Rail North Committee
Minutes

Monday 01 September 2025
Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Mayor Andy Burnham	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Councillor Phil Riley	Lancashire Combined Authority
Councillor John Murray	Westmorland and Furness Council
Councillor Michael Gorman	Cheshire East Council
Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Mayor Steve Rotheram	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Councillor Anne McCormack	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Councillor Martin Gannon	North East Combined Authority
Councillor Carl Quartermain	Tees Valley Combined Authority
Councillor Ingrid Sheard	Greater Lincolnshire County Combined Authority
Councillor Peter Mason	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Hans Mundry	Warrington Borough Council
Mayor Oliver Coppard	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
Mayor Luke Campbell	Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority
Lord Patrick McLoughlin	TfN Chair

Partners in attendance:

Ellie Burrows	Network Rail
Warrick Dent	London North Eastern Railway (LNER)
Laura Shoaf	Shadow Great British Railways
Ben Simkin	CrossCountry Trains
Rob McIntosh	Network Rail
David Jones	CrossCountry Trains
Matt Rice	Northern Rail
Carolyn Watson	Northern Rail
Andy Mellors	Avanti West Coast
Robert Oerton	Grand Central Rail
Chris Jackson	TransPennine Express
Rachel Marsden	TransPennine Express

Transport for the North Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Helen Davies	Democratic Services Officer
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
David Hoggarth	Head of Strategic Rail
Katie Day	Deputy Chief Executive
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Keith Mitchell	Interim Finance Director and Deputy Section 151 Officer
Lisa Pitt	Deputy Finance Director and Section 151 Officer
Joanne Barclay	Monitoring Officer
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
Jonathan Brown	Strategic Rail Lead
Alex Woodall	Rail Reform Advisor
Charlie French	Investment Planning Manager
David Worsley	Rail Strategy Manager

Item No: **Item**

1 Welcome and Apologies

Apologies had been received from:

Mayor Kim McGuinness	North East Combined Authority
Mayor Claire Ward	East Midlands Combined County Authority
Councillor Denise Rollo	Cumberland Council
Councillor Peter Kilbane	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting 10 June 2025 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

4 Great British Railways (GBR) Update

Laura Shoaf, Chair of Shadow Great British Railways (GBR) attended the meeting and provided an update on the progress of the GBR legislation, noting

that preparations were underway ahead of the return of ministers. While no specific dates were confirmed, significant progress had been made over the summer.

She emphasised the importance of integration, bringing together track and train operations under a single, responsive structure. This approach allows for a streamlined passenger and regional focus, with empowered business units rather than large central teams.

The goal was to ensure those closest to daily rail operations were equipped to meet passenger needs effectively by thinking differently, demonstrating ambition to align transport planning with the needs of communities. Integrated transport plans would be key to designing networks that truly serve people.

Rob McIntosh, Network Rail's Senior Sponsor for GBR, addressed the Committee, outlining GBR's role in redefining the rail industry, including with the North, and its alignment with local transport plans. He advised GBR will operate without franchises or contracts, enabling a more flexible and partnership-driven approach.

The initiative is being progressed as part of the mayoral transport framework, with a mandate to collaborate with the eight most established Combined Authorities (CAs). This framework is expected to be in place ahead of the Bill's second reading in Parliament.

The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions or seek clarity on the update. Key points raised were:

- Clarity about how conflicting regional priorities, for example in relation to capacity allocation, might be managed under GBR.

The Shadow GBR Chair acknowledged that decisions will inevitably have wider impacts and GBR will seek to understand and navigate these complexities, ideally working with groups/partnerships like Rail North Committee (RNC) to consider trade offs.

- The Committee noted its demonstrative ability to speak with a unified voice on behalf of the North. The Committee noted the opportunities of greater devolution; the more responsive the railway was to the needs of local residents, the better. The Committee was keen to collaborate with GBR to ensure legislation was appropriately shaped to provide statutory powers at a place-based level (including as the North), along with a clear mechanism for requesting further devolution through GBR.

The Senior Sponsor for GBR noted the key question should be how capacity on the network was allocated. The current system stemmed from the early 1990s, a period marked by railway contraction and privatisation. Today, the ambition was markedly different. A working group has been developing a revised access policy as part of GBR, and GBR has actively facilitated the involvement of CA

representatives in these discussions to ensure their voices are reflected in the formation of national policy.

- Mayor Coppard acknowledged the challenges South Yorkshire faces in developing rail capacity compared to larger Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) with greater revenue funding and business rate retention. He emphasised the region's efforts to grow its rail infrastructure and build an integrated transport network, noting recent progress such as the tram returning to public ownership and plans for bus services to follow in 2027.

He highlighted concerns around resource allocation, not only in terms of rail capacity but also team capacity, which has previously limited South Yorkshire's ability to engage effectively with partners such as Transport for the North (TfN). Mayor Coppard stressed the importance of ensuring equitable collaboration despite disparities in team size and capacity across regions.

The Chair and Senior Sponsor for GBR agreed to discuss these issues in more detail outside of the meeting.

- Fairness issues across the network such as fluctuating demand (e.g. major sporting events).

- The challenge of representing deeply rural areas in the North that fall outside CA boundaries.

Mayor Andy Burnham noted that Bee Network rail lines would extend into bordering regions next year, and that the RNC provides a forum to work with partners and neighbours across borders.

The Shadow GBR Chair acknowledged the need for flexible approaches tailored to regional capacities, with further planning expected to emerge in the autumn. She reiterated the desire for partners to experience a new, collaborative model.

The GBR Senior Sponsor reaffirmed that GBR will be designed as an integrated and accountable body.

The Shadow GBR Chair emphasised the potential for a single change to make a meaningful difference in the North and encouraged ongoing dialogue among partners to support transport planning.

The Committee proposed that key points and model content is developed for the North to consider in relation to the Bill.

The Committee expressed a desire to invite GBR back on a half-yearly basis.

RESOLVED: That

a) the GBR update be received and noted

b) Key points and model content be developed, by TfN Officers, working with constituent authorities, for the forthcoming Bill for this Committee to consider; and

c) the GBR be invited back to this Committee on a half-yearly basis.

5 Rail Station Accessibility

Katie Day, Deputy Chief Executive, introduced the report to the Committee noting two substantive parts. There had been a response from the Secretary of State (SoS) regarding the advice the Committee provided on Access for All Funding. The report recommended issuing a formal response. The SoS's recognition of the challenges in rail station accessibility across the North was welcomed. However, the Committee may wish to seek further discussions on devolution opportunities, particularly around enabling all CAs to have the flexibility to allocate funding to stations where appropriate.

Secondly, in response to the request by this Committee in June, the report outlines potential innovations to speed up project delivery. Another issue highlighted was level boarding, which remained a barrier despite improvements in train design.

The Committee was invited to discuss the report further and questions were welcomed.

Mayor Burnham expressed disappointment with the SoS's response, stating the need for a robust reply from the Committee.

Mayor Rotherham reaffirmed his commitment to making the entire rail network accessible by the end of the decade.

Cllr Gorman raised concerns over Crewe Station's exclusion from funding, describing it as a national scandal given its reliance on outdated infrastructure. He questioned the criteria used for funding allocation.

Mayor Coppard voiced frustration that South Yorkshire had been entirely overlooked, stating it does not reflect meaningful devolution.

Councillor Hinchcliffe stressed that any underspend in the North should remain within the region to support local priorities for accessibility improvements.

Mayor Burnham noted the widespread dissatisfaction among members, emphasising that the current approach is inadequate. He criticised the separate funding pot held by the Department for Transport (DfT), which required individual bids and competitive bids, in his opinion, did not reflect a responsive or inclusive model of railway governance.

He noted the upcoming Devolution Bill, where mayoral combined authorities were being offered the right to request further devolution.

Mayor Burnham proposed two courses of action with associated next steps; firstly, that the Committee respond to the Secretary of State highlighting the concerns expressed. Secondly, exploring the right to request further devolution suggesting there was clear appetite among partners. He recommended considering devolved access to funding, either through MCA-managed allocations or a dedicated northern pot to prioritise accessibility improvements across the region.

It was also suggested that DfT be asked to identify major northern stations lacking accessibility plans.

Mayor Burnham noted that whilst innovation wasn't addressed in detail, it remained an important consideration for this Committee.

RESOLVED: That:

a) the allocation of "Access for All" funding to ten stations in the North be noted

b) the SoS's response to our statutory advice on rail accessibility (Appendix 1) be noted and a response be given by this Committee highlighting the concerns raised during the discussion including further pressing the case for devolved funding

c) the contents of the "Rail station accessibility: Initial findings on innovations to support delivery" draft report attached as Appendix 2 be noted; and

d) the "right to request" be explored in relation to devolution of Access for All funding.

6 Rail Network Enhancement Pipeline (RNEP) Update

Katie Day, introduced the report to the Committee, explaining that it was being considered by exception due to recent developments since the last meeting. She noted a shared sense of disappointment around the pausing of several significant schemes, including:

- the East Coast Mainline (Northallerton to Newcastle);
- capacity improvements at Sheffield Midland Station;
- freight gauge clearance between Northallerton and Eaglescliffe; and
- Midland Mainline electrification.

Members were invited to reflect and offer any additional comments they wished to feed into the upcoming Transport for the North Board meeting on 15 September, where a broader discussion on the implications of the Comprehensive Spending Review would take place.

Mayor Coppard expressed concern over the pausing of schemes impacting South Yorkshire, as well as the associated works affecting connectivity into the North-West. He highlighted the indefinite delay to Midland Mainline electrification in the North as particularly disappointing, especially given that similar works had already commenced in London. He also noted that the way information about these delays had been communicated contributed to wider frustrations and confirmed that he had raised these issues directly with colleagues in government.

Mayor Burnham emphasised the need for clearer timeframes to support wider investment in the North, highlighting ongoing uncertainty is not helpful for investors.

Councillor Hinchcliffe noted that any response to the DfT should emphasise the importance of Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), as several paused infrastructure schemes may be linked to forthcoming decisions on NPR. A timely announcement is considered vital to provide clarity and support planning across the North. The Committee and its officers were encouraged to view these projects collectively as part of infrastructure for the North, identifying priorities and advising government on a phased delivery approach. The response should also include constructive proposals to help ensure that none of the schemes are lost due to prolonged delays.

The Deputy Chief Executive summarised the discussion, noting that no further updates had been received on NPR with expectations of an announcement in the autumn, though this could realistically be as late as Christmas. Emphasis was placed on the opportunity to revisit and comment on the paused schemes, highlighting their significance to the NPR "in full" network, which both Transport for the North Board and the Committee have long supported.

It was advised that the Committee approve, via the Chief Executive's delegated powers, the issue of a letter, to the Rail Minister, copied to the Chancellor, that stressed the urgency of investment ahead of the anticipated NPR announcement.

RESOLVED: That:

a) The updates on the status of RNEP funding and the impact on outcomes for the North be received and noted

b) feedback/comments for the Transport for the North Board to consider as part of their response on the CSR more widely, be provided and

c) A letter from this Committee be drafted, to the Rail Minister, stressing the importance investment ahead of the anticipated NPR announcement.

7 East Coast Mainline Update

Martin Tugwell, Chief Executive, introduced the update, nothing that this change represented a significant milestone for the North, with benefits extending beyond communities along the East Coast Mainline. Members were reminded of the

importance of restoring a second hourly service from Newcastle to Manchester, which now depended on future infrastructure improvements east of the Pennines.

Ellie Burrows, Regional Managing Director for the Eastern Region, provided an update on the December 2025 timetable change.. She thanked the Committee for its support in unlocking increased long-distance and regional services, and highlighted benefits including faster journey times, improved connectivity, and over 60,000 additional seats. The timetable also enhanced links across Yorkshire, the North East, and Scotland.

The Regional Managing Director acknowledged previous challenges and confirmed readiness for implementation, supported by independent verification and a phased service rollout. While modelling showed a slight dip in punctuality, overall connectivity gains were expected to outweigh performance impacts. Passenger communications would begin shortly, with clear messaging around timetable changes and festive engineering works. The approach reflects strong collaboration across the rail industry and aligns with the direction of GBR.

The Committee was given the opportunity to seek clarity and ask questions.

Councillor Gannon expressed strong concerns about the impact of the new timetable on communities across the North East, citing reduced service levels at several stations and ongoing capacity constraints on the East Coast Mainline north of Northallerton. While acknowledging the benefits for long-distance travel, he emphasised the need for urgent investment and minimal engineering interventions to protect existing capacity. He recalled previous assurances from the Rail Minister, which lacked firm financial commitment, and reiterated support for the report's recommendations, calling for robust representations to secure improvements.

The Regional Managing Director assured the Committee that the focus since the timetable's deferral had been on ensuring readiness and minimising performance impacts, in line with previous commitments. She emphasised that teams have been working intensively to deliver the agreed timetable to the highest standard.

The Chief Executive explained that the paper was structured to provide reassurance about the readiness for the December timetable change, noting that lessons from the North's experience in May 2018 had driven a more cautious and collaborative approach. He emphasised that the deferral of the timetable was a deliberate decision to ensure preparedness and avoid repeating past disruptions.

The Chief Executive also highlighted the broader benefits of additional infrastructure works on the East Coast Mainline, which support not only local improvements but wider connectivity across the North. He recommended that the Committee reflect on these points and work with officers to prepare a response to government, advocating not just for East Coast upgrades but also for a renewed commitment to NPR.

Mayor Burnham asked whether the paused schemes could be considered within the scope of NPR, to which the Chief Executive confirmed they were indeed part of the preferred network. Mayor Burnham stressed the need to challenge the continued pausing of northern infrastructure projects, calling for greater clarity on timeframes and prioritisation, given their importance to communities across the region.

The Deputy Chief Executive agreed and confirmed that the paused schemes align with the North's preferred NPR network, supporting vital east-west connectivity. She committed to working with colleagues to issue a letter from the Committee following the meeting, addressing these concerns and advocating for progress, including the points made under the previous agenda item.

RESOLVED: That:

a) The Regional Managing Director be thanked for her attendance and update to the Committee

b) The update for the plans introducing the December 2025 timetable with the rail industry be received and noted and

c) A letter be sent to the Rail Minister to set out the Committee's case for additional funding to enable the delivery of paused infrastructure schemes in the North of England.

Councillor Gannon left the meeting.

8 Rail Reform

Katie Day, Deputy Chief Executive introduced the Rail Reform report that outlined initial thinking on how the RNC might evolve, following on from previous discussions back in June, and reflecting the level of devolution already achieved through the Rail North Partnership.

The report was informed by engagement with officers over the summer and built on earlier conversations during the meeting.

Members welcomed the clarity and ambition of the report, noting it provided a strong foundation for shaping future legislative proposals.

It was agreed that the next step would be to work with the Shadow GBR team to translate the Committee's aspirations into specific clauses within the forthcoming Bill.

RESOLVED: That:

a) the feedback on constituent authorities' aspirations for rail reform and the key themes be received and noted

b) the initial suggestions for how RNC could evolve be considered

c) how the functions currently held by the North may need to evolve/change be considered

d) following the discussions from the meeting, a proposal for rail reform in the North be provided for consideration in due course; and

e) Work be carried out with the Shadow GBR team to translate the Committee's aspirations into specific clauses within the forthcoming Bill.

9 Rail North Partnership Operational Update

Ben Simkin, Regional Director for CrossCountry in the North East and Scotland, provided a brief update on service performance and operational priorities. He reported strong midweek performance following the May timetable change, though Sunday services remained challenging due to staffing arrangements. CrossCountry was working with the DfT to resolve these issues ahead of the December timetable.

Capacity had been increased on the Newcastle–Reading corridor, with further service enhancements planned for December. Industrial relations remained a concern, discussions with trade unions were underway to reach resolution.

In response to concerns about overcrowding on the Leeds–Sheffield corridor, the Regional Director for CrossCountry confirmed that additional capacity introduced in May, and further improvements planned for December, should help alleviate pressure.

The Committee agreed to monitor this closely in the new year.

The Deputy Chief Executive concluded by inviting any further reflections on the innovation and accessibility report be provided via correspondence, and emphasised the importance of aligning the Committee's ambitions with wider rail reform.

The Committee agreed that CrossCountry should be invited to return for a fuller operational update at a future meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

a) the Operational Update be received and noted

b) the actions being taken by Rail North Partnership to ensure operators deliver services that meet passenger needs be supported

c) the updates from train operators provided in Appendix 1 be noted and

d) the Regional Director for CrossCountry be invited to a future Committee meeting to present a fuller operational update.

Councillor Murray left the meeting.

10 Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting will be a consultation call meeting via the Chief Executive's delegated powers and will take place on Tuesday 25 November 2025 at 11:00am, via Microsoft Teams.