Rail North Committee
Minutes

3 September 2024
Microsoft Teams

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Mayor Andy Burnham (Chair)	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Cllr Karen Shore	Potteries;
Cllr Rupert Swarbrick	Lakeland;
Mayor Steve Rotheram	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority;
Cllr Martin Gannon	North East Combined Authority;
Cllr Peter Kilbane	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Cllr Tim Mitchell	South of Humber
Cllr Stewart Swinburn	South of Humber;
Mayor Oliver Coppard	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority;
Cllr Stephen Harker	Tees Valley Combined Authority;

Partners in Attendance:

Ben Simkin	Cross Country Trains
Matt Rice	Northern
George Thomas	TransPennine Express

Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Katie Day	Deputy Chief Executive
Paul Kelly	Finance Director
Julie Openshaw	Head of Legal
David Hoggarth	Head of Strategic Rail
Adam Timewell	Head of Programmes Northern
Chris Roberts	Head of Programmes TPE
Charlie French	Investment Planning Manager
Caroline Young	Partnership and Programme Manager
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
David Worsley	Rail Strategy Manager

Item No: **Item**

1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and apologies were received from Cllrs Renwick and Ieronimo.

1.2 In opening the meeting, the Chair stated that he believes progress has been made and that a new era has been entered in the rail industry which needs to be embraced. He continued that TfN and the Committee now know what needs to be done to create a good standard of rail service with the focus now on delivery.

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 held on 15 July 2024 were considered for their accuracy.

3.2 The Chair invited the Head of Strategic Rail to provide an update on TfN's letter on potential Open Access Operators.

3.3 The Head of Strategic Rail advised the Committee that a consultation response was senton Open Access with the applicants copied in. The Committee were informed that responses have been received from the two applicants with both recognising the performance and congestion concerns highlighted. Additionally, Virgin Trains has confirmed that they are no longer planning to run trains through the Castlefield Corridor and are keen to continue to liaise with TfN and the committee as they develop their proposal.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2024 be noted.

4. Rail Accessibility Task and Finish Group

4.1 In introducing this report, the Chair commended the work of the Task and Finish Group and informed the Committee that their work is really valued. He acknowledged the significant amount of investment that will be required to make stations accessible but believes that the sum will be worth it in order to secure access to the railways for all residents of the North of England. He stressed the importance of being pragmatic due to the significant challenges to the public finances.

4.2 Members received the report of the Rail Strategy Manager who highlighted the key points of the report.

4.3 Cllr Swarbrick supported the ask for the devolution of the 'access for all fund' stating that TfN with its constituent authorities would do a better job of distributing the funding around the identified priorities.

4.4 Mayor Coppard enquired about the decision-making process and the prioritisation of work.

4.5 In response the Rail strategy Manager explained that the original intention, was to develop an overall programme, that would deliver the changes required. Economic analysis work has been done which shows where the biggest returns on benefits for the money spent will be made and has also identified the routes and local authority areas where there are the biggest gaps. He emphasised that this information hasn't been publicised in order to avoid people focusing on the top priority areas, as

the Committee and TfN want every station across the North to be up to the same high standards.

4.6 Mayor Coppard suggested that it is not just through an economic lens that the priorities should be assessed but other criteria including geographic equity should also be considered.

4.7 Cllr Kilbane raised the issue or rural stations, stating that whilst there will not be positive economic cases for these stations, they are vital due to them being a lifeline for so many people. He requested that this be considered in the decision-making process.

4.8 He then drew the committee's attention to the fact that some operators are looking at not stopping at certain stations due to the fact that the disabled access part of the train can't access the platform.

4.9 Mayor Brabin stated that a number of stations in West Yorkshire will become accessible as a result of the TransPennine Route Upgrade. She also suggested that as a starting point every other stop be accessible across the network in West Yorkshire so that it is not just East to West that's covered and that there are options for those with a disability.

4.10 The Chair observed that there are a number of big proposals being suggested by the Committee that will allow for the required changes.

4.11 The Head of Programmes for Northern Trains provided reassurance that a number of metrics will be looked at as part of the business planning process which will not only consider economic value but will also consider usage metrics, areas of deprivation, and will allow for a fair distribution across the network. Quick wins will also be looked at.

4.12 The Head of Strategic Rail addressed Cllr Kilbane's point about trains not stopping at a certain stations due to the fact that the disabled access part of the carriage being unable to access the platform. He stated that this is a situation at one station in North Yorkshire relating to the December 2024 timetable. He informed the Committee that this hasn't been agreed yet and that the Rail North Partnership has requested further information.

4.13 In summing up the Chair on behalf of the Committee endorsed the devolved 'access for all' budget for the North. He also requested that the North should get a proportionate amount of the £350 million funding available linked to the level of need there is and the level of inaccessibility of stations in the North. He requested that a set of criteria be developed that takes into account economic and social factors and that a set of balancing criteria also be developed to judge station need.

4.14 The Chair addressed the possibility of a devolved budget which he believes will give greater flexibility on work specifications and more importantly lower costs for the work that needs to be done. He agreed with Mayor Brabin that these works should be linked into projects such as the TransPennine Route Upgrade. Additionally, he suggested that something can also be done around station devolution and 'station as a place' which can be linked into work being done to stations in Mayoral Combined Authority areas. He also believed that with clever planning gain and building land around stations this work could be done without

any recall to public funds. He requested that this be part of the spending review considerations.

4.15 The Chair asked that the work on accessibility be submitted as quickly as possible and requested that the Committee be kept updated on progress.

4.16 The Chief Executive stated that TfN will get the principal ask into the system as quickly as possible and will continue to work with the task and finish group as well as keeping the Chair and the Committee sighted on what's being taken forward.

Resolved:

That the Committee endorses

1) The approach to shaping the implementation of works which progress delivery of TfN's accessibility requirements, including:

- Northern Trains (Annual Business Plan for 2025-26 and 10-year Outline Service Specification);
- TransPennine Express (Annual Business Plan for 2025-26 and 10-year Outline Service Specification);
- Network Rail (Stations covered by the Rail Network Enhancements Programme including the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) programme); and
- Network Rail (Access for All in Control Periods 7 & 8).

2) The Development of a new approach to bring together local funding (from Local Transport Authorities and Mayoral Combined Authorities) and work planned by train operators – starting with their 2025/26 Annual Business Plan Programmes and continuing for the next 10-years, through the new Outline Service Specifications;

3) Seeking devolution of the Access for All programme in the North to be administered through the Rail North Partnership Agreement, with funding devolved and 'ring fenced' for investment in improved accessibility.

5. Infrastructure Update including State of Play

5.1 Members received the report of the Investment Planning Manager who highlighted the key aspects within his report.

5.2 The Chair stated that this work is valuable and should have been in place a long time ago.

5.3 Mayor Rotheram expressed his disappointment at the lack of recognition that the Liverpool City Region got in the report as it has a vital role to play in unlocking the region's potential. He highlighted a number of areas of importance that had been missed including the Freeport and Freeport status that Liverpool has and the pressures that this will generate on the rail network and the two investment zones linking Liverpool and Manchester.

5.4 He then asked TfN to give more recognition of the significance of Liverpool City Region being a major hub and interchange and wants the two to work together to understand the impact on the Merseyrail

expansion which could have significant impact on linkages between Liverpool and Manchester as well as the possibility of them having different ways of taking passenger rail. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of the Liverpool Central Station scheme, which is a scheme of national importance, and the importance of the West Coast Mainline to the Liverpool City Region. He requested that TfN Officers speak with Liverpool City Region officers on these matters.

5.5 Mayor Brabin welcomed the Taskforce believing that the introduction is timely. She continued, that whilst the problem in Leeds has been identified the solution hasn't because the 'T ' shaped station is required. Referring to the Manchester Taskforce which has been in place since 2020 she asked about lessons learned and how the new Taskforces will work more swiftly in order to deliver for the regions. She also enquired how this fits in with the new landscape following the change in Government.

5.6 In addressing Mayor Brabin's points on the Taskforce the Chair explained that the Manchester Taskforce has made modest progress but needs to be a more place-based solution and not as rail focused. Additionally, he believes it needs to be quicker at developing the big solutions and work rather than there being piecemeal interventions.

5.7 Whilst expressing his support and keenness for the introduction of the Sheffield Taskforce Mayor Coppard asked about capacity and resourcing and how it will be done. He wanted it to reflect the priorities attached to areas whilst making sure that there is sufficient capacity in the system from the DfT and TfN.

5.8 Cllr Kilbane questioned the lack of Taskforce for the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority area. He supported Mayor Burnham's comments and the need for them to think beyond trains. He then highlighted that York is the third busiest station in the North and if action isn't taken soon then it will be at capacity. He acknowledged that all areas are competing for the resources to do work in their areas and raised the question of prioritisation.

5.9 In responding to Cllr Kilbane the Chair stated that if the bottlenecks can be solved in and around the big cities which will mean that everywhere else in the area will be functioning better as well. However, he agreed that the Taskforce based approach is an approach that needs to be used across all areas of the North.

5.10 He then continued with the issue of freight and asked whether it would be appropriate to have a freight specific proposal on freight flows across the north and how they can be separated from passenger flows. He highlighted the lack of clarity on this issue and that over congested networks are being used to carry everything. He then went on to highlight the 2034 date believing that this will cause chaos if not addressed particularly if HS2 begin running trains to the North without any changes to the West Coast Mainline. He advised that planning needs to begin on this and that improvements need to start being made as well as the Government and DfT being spoken to.

5.11 Cllr Shore raised the issue of the station growth plan by 2050 and drew attention to the fact that both Cheshire authorities had invested significant funds in developing plans for both Chester and Crewe related to HS2. Whilst there are other funding opportunities being worked on smaller authorities like Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester don't currently have the capacity to develop these proposals.

5.12 The Chief Executive informed the Committee that he and the officers have listened to the points raised and will take them away and revise them.

5.13 Addressing the issue of resourcing he explained that TfN are about to commence business planning for the year ahead and acknowledged that the Committee and the main Board are wanting to see action within the plan. Initial conversations on business planning will be had at the September Board and further conversations will be had at subsequent meetings.

5.14 On freight he explained that if the focus is on unlocking the economic potential of the north and its contribution to the rest of the country then the focus needs to be on the ports, airports, distribution centres, centres of economic activity. Additionally, TfN and the constituent authorities need to stop thinking about it in terms of modes and think about it in terms of what are the business needs to get goods and labour in and the goods and services out.

5.15 He then addressed the issues of delays stating that delays at Leeds station are the third biggest source of delays on the entire network in the entire country and therefore sorting out the issues in West Yorkshire and Leeds is not only good for the area, but also for the North and the entire country. Additionally, this work has highlighted the importance of all the interchanges and connections at places like Sheffield and this is why these areas have been identified for a Taskforce next. He agreed that Liverpool has a key role and believes that focusing on the really critical regional, and national blockages first would then help unlock wider connections across the north.

5.16 The Chair asked for a similar approach be taken for Liverpool as it is for Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield and asked for this to be considered and a proposal brought back to Mayor Rotheram and Liverpool.

5.17 The Chief Executive agreed to do this.

5.18 In responding to the comments made by the Committee the Investment Planning Manager addressed a number of issues. He informed the Committee that positive conversations have already taken place with Liverpool. Additionally, he was pleased that locations where greater oversight is required have been identified.

5.19 He further explained that TfN needs to be able to make decisions about present situations in order for short term interventions to be put into place and this needs to be considered within the context of getting the network ready for TRU and NPR which isn't currently happening.

5.20 Mayor Brabin enquired as to whether the work is being done in parallel with the Secretary of State.

5.21 The Investment Planning Manager stated that he believes that TfN are ahead of the Government on this issue but wants to make sure that TfN are working hand in hand with the government to ensure that different versions aren't being produced.

5.22 The Chair explained that there is a proposal for a major strategic rail interchange in Liverpool City called Parkside and asked that this be included in the next iteration as it could lead to a rethink of freight within the north of England

Resolved:

1) The Committee endorses the next steps, which include:
    - Establishing a Leeds Area Task Force a Sheffield Area Task Force and a Liverpool Area Task Force, bringing together industry and partners to oversee programme development and delivery in their respective regions.
    - Establishing Place-Based Groups for the key interchange stations to bring together work to support future passenger flows with local masterplans.
    - Developing of a clear set of long-term railway outputs for the North, interpreting the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) into train service requirements for the industry to plan against
2) That the Committee continues to make the case for TfN representation on all Programme Boards across the North of England

6. Outline Passenger Service Specification for Northern and TransPennine Express

6.1 Members received the report of the Transport Planner. The Head of Programmes Northern Trains and the Head of Programmes TPE then outlined the key points of the report before taking questions and comments from the Committee.

6.2 Mayor Brabin asked that the vision statement should refer explicitly to the climate emergency in transition to net zero as a priority.

6.3 Mayor Coppard asked to what extent is the passenger specification going to be driven by talking to passengers as he believes that the day-to-day experience of passengers is what should be driving this conversation.

6.4 The Chair explained that there is now a government policy that Mayors will have a direct role in specifying rail services within our regions. Whilst he doesn't think there will be a conflict he wants to ensure that this doesn't happen at an early stage and wants the TfN role to complement the Mayoral Combined Authority and local authority roles.

6.5 In response the Head of Programmes Northern Trains stated that they will look at the wording on Net Zero intention so that it linked in with the net zero targets that have already been set.

6.6 Addressing Mayor Coppard's question he advised that TfN are using existing information that has been gathered by Transport Focus as well

as local area Transport Plans which are being fed in first. Gaps can then be considered and tested in different passenger groups including any in local areas.

6.7 In relation to the Chair's question on the direct role of Mayors he explained that Local and Strategic Transport Plans are being used as the basis for pulling things together in order that they can be considered from a Pan-Northern regional basis. This allows TfN to identify gaps, conflicts and choices that may need to work and then priorities can be looked at. Officers in Greater Manchester are working with the team and reassurance was provided that officers from constituent authorities from across the North will be worked with in order to look at their strategic plans.

6.8 The Chair requested that in order to give clarity to this an understanding needs to be gained on the ambitions of the city regions around more devolved control. This will help build a picture and lines will start to emerge as to which ones are commuter lines specific to those places and which are the pan-northern lines that are in a different place for specification.

6.9 In response the Head of Programmes Northern informed the Committee that work has started on categorising what is national, regional and local, so that this can be looked at from a train services perspective as well as a standards perspective. This will enable a view can be built as to what is the national standard and what people want to see regionally and locally.

6.10 The Chair believes that there are signs that progress is being made on this and that clarity is starting to develop on infrastructure and services and getting the balance right between what TfN can do and what constituent authorities can do and how things knit together.

Resolved:

That the Committee endorses

1) The work on a new outline specification for Northern and TransPennine Express services as an opportunity to reflect TfN's focus on supporting delivery of the Strategic Transport Plan
2) The proposed revision to the initial Vision Statement, to better reflect Transport for the North (TfN) and government priorities.

7. East Coast Main Line Next Steps

7.1 Members received the report and the Chief Executive highlighted the key points within the report.

7.2 Mayor Brabin emphasised the importance of getting the connections from Bradford to London for the City of Culture as well as Leeds-Sheffield connectivity which was also echoed by Mayor Coppard.

7.3 On the issue of the May 2025 timetable Mayor Coppard enquired as to whether it is still the plan for a decision to be made on this in November and what will happen next if there is a delay.

7.4 Cllr Kilbane informed the Committee that when officers are asking about improvements to services along the East Coast Mainline, they are being

told that these should happen once the new timetable is in place. He asked if it would be worthwhile exploring any improvements that can be made away from this. He then sought reassurance that the new timetable will be being introduced as the delays being experienced are impacting on the local economies.

7.5 Cllr Swinburn expressed his frustrations about the delay in the direct link between London and Cleethorpes and the impact this is having on the local economy.

7.6 The Chief Executive addressed the issues raised by the Committee. He explained that the Taskforce is focusing on having the timetable ready for November however he was unable to give a definitive answer but would have a clearer idea later in the week and would keep Committee Members updated once the East Coast Taskforce has met. Additionally, he stated that he has been very clear with the Taskforce regarding the priorities for the North and committed to having a briefing session with Committee Members once the recommendation had been put forward.

7.7 He then highlighted the reasons behind the current issues with capacity on the East Coast Mainline, explaining that when applications for additional services were granted this was done on the assumption that that there would be a particular set of investments in infrastructure and some of this infrastructure work hasn't been done.

Resolved:

That the current position on the East Coast Main Line timetable be noted and that it is intended that there will be a briefing on the proposed way forward autumn.

8. Rail North Partnership Operational Update

8.1 Members received the report of Director of the Rail North Partnership. The Chair then invited the train operators to provide a progress update.

8.2 Mr George Thomas provided an update on TPE highlighting the improvements there have been in services particularly the reduction in the number of services cancelled which is leading to stronger customer satisfaction. He also informed the Committee that there has been an increase in the number of journeys that customers are taking. Additionally, they have been able to provide additional services including to/from the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

8.3 He explained that the company now has the right stability and is reducing the training backlog. An update was also provided on the procurement of new trains which is progressing well.

8.4 Mayor Brabin enquired about the stops that TPE were due to provide at Garforth and CrossGatea that got pulled (from the December 2024 timetable) and requested an update as people from North Yorkshire use Garforth in order to commute into Leeds and the removal of these stops could lead to overcrowding. Additionally, she requested an updated on the Sunday York-Pontefract- Sheffield service and how TPE intend to provide long enough trains from December where more services will be

returning and if there are delays the risk of overcrowding on shorter trains.

8.5 Cllr Kilbane and Cllr Swinburn asked questions relating to specific services in their areas.

8.6 Addressing the Garforth point Mr Thomas stated that detailed work is taking place on the timetable and some options are being worked through and he will return to Mayor Brabin on this.

8.7 On the issue of capacity Mr Thomas outlined how this will be dealt with. He explained that a number of interventions have been made. There will be a 12% uplift overall in seats and there will also be an increase in frequency of trains which will give more options and spreads the capacity more evenly over the train. He expressed confidence that TPE have got the right level right level of capacity to manage overcrowding when the plan is working.

8.8 The Head of Strategic Rail informed the Committee that the York-Pontefract - Sheffield service is a Northern service, and he is in discussions with Officers from West Yorkshire on this matter.

8.9 Mayor Coppard brought to the Committee's attention an issue with Cross Country Trains. Two weeks notice was given to a 13 week revision in the timetable where services between Reading and Newcastle have been reduced from 11 to three services a day. This route serves both Sheffield and Doncaster and has led to a 75% reduction in seats at Doncaster. Mayor Coppard was frustrated at the notice given on these cuts as well as the reasons provided which were related to a backlog in driver training due to Covid. He found it difficult to understand why this should still be an issue three years after the last national lockdown had finished. Mayor Coppard requested an explanation and reassurance that this is just going to be a short-term reduction in services and that it won't happen again. He also requested that these reassurances be given in writing so that he can share with the travelling public of South Yorkshire. Cllr Kilbane expressed his frustrations on this matter as well.

8.10 The Chair invited Mr Simkin to respond and invited him back to do a further presentation to the Committee at the November meeting.

8.11 Mr Simkin apologised for the late notice given on the short-term temporary changes. He explained that this work is something that they had planned to do earlier but the General Election and the change in government had slowed down the process. As a result of the delay this impacted on their communication, and he recognised this is something that they should have done better.

8.12 He reminded Members of the last time he spoke to the Committee and amongst the positive messages he gave he cited that they were having some acute issues with train cancellations, particularly around seasonal periods, and whilst they don't cancel trains on a frequent basis he envisaged some seasonal challenges particularly around holiday periods.

8.13 Whilst acknowledging Mayor Coppard's comments on Covid he explained that for them it is linked to driver training backlogs at their main depot in Birmingham New Street, where the bulk of their drivers sit within their

train crew establishment. He further explained that they took the decision in order to be able to clear some of the backlog and bring additional drivers into the business. He stated that they could have chosen to do nothing but believes that this would have led to greater uncertainty for passengers as there will have been a strong likelihood of more inconsistent cancellations. He explained that whilst this was a tough decision to take, he believes it was the correct decision as it will give certainty to customers over the 92 day period.

8.14 He informed the Committee that a customer handling plan has been put in place with the support of other operators, particularly at Doncaster, which allows people to travel with other operators where they have had a Cross Country only ticket. He reassured the Committee that this is this is a short term tactical plan that will enable them to catch up on the backlog of driver training which will provide an additional ten drivers in Birmingham when the timetable reverts back allowing them to run the timetable more effectively, reliably and consistently.

8.15 Mayor Brabin highlighted that a similar situation happened in Wakefield where changes were communicated very late and requested that lessons are learnt and that there is greater communication in advance of any changes so that these can be communicated to the public in a timely manner. This was echoed by Mayor Coppard.

8.16 Mr Matt Rice then provided the Committee with an update on Northern performance. Mr Rice stated that the current performance of Northern is not good enough particularly in terms of cancellation at weekends. He informed the committee that he wants to be more public about Northen's commitments to bringing more accountability to some of the things they can fix and asking for help for things they can't fix. He then emphasised the importance of positive relationships with the unions and how this is key enabler and helps to provide a healthy economy.

8.17 He then outlined a number of things they have been doing to help the growth agenda including preparation for the introduction of the Northumberland Line towards the end of the year, and some electric trains have been being run in East Manchester towards Stalybridge. He also highlighted that underlying demand is growing despite their core offer not being where it needs to be.

8.18 The Chair was critical of Sunday cancellations across the summer at a range of between 20% and 35% for the North West with these levels being higher in parts of Lancashire and Cumbria. He was also disappointed with the 'do not travel' messaging from Southport and Blackpool on a bank holiday weekend where tourist travel is vital for their economies for these locations on these days.

8.19 Cllr Kilbane stated that the cancellations in the North West have a knock on effect into North and West Yorkshire and across the region.

8.20 Northern's Recovery Plan was to be discussed in more detail in the private part of the meeting.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

1) Notes the information in the report and supports the actions that Rail North Partnership (RNP) is taking to ensure operators focus on delivering the services passengers specified.

2) Notes the updates from train operators and requests Cross Country Trains attends the November meeting of the Committee to provide an update on progress against their recovery plan.

9. Date and time of next meeting

Tuesday 19 November 2024 at 10.30am

10. Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Item 11 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 [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.

11. Northern Trains Recovery Plan

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

Resolved:

That the report be noted