

Transport for the North Board Minutes

15 September 2025
Kings Mercure Hotel Darlington

Present:

Lord McLoughlin (Chair)

Attendee

Cllr Michael Gorman
Cllr Louise Gittins
Cllr David Tucker

Cllr Phil Riley

Cllr Anne McCormack
Mayor Kim McGuinness
Cllr Stephen Harker
Cllr Carl Quartermain (Observer)
Cllr John Murray
Mayor Tracy Brabin
Mayor David Skaith

Local Authority

Cheshire East;
Cheshire West & Chester;
Hull and East Yorkshire Combined
Authority;
Lancashire Combined County
Authority;
Liverpool City Region;
North East Combined Authority
Tees Valley Combined Authority;
Tees Valley Combined Authority;
Westmorland and Furness;
West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
York and North Yorkshire Combined
Authority;

Rail North Authorities Attendees

Cllr Ingrid Sheard
Greater Lincolnshire Combined County
Authority

Business Representatives

Isobel Brown
Mark Rawstron
Natalie Sykes

Cumbria
Lancashire
West Yorkshire

Partners in Attendance:

Richard Leonard
Rob McIntosh

National Highways
Network Rail

Officers in Attendance:

Name

Martin Tugwell
Gary Rich
Katie Day
Joanne Barclay
Rachel Ford

Job Title

Chief Executive
Democratic Services Officer
Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Legal
Interim Strategy Director

Item No: Item**1. Welcome & Apologies**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and to Darlington. He informed the Board that several Members had visited Darlington Station prior to the meeting, where they observed the ongoing developments and improvements to the station. The Chair reminded the Board that the meeting would be his final one as Chair of Transport for the North (TfN).
- 1.2 Apologies were received from Mayors Burnham, Coppard and Ward, Cllrs Rollo, Hinton, O'Brien, Hunt, Mundry, Flaherty, Mason, Akbar and John McCabe.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Transport for the North Board held on 23 June 2025 were considered.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive provided an update on matters arising from the previous meeting. He specifically reported on the work undertaken with executive officers from the constituent authorities in preparing the proposal on the future status of Transport for the North. He also highlighted to the Board that there had been a further 22 requests in July via the TfN Offer, bringing the total to 67 for the current financial year. It was noted that engagement with constituent authorities had continued with a number of showcase events held with authorities, which had contributed to increased interest.
- 3.3 Councillor Gittins commented on the visible progress of the TransPennine Route Upgrade, which she had observed during her journey to the meeting.

Resolved:

That:

- 1) The minutes of the Transport for the North Board held on 23 June 2025 be approved as a correct record.
- 2) That the update of the Chief Executive, including the Quarterly Operating Report, be noted.

4. Regional Growth in the Tees Valley Combined Authority Area

- 4.1 Councillor Harker delivered introductory remarks prior to the Board receiving a presentation from Ms Julie Hurley and Mr Mike Crawshaw. Ms Hurley provided an overview of transport and regional growth opportunities across the Tees Valley Combined Authority area. Mr Crawshaw outlined the planned celebrations in the area to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the railway.

- 4.2 The Chair extended congratulations to Mr Crawshaw and his team in recognition of their work on the upcoming celebrations. These sentiments were endorsed by other Members of the Board.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

5. Spending Review Outcomes Update

- 5.1 Members received the report of the Chief Executive who then highlighted the key points within his report.
- 5.2 Mayor Skaith welcomed the Government funding that will enable the improvements to the A66 to be delivered. He emphasised the essential nature of the improvements and drew attention to the dangers associated with this particular stretch of road which is heavily used for freight movements.
- 5.3 He further highlighted the funding disparity between city region combined authorities and non-city region combined authorities, noting the challenges this presented. He reiterated the importance of adopting a joined-up, pan-regional approach to transport, explaining that such an approach would benefit the entirety of the North, provided there was flexibility in how funding could be utilised.
- 5.4 Councillor Gorman expressed his thanks to TfN for their support and assistance in strengthening the business case for the Middlewich Eastern Bypass, which had helped secure the funding for its delivery. He also noted the inflationary pressures experienced by his authority due to delays in the Department for Transport's approval of the scheme.
- 5.5 Mayor McGuinness expressed her support for Mayor Skaith and other non-city region combined authorities in their call for funding parity and access to appropriate funding streams.
- 5.6 In response to the Chief Executive's query regarding whether the Board wished TfN to make representations to the Department on the need to streamline and improve its consideration of business cases, Mayor McGuinness confirmed her full support for such action. She stated that delays incurred financial costs which had to be borne by the promoting authority, which in turn can lead to the cancellation of schemes.
- 5.7 Mayor McGuinness also welcomed proposed changes to the 'Green Book', noting that the revised criteria for assessing value for money will be beneficial.
- 5.8 She expressed hope for progress on Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and reiterated that full delivery of the scheme was the only acceptable outcome for the North East. Councillor Gittins voiced her full support, stating that the Board's position remained that NPR must be delivered in full.
- 5.9 In response, the Chief Executive informed the Board that the Chair of the Rail North Committee, Mayor Burnham, had already written to the Secretary of State setting out the Committee's concern at the pausing of

a number of schemes in the Rail National Enhancement Programme (RNEP). He added that Transport for the North would follow up with further representations to Ministers, emphasising that delays arising from the Department's consideration of business cases were increasing costs to the promoting authorities and delaying the realisation of benefits.

Resolved:

That:

- 1) The report be noted
- 2) The comments of the Board in relation to the Road Investment Strategy be noted
- 3) That representations be made to the Department for Transport (DfT) on the need to review and streamline the business case approval process.

6. Freight Update

- 6.1 The Chair introduced the item by emphasising the importance of Transport for the North's (TfN) engagement with the business community across the north. He reported that he had hosted several roundtable discussions on a range of topics involving key business stakeholders. He noted that the most recent roundtable had focused on rail freight and had highlighted the extent to which companies are looking to Political leaders to champion the need for investment that supports the sector.
- 6.2 Members received the report of the Interim Strategy Director who highlighted the key points within her report.
- 6.3 Mr Mark Rawstron welcomed the discussion on Freight. He highlighted the importance of the business voice and stated that it lends legitimacy to the Board. He added that the more that Transport Planning collides with the real world the better it will make it.
- 6.4 Cllr Gorman acknowledged TfN's support in exploring improved freight connectivity via Holyhead and enquired whether the Irish Government had been involved in this work to date.
- 6.5 The Interim Strategy Director confirmed that the Irish Government was not currently involved but undertook to explore the matter further and provide an update to Cllr Gorman.
- 6.6 Cllr Gittins stressed the importance of engaging with businesses to identify their freight-related infrastructure needs and expressed hope that TfN's work in this regard would prove successful. She reported that work had been undertaken with businesses in North Wales affected by the increase in passenger services on the Wrexham to Bidston and Liverpool line. She noted the importance of the public sector working with the private sector to make the case for investment that results in increased rail freight capacity.
- 6.7 The Chair reported that, during a recent roundtable discussion, he had extended an invitation to industry representatives to work with the TfN executive on identifying the challenges that need to be overcome.

- 6.8 Mayor Skaith highlighted the significance of movements to Drax within North Yorkshire, noting that it was of critical importance to the country as a whole but was also a flow that was inefficient in terms of its routing. The Chair stated that he believes that improving the capacity for rail freight is an area that TfN can help with.

Resolved:

That:

- 1) The key themes from the roundtable be noted
- 2) That the comments from Board be noted.

7. Rail North Committee Update

- 7.1 Members received the report of the Deputy Chief Executive who highlighted the key elements within the report.
- 7.2 Cllr Gorman expressed disappointment that funding for station accessibility remained centralised and that with funding only available to invest in three stations per year, the rate of progress was unacceptable. He emphasised the significance of Crewe station as a major gateway to the North, serving over three million passengers annually, and observed that it had not received any investment. Councillor Gorman described the current condition and lack of investment at Crewe station as a matter of national concern.
- 7.3 Cllr Riley supported the importance being given to improving station accessibility. He specifically referred to the slow progress at Chorley station and Burnley Manchester Road. Cllr Riley suggested that establishing a local delivery partnership would be preferable to the current national, top-down approach.
- 7.4 Mayor McGuinness addressed the issue of devolving accessibility funding and questioned why it continued to be retained centrally. She expressed concern about the pace of the national programme and highlighted the negative impact of inaccessible stations on communities and efforts to increase rail usage. Mayor McGuinness also noted the importance of improving accessibility as helping improve the safety of women and girls.
- 7.5 With regard to the East Coast Main Line (ECML) timetable, Mayor McGuinness noted that the upcoming timetable change will result in mixed outcomes, with improvements in some areas but the loss of stopping services in others. She emphasised the importance of unlocking funding to deliver the paused schemes on the ECML north of York to both help address some of these issues, and as part of the works required for NPR 'in full'.
- 7.6 Mayor Skaith supported the points made by colleagues with regards to devolving central funding on accessibility works. He asked whether a review of the current position regarding proposed accessibility works could be undertaken.
- 7.7 Mayor Brabin expressed frustration among elected representatives at the slow pace of the national accessibility programme. She suggested that

devolved powers over funding could be exercised through the 'Right to Request' provision under the Devolution Bill, which would allow Mayors new powers.

- 7.8 Cllr Murray highlighted several positive initiatives to improve rail services being developed in his area but noted that the full potential of these would remain theoretical while stations remained inaccessible.
- 7.9 In response to Mayor Skaith's comments, the Deputy Chief Executive reported that a Task and Finish Group of the Rail North Committee had completed a review, and the findings had been presented to the Department.
- 7.10 The Deputy Chief Executive further reported that a letter had been sent to the Secretary of State, setting out the Rail North Committee's concerns about the decision to continue to manage investment centrally. She confirmed that Transport for the North would continue to work with constituent authority officers to explore the development of a formal proposal for the funding to be devolved.

Resolved:

That:

- 1) The Board note the feedback from the Rail North Committee.
- 2) That the TfN executive would continue to work with constituent authorities to develop a proposal for devolving funding to the north.

8. Section 1 Corporate Risk Register

- 8.1 Members received the report of the Head of Corporate Office & Risk and the Chief Executive highlighted the key points within the report.

Resolved:

That TfN's corporate risks and risk management activity over the last 6 months be noted

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on Monday 8 December 2025 at 1pm, in Warrington.

Cllr Gittins expressed appreciation on behalf of the entire Board to the Chair for his leadership and contributions to Transport for the North over the years. She reflected on how the work of TfN had set new standards and tackled issues such as social exclusion and environmental as being integral to its work to unlock the north's economic potential.

The Chair thanked Cllr Gittins for her kind remarks and acknowledged her support in her role as Vice Chair. He informed the Board that it had been a pleasure to serve as Chair of Transport for the North. He reflected on the challenges and changes experienced during his tenure and extended his best wishes to the organisation for the future.

Resolved:

- 1) That Lord McLoughlin will stand down as Chair as of 31 October 2025.
- 2) That the Vice Chair, Cllr Louise Gittins shall act as interim Chair from 1 November and will chair the next Board Meeting on 8 December 2025.

10. Exclusion of Press and Public

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Item 11 on the grounds that: It involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in Paragraph 3 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.

11. Future Status of Transport for the North

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

Resolved:

That the report, presentation and Members comments be noted.