport for the North Board
Subject: Rail North Committee Update
Author: David Hoggarth, Head of Strategic Rail
Sponsor: Darren Oldham, Rail and Road Director
Meeting Date: Wednesday 20 March 2024

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 To provide the Board with feedback on the matters discussed at the Rail North Committee (RNC) Consultation Call on 21 February 2024.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 That the Board notes the feedback from the RNC including the initial output from the Accessibility Task and Finish Group, and progress made by TransPennine Express on their recovery plan

3. Rail Accessibility Task and Finish Group Initial output

- 3.1 Members considered feedback from the initial meeting of the Task and Finish Group which was held on 25th January 2024. The Committee heard that, at the current rate of progress, it would take over 50 years to bring all stations up to the desirable level of accessibility. Members considered two options for accelerating progress (including delivering step free access to all stations); on either a 20-year programme or on an accelerated 10-year programme. The Committee agreed that the 10-year programme should be developed and incorporated into a TfN Stations Strategy, to be completed by June 2024.

4. Rail North Partnership Operational Update

Avanti West Coast

- 4.1 The outcome of the Committee's discussion with Avanti West Coast is the subject of a separate report to this Board.

TransPennine Express

- 4.2 Chris Jackson from TransPennine Express (TPE) updated members on progress against TPE's recovery plan. He highlighted that the amended timetable (from December 2023) was working well and delivering the increased reliability predicted. TPE is on track to restore the full timetable from December 2024. Enhancements from summer 2024 would be targeted at areas where more resources are predicted to be available. Some driver depots were not yet at the level of resilience required in the previously agreed metrics and therefore uplifts would be focused on the other areas.

CrossCountry

- 4.3 The Committee received a business update from Ben Simkin of CrossCountry Trains. Mr Simkin highlighted the relevant parts of their new National Rail Contract (with DfT) including rolling stock and service enhancement plans. He also covered recent performance impacts including that due to storm damage.

Northern

- 4.4 Nick Donovan of Northern provided an update and the Committee noted it was Nick's last Committee meeting before handing over to the new Managing Director,

Tricia Williams. The Committee thanked Nick for navigating Northern through their transition as part of the move to Operator of Last Resort.

5. Infrastructure Focus:

5.1 The Committee received a report on the progress made in respect of infrastructure investment programme across the North. They noted that the cancellation of HS2 and the announcement of Network North had created a number of areas of uncertainty in the programme and that these would need to be given further consideration once a review of the uncertainties had been completed. The report provided updates on the Transpennine Route Upgrade, Hope Valley Upgrade, Manchester and North West Programme, Leeds Area, East Coast Main Line and West Coast Main Line North. The Committee wrote to the DfT and provided a number of suggestions aimed at better integration of the programmes and provide greater opportunity for local input. Suggestions which have been included are as follows: Transport for the North representation on all relevant Programme Boards, the establishment of Task Forces to coordinate work around Leeds and Sheffield stations and publication of an updated Rail Network Enhancements Programme.

6. Business Plan and Member Contributions 2024/25:

6.1 Members endorsed the Strategic Rail priorities to be included in the TfN Business Plan for 2024/25 and also the approach to members' contributions for the next financial year. These recommendations have been included in the proposed budget in a separate report to the Board.

7. Rail Outlook and the Strategic Transport Plan:

7.1 The Committee considered a report highlighting the significant growth which the rail network would need to accommodate by 2050 in order to meet the Strategic Transport Plan outcomes. It set out the key challenges faced by passengers and freight users and the types of interventions that will be required. TfN's evidence base was set out in the Strategic Rail Report which, following public consultation, had been updated to support the final Strategic Transport Plan. The Committee agreed to facilitate further comments from Members prior to a substantive discussion at a future meeting.

7.2 The Committee also considered reports on the Train Operator Annual Business Plans for 2024/25 and rolling stock procurement.

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 Any legal implications are included within the report. It is within Transport for the North's power to be consulted over the grant of rail franchise agreement for passenger services within, to and from, the Transport for the North Area and also the right to enter into arrangements with the Secretary of State relating to the management of rail franchise agreements.

The Rail North Committee on behalf of Transport for the North, manages the franchise agreements of 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 future viability of rail services and Transport for the North's future role.

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 Accessibility of the rail network is being picked up through the Task and Finish Group which reported its initial findings to the Committee. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in relation to accessibility of the rail network. Improvements to rail network accessibility issues will have a positive impact of individuals.

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)	DfT	Department for Transport
b)	ECML	East Coast Main Line
c)	TPE	TransPennine Express
d)	NPR	Northern Powerhouse Rail