Rail North Committee
Minutes

Tuesday 10 June 2025
Kala Sanga Arts Centre, Bank House, 41 Bank Street, Bradford, BD1 1RD

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Mayor Andy Burnham	Greater Manchester Combined Authority;
Cllr Phil Riley	Blackburn with Darwen;
Cllr clllr Peter Kilbane	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Cllr Cllr Stephen Harker	Tees Valley Combined Authority;
Cllr Hans Mundry	Warrington;
Cllr Cllr Jean Flaherty	Warrington;
Cllr John Murray	Westmorland and Furness;
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Mayor Tracy Brabin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Cllr McCormack (In place of Mayor Steve Rotheram)	
Mayor Jenkyns	

Partners in Attendance:

Tricia Williams	Northern Trains
Matt Rice	Northern Trains
Chris Jackson	TransPennine Trains

Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Lord McLoughlin	Chair of TfN Board
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Helen Davies	Democratic Services Officer
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
David Hoggarth	Head of Strategic Rail
Joanne Barclay	Head of Legal
Katie Day	Deputy Chief Executive
Charlie French	Investment Planning Manager

Item No:	Item

1 Appointment of the Rail North Committee Chair and Vice Chair

RESOLVED- That:

a. Mayor Burnham be appointed as Chair; and

b. Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe be appointed as Vice Chair.

2 Welcome and Apologies

2.1 Apologies of absence had been received from:

Councillor Gorman	Cheshire East Council
Councillor Mannion	Cheshire East Council
Councillor Shore	Cheshire West and Chester Council
Councillor Rollo	Cumberland Council
Mayor Ward	East Midlands Combined Authority
Mayor Campbell	Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority
Councillor Handley	Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mayor McGuinness	North East Combined Authority
Councillor Gannon	North East Combined Authority
Mayor Coppard	South Yorkshire Combined Authority
Councillor Hunt	South Yorkshire Combined Authority

2.2 During the welcome, Mayor Burnham noted that Members were awaiting any implications for transport across the North as a result of the conclusions from the Spending Review tomorrow.

2.3 Mayor Brabin requested it be noted that: following the cancellation of the HS2 leg from the Midlands to Leeds by the previous government, the associated funding was not directly reinvested into region

2.4 The White Rose Partnership (a collaborative alliance between three metro mayors to improve connectivity across Yorkshire) was focused on working with innovative transport solutions. It was reported to the Committee that Mayor Campbell had noted his intention to sign the Partnership agreement too.

2.5 Mayor Burnham noted the recent report from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) North that was supportive of the work being undertaken to improve transport across the north.

2.6 Katie Day, Deputy Chief Executive, agreed to circulate the report to the Committee, and confirmed that the report's key headlines highlighted the stark reality in transport investment between the North and other parts of the UK.

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 There were no declarations of interest received.

4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting 20 November 2024 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

5 Statutory Advice: Rail Station Accessibility

5.1 Mayor Burnham noted the importance of continuing to put this item at the top of the agenda, and the positive impact that was having. However, it was noted that the financial cost to ensure all stations in the North of England were step-free was more than £1.5 billion and that this Committee should be bringing forward the date by which these stations were accessible by thinking creatively; for example, looking at regeneration plans and considering opportunities through devolution.

5.2 Katie Day, in introducing the paper, extended thanks to the Committee, and the work of the Task and Finish group for providing much greater clarity on what needs to change to address the scale of the challenge for the North. The output of that work was submitted as advice to the Secretary of State, including some 'quick wins' for both accessibility and personal safety Once a response is received, this will be shared with the Committee and inform the next stages of the work.

5.3 The case was also made for greater devolved funding to the North to help speed up delivery.

5.4 The Committee was asked to provide strategic direction on next stages of the work. While the case for change was clearly articulated, it was acknowledged that associated costs would need to be considered.

5.5 The Committee raised a number of points in the discussion including:

- Starting in 2026, Greater Manchester (GM) would be integrating rail lines into the Bee Network as part of its integrated travel ambition and the release of GM funding (as part of the city region sustainable transport settlement) into station infrastructure would be part of that work. Accessibility of stations needed to be at the top of the national agenda.
- Whilst the work to identify costs had been started, a priority list could be part of the next steps to determine quick wins with costs included. TfN officers agreed to circulate the detail after the meeting, as this was already available.
- Members were keen to understand how innovation across technical and procurement/delivery of accessibility schemes could improve value for money and speed up delivery. They suggested a review of innovative techniques including evidence from other countries. TfN officers agreed to prepare advice for the Committee.

- The importance of designing solutions that were safe for everyone including women and girls.
- The question was raised whether grouping stations within a programme of works might bring down procurement costs. Assurances were given that the industry was looking at this, for example in the delivery of the Transpennine Route Upgrade.

5.6 The importance of reviewing equity, given some stations appeared to be accessible but were not in practice e.g. gradient of slopes and potholes could impact negatively.

RESOLVED

That the advice recently submitted to the Secretary of State be noted.

6 Devolution and Integration of Rail in the North

6.1 The Chair introduced the item by highlighting the Committee's positive impact, noting its voice had shown how a place-based approach (enabled by devolution) can deliver benefitsHe referenced the Committee's role in helping to prevent the closure of ticket offices, and the North's role in resolving the May 2018 timetable issues, as well as its firm stance on accessibility and safety.

6.2 The Committee was now in a position where it could outline its priorities to industry rather than having to advocate for its preferred direction. This shift would support the development of a more devolved and place-based approach to rail, which is expected to become increasingly relevant across all areas as the devolution model continues to expand with mayors being given a statutory role in future.

6.3 David Hoggarth, Head of Strategic Rail, introduced the paper, highlighting TfN's response to the government's consultation on rail reform which called for Great British Railways (GBR) to prioritise growth, with financial flexibility to support local investment and development. While the rail industry had engaged positively with the Committee, this had often occurred during periods of challenging decision-making. The current context presented an opportunity to clearly communicate the North's needs and expectations to the industry, whilst ensuring rail is integrated with local requirements.

6.4 It was proposed that TfN officers work with the Committee and lead officers over the summer period to develop a single view, capturing the North's collective aspirations for rail reform; and to bring initial thinking to the September meeting.

6.5 The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions. Points discussed included:

- Whilst GM was in the midst of integrating its transport system under the Bee Network, the Chair noted it is not intended to cut across transport ambitions for this Committee but rather work with colleagues outside of the GM

boundaries to build out the integrated system across the North giving residents better value for money.

- The rail industry was on the verge of significant transformation, characterised by evolution rather than revolution. Areas across the North were already covered by Mayoral Combined Authorities, or in the processes of transitioning towards greater devolution, with Mayors/local leaders playing a greater role in transport. The Committee has a unique opportunity to consider and influence cross-boundary transport, as part of its remit.
- Mayor Brabin welcomed the forward thinking presented in the paper and seeking to establish place-based approach to railways across the North. She noted that ongoing dialogue among Committee members was essential to fully understand geographical boundaries and the interactions between different rail infrastructure/services and GBR, guarding against any part of the North being left behind and ensuring the North can make decisions about its network.

6.6 David Hoggarth noted that in would likely take approximately 2-years to establish GBR.This Committee already has mechanisms in place to engage with industry, so this would enable the development of a clear plan by the late autumn.

6.7 The Committee agreed to invite Laura Shoaf, Chair of Shadow GBR, to a future meeting to articulate the views of the Committee from a place-based perspective.

6.8 Gary Bogan, Rail North Partnership Director, provided an update on the work of the train operators (which was also covered by the paper). He reported that, at the time of the Committee's previous meeting, Northern Trains Limited (NTL) had been issued with a breach notice under the service agreement due to high levels of cancellations. Since then, NTL had developed a recovery plan and initiated a programme of work aimed at stabilising performance and modernising the business.

6.9 A key concern raised by the Committee had been the reliability of Sunday services sourced from the North West, given volunteering arrangements. NTL had proposed a short-term agreement to conductors in the West ahead of wider negotiations, but this was rejected, prompting further discussions and action.

6.10 NTL, in collaboration with the Conductors' Union (RMT) and employees, had since worked towards a reset in relations. Ahead of formal negotiations being able to commence, NTL requires a mandate from the Government.

6.11 Tricia Williams, Managing Director of NTL said they were committed to delivering sustainable performance improvements. The first phase of its plan, titled 'Stabilising', had already led to improved performance since the start of the year. Engagement with staff and trade unions had been constructive. While the reduced timetable was not the long-term ambition, it had provided greater predictability for customers, despite continued reliance on volunteer staffing.

6.12 NTL's long-term priorities included reducing cancellations to 2%, ensuring customers could reliably reach their destinations, and delivering an inclusive and accessible service. Recent leadership conferences involving managers from across NTL had focused on accessibility and enhancing passenger assistance. A new Passenger Assistance App had been launched for station staff, supporting not only physical accessibility but also addressing broader barriers to accessing rail travel.

6.13 She outlined their ambition to increase passenger journeys by 30 million by 2030 and expressed a willingness to work collaboratively with the Committee to support local growth plans for the benefit of the wider region.

6.14 It was noted that the Northumberland Line, which had not operated passenger services since the 1960s, commenced operations in December 2024. As of the previous week, the line had recorded 350,000 passenger journeys.

6.15 NTL also confirmed that it was progressing plans to procure up to 450 new trains for its fleet. Driver training and broader workforce development were under active review to support future operational needs.

6.16 Matt Rice, Chief Operating Officer at NTL, provided an update on the wider performance improvement plan and expressed his thanks to the Committee for its continued support, particularly in relation to Sunday working arrangements.

6.17 The Committee was informed that the business had now stabilised, drawing on learning from TransPennine Trains (TPT). Regaining operational control had been key to restoring calm and stability. However, it was acknowledged that some parts of the network continued to underperform, largely due to the legacy structure of NTL, which had been formed from three separate regions.

6.18 To address this, NTL was progressing towards a new operating model, centred on place-based leadership. This approach aimed to strengthen local relationships, support better-informed decision-making, and broaden leadership capacity. Further updates would be provided as this work developed.

6.19 There was also a focus on fleet reliability, with recognition that parts of the current fleet were not performing to the required standard. Over the past 12 months, the leadership team within the engineering function had been refreshed, with an emphasis on creating high-skilled, well-paid roles to support long-term improvement.

6.20 The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions. Discussion points included:

- Mayor Brabin advocated for NTL's driver simulation training tool to speed up driver training.
- Clarity was sought on how overcrowding on trains would be mitigated, and provision of capacity ahead of new trains being introduced (given impact of

ageing fleet). NTL confirmed that analysis on where customers were travelling to and from was being undertaken to understand capacity during days and weeks, but the addition of modern trains to the fleet was the ambition as these would provide more capacity. The Committee was advised whilst there were pinch-points at specific times of the day, such as commuting and those going to school, many other trains were not full. NTL was keen to work with this Committee to best utilise the asset and work with more agility to strengthen around peak times, grow patronage and invest in future choices. The Committee requested sight of the analysis NTL has carried out.

- Short platform restrictions at Leeds means NTL cannot meet demand on the route between Leeds, Sheffield and Nottingham.
- A briefing had been arranged for key officers with NTL colleagues to discuss the interim rolling stock capacity issue and they would report back to this Committee.
- NTL was one of the largest recruiters of apprentices within the rail industry. Training academies in Manchester and Leeds host all NTL's new trainees and are rated 'good' with some areas 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Recruitment of train drivers and conductors was healthy, but modernisation was the focus.
- The Committee noted that the Bee Network had been designed to provide career pathways for young people, with opportunities for progression across the integrated transport system. The Chair highlighted the importance of considering the full range of transport modes: buses, trams, and trains, when developing career frameworks. He emphasised the need to identify core competencies across public transport roles and to ensure that career opportunities are presented in a way that is attractive and accessible to younger people.

6.21 Cllr Flaherty and Cllr Mundry left the meeting resulting in the Committee becoming inquorate. The meeting continued as a Chief Executive Consultation Meeting.

6.22 Chris Jackson, Managing Director of TPT, presented a short slide-deck (as included within the agenda pack) to the Committee that gave an overview of the three-stage plan, the stabilisation of TPT, preparing for the future and the transformation of the business. Thanks were extended to the support of Committee and the Rail North Partnership, TfN colleagues and rail partners in respect of the positive progress made by TPT.

6.23 The Committee noted the moving to 'Operator of Last Resort' was the correct course of action, when reviewing the cancellations graph within the presentation.

6.24 The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions. The discussion included:

- Overcrowding on trains at the weekend and the justification of First-Class carriages when the train is full. The Committee were advised that the data for last week showed that 4% of trains were over 110% capacity. Usually

operations are within a Monday-Saturday timetable, however, when routes had engineering works, routes took a longer diversion and capacity needed to be allocated elsewhere on the network. Discussions were being had on the allocation of First-Class carriages for new trains. Declassifying trains is the decision for individual conductors responding to the situation. The Committee noted that currently any tickets being sold as First-Class attracted a higher yield which in turn has a net positive effect on the amount of subsidy that TPT takes from the Government to operate. £160 million pounds of Government subsidy had been estimated to operate services for 2025.

- The Committee noted the willingness to review the timetables for train operators to consider any simplifications including the fare structure.

Councillor Peter Kilbane left the meeting.

- Mayor Brabin posed a question in relation to blockades, observing that some replacement buses were old, uncomfortable and not fit for purpose. This does not encourage the public to use public transport. The Committee was advised that statistics relating to the age of buses would be shared after the meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

a) TfN's response to the recent consultation on Rail Reform be noted.

b) an outline proposal for a reformed industry in the North be requested for consideration at the next RNC meeting.

c) the updates from NTL and TPT including the work they are doing to improve and enhance services for passengers in the North be considered.

7 Rolling Stock Strategy

7.1 Katie Day introduced the paper within the agenda pack highlighting procurement of trains for the future but noting that there were existing issues with the current fleet, as the meeting had already touched upon. She highlighted the planned briefing with rail officers to discuss the short-term issues, and thereafter provide advice to the Committee. The purpose of the paper was to sight the Committee on the planned procurement.

7.2 The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions, and there was some discussion on:

- The setting of the criteria for the procurement was a coalition with train operators advising of its objectives and that information being used by Rail North Partnership and the Department for Transport. Quality and price were both procurement considerations.
- The Chair noted that many trains would spend considerable operational time working in integrated systems and this needed to be reflected in the specification. For example, across GM, Metrolink standards would apply in terms of accessibility. The Committee was

advised that that active engagement had taken place with stakeholders and disability groups. Within the last month, new technical standards were issued on accessibility and that has been built into mandatory requirements with suppliers.

- The Committee was given assurance that TfN would review the comparison between the current specification and the ambition of this Committee in respect of accessibility needs. The point about integration of trains within an integrated system had been noted.

Councillor Phil Riley left the meeting.

- The Committee queried how the transfer of rolling stock to other operators or lines would be managed. NTL confirmed the expectation of stock to continue working with the existing fleet until approximately 2030. New stock would replace the existing fleet, and conversations were taking place with rolling stock companies. Any decisions would come via the Rail North Partnership, and presented back to this Committee as appropriate.
- The Committee noted a compelling argument would be needed for Treasury sign-off on the investment in new trains.

RESOLVED

That the update on the plans to procure new fleets of rolling stock for the North be noted.

8 Infrastructure Update

8.1 Charlie French, Investment Planning Manager, introduced the paper and gave an overview of the key messages noting that last September the Committee had asked for this plan having considered the State of Play and single overview document.

8.2 The Committee noted that the colour coded diagram within the report was easy to read and gave good visibility of the rail investment for the North.

8.3 The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions, and there was some discussion on:

- How the paper related to Northern Arc and the White Rose Agreement; clarity was given that TfN colleagues had been working closely across the region for full alignment and layered into the report these other programmes.
- There was agreement by the Committee that the report should be brought back for continued engagement; noting the interdependencies but also the baseline for the Committee to use in the interim, whilst there is a transition for GBR (GBR).

8.4 Members requested that all constituent parts of the North should be visible and the plan updated to reflect local proposals.

RESOLVED

That:

a) the updates to the State of Play including the introduction of the Investment Overview and the commitment to bi-annual updates to the Committee be noted;

b) progress with the development of Task Force Boards and Place-Based Groups be noted.

c) changes to North of England governance, and how this is informing the decision-making process and ensuring that the aspirations and needs of Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) for investment in the North's railways be noted.

d) further work to help secure the best outcomes for the North by working with the industry and government be endorsed

e) the sequencing of investment in the North's railways to maximise the passenger benefits and wider economic impact be noted.

f) the establishing the activities and investments needed to achieve the TfN STP ambition to treble rail freight mode share by 2050 be noted.

g) the tackling known and foreseen constraints across key network nodes and routes be noted.

9 Rail North Partnership Operational Update

9.1 The discussions from the agenda items on devolution and integration of rail in the North had given the Committee a full update and there was nothing to further to add.

9.2 Mayor Brabin asked that the rail operator CrossCountry be invited to a future Committee meeting.

9.3 Katie Day agreed to have a discussion with CrossCounty and Avanti rail operators ahead of scheduling time on a future agenda.

RESOLVED

That:

1) The report including the actions that Rail North Partnership (RNP) is taking to ensure operators focus on delivering the services passengers specified be noted.

2) The updates provided by train operators be noted.

10 Date and time of next meeting

The Committee noted the date and time of the next meeting:

Monday 1 September 2025 at 11am on MS Teams.

TRANSPORT FOR THE NORTH