Rail North Committee
Minutes

Tuesday 25 November 2025

Virtual via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Mayor Andy Burnham	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Cllr Stephen Harker	Tees Valley Combined Authority;
Cllr Jean Flaherty	Warrington;
Cllr Phil Riley	Lancashire Combined County Authority;
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Mayor Steve Rotheram	Liverpool City Region;
Cllr Martin Gannon	North East Combined Authority;
Cllr Cllr Tom Hunt	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority;
Cllr Anne McCormack	Liverpool City Region;
Cllr Peter Kilbane	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Cllr Carl Quartermain	Tees Valley Combined Authority;
Cllr John Murray	Westmorland and Furness;
Cllr Peter Mason	Staffordshire;
Mayor Claire Ward	East Midland Combined County Authority;

Partners in Attendance:

Shiona Rolfe	CrossCountry Trains
Tricia Williams	Northern Trains
Robert Bolton	Network Rail
Ben Simkin	CrossCountry Trains

Andy Mellors	Avanti West Coast
Chris Jackson	TransPennine Express

Transport for the North Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Helen Davies	Democratic Services Officer
Katie Day	
David Hoggarth	Head of Strategic Rail
Caroline Young	Partnership and Programme Manager
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Joanne Barclay	Head of Legal
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
Charlie French	Investment Planning Manager
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Keith Mitchell	
Lisa Pitt	
Nicola Spencer	

Item No: **Item**

1. Welcome and Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee to the meeting, noting the recent Government announcement of a rail fare freeze as a positive step for people across the North. He acknowledged that Rail Reform was approaching, with Greater Manchester preparing for rail integration into the Bee Network and the introduction of a simplified fare structure and looked forward to working with members to deliver improvements for their communities.

1.2 Apologies had been received from:

Councillor Denise Rollo	Cumberland
Councillor Lisa Hinton	Cumberland
Councillor Michael Gorman	Cheshire East
Councillor Nick Mannion	Cheshire East
Councillor Louise Gittins	Cheshire West and Chester
Councillor Eamonn O'Brien	Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Councillor David Tucker	Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority
Councillor Hans Mundry	Warrington Borough Council
Mayor Luke Campbell	Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mayor David Skaith	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mayor Tracy Brabin	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
Mayor Kim McGuinness	North East Combined Authority
Mayor Oliver Coppard	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 There were no declarations of interest received.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting 01 September 2025 be noted* as a correct and accurate record.

*Minutes will be formally approved at the next in-person meeting of the Rail North Committee Tuesday 09 June 2026.

4. Rail Accessibility: Update

4.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee and noted the ongoing priority on improving accessibility across rail stations and services. Whilst there had been recent progress, he stressed the need to accelerate work so that stations were fully accessible for all residents across the North.

4.2 David Hoggarth, Head of Strategic Rail, advised the Committee on proposals to progress priority actions from the previous rail accessibility report, alongside further work on level boarding. The Committee received the Secretary of State's response to the request for devolved accessibility funding, noting shared commitments and progress on the TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU), including three additional stations now expected to be made fully accessible. However, the Secretary of State had confirmed that current 'Access for All' funding was fully allocated, and further devolution was not proposed at this stage.

4.3 The report summarised the Railways Bill and accompanying accessibility roadmap. David Hoggarth noted ongoing assessment of the implications for devolution and future relationships with Great British Railways and the Secretary of State. A draft high-level submission to the Transport Select Committee inquiry was proposed, that focused on accessibility and safeguarding devolution.

4.4 The Committee was invited to ask questions and seek clarity on the report.

4.5 The Chair expressed disappointment that the Secretary of State had rejected devolving 'Access for All' funding. He noted that local authorities submit their own priority lists, but national decisions often override them, suggesting this was an area well-suited to devolution. He suggested the Committee consider how to set out a route map toward devolution in future spending reviews, particularly as accessibility could be integrated into wider station improvement plans such as those linked to the Bee Network.

4.6 Councillor Hinchcliffe raised concerns about the overall scale of funding available, even if devolved, and argued that accessibility should be embedded within mainstream rail infrastructure budgets rather than treated as a separate pot. She asked whether major schemes, such as the TRU, Northern Powerhouse Rail, or paused projects, already included funding for station accessibility alongside track investment.

4.7 David Hoggarth confirmed that while 'Access for All' is one route, major programmes like the TRU were increasingly incorporating accessibility funding. TRU initially covered only some stations, but further stations had been added following local advocacy, offering a model for embedding accessibility in other major schemes.

4.8 David Hoggarth noted that the Transport Select Committee was scrutinising the Railways Bill, with accessibility identified as a specific focus. This created an opportunity to strengthen the Committee's case for devolution within the proposed submission.

4.9 The Chair suggested that the Committee should set out what an optimal devolved model would look like, given the rapid expansion of mayoral combined authorities. He argued that accessibility funding should ultimately sit within devolved capital settlements so that accessibility would become a mainstream part of wider station and transport improvements, rather than a small, isolated national pot. He suggested seeking amendments to the Bill to secure this shift.

4.10 Councillor Kilbane supported the principle of devolving accessibility funding but stressed that accessibility should be standard across the network and raised concerns that non-city region combined authorities risk falling behind due to smaller transport settlements.

4.11 The Chair emphasised that accessibility must be treated as a basic requirement, and that devolved funding should be available to all areas. He suggested that prioritisation should sit at local or combined authority level, not nationally, and that the Railways Bill was the opportunity to set out a clear proposal for reform. He added that the current delivery process was too slow, with long delays even for approved schemes. He noted that combined authorities were increasingly investing their own funds as part of wider integration programmes.

4.12 David Hoggarth proposed strengthening the draft submission to the Transport Select Committee by:

- calling for accessibility funding to be mainstreamed within wider investment programmes
- seeking a clear route map whereby decision-making on accessibility funding becomes fully devolved so that the default for setting accessibility priorities is by mayoral strategic authorities.
- reaffirming the Committee's support for deeper devolution within the Railways Bill.

RESOLVED: That:

a) the priority items to progress from the 'rail accessibility innovations report' (presented at the last meeting of the Committee as set out in section 3.2) be noted.

b) the further updates including positive progress on the previously excluded stations in the TRU programme be noted.

c) the response from the Secretary of State (Appendix 2) to the Committee's request for devolution of 'Access for All' (AfA) funding (Appendix 1) be noted.

d) the publication of the Railways Bill (including a specific policy paper on accessibility) be noted; and that a high-level response to the Transport Select Committee's inquiry to share RNC's work on rail station accessibility in the North be supported with the proposed amendments highlighted in paragraph 4.12

e) the next steps set out in section 5 (of the paper), including working with train operators and Network Rail to investigate the scope for level boarding at stations and the planned accessibility dashboard to monitor progress be agreed.

5. Infrastructure Update

5.1 Charlie French, Investment Planning Manager, provided an update on the £15 billion programme of rail investment across the North, including TRU and upgrades in Manchester and Leeds. While these schemes would improve reliability, journey times, stations and freight capacity, they would also lead to significant short-term disruption, including around 400 days of impact on TransPennine services over the next two years.

5.2 The updated State of Play document now incorporated partner aspirations, known timelines and funding positions, and provided a single overview of how programmes across the North align.

5.3 Funding uncertainties following the spending review were noted, with some schemes paused or cancelled, though they remained important for regional benefits. Ongoing integration work aimed to align programme outputs, but choices on service priorities would still be necessary.

5.4 The industry had proposed five decision-making criteria for future timetables. Key milestones included early TRU and Manchester-related

changes around 2030, further major changes in the mid-2030s, and opportunities to shape services into the 2040s.

5.5 The need for adequate industry resourcing was emphasised, as current workloads were stretching teams and could risk delays or reduced ability to manage disruption.

5.6 The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarity on the report; there were questions around:

- how the proposals related to wider ambitions for Northern rail infrastructure, including White Rose, Manchester–Sheffield connectivity, and a Liverpool-Manchester link and whether the paper should be interpreted as the limit of future investment and whether decisions would differ if further major schemes (e.g., Northern Powerhouse Rail) do not proceed.

Charlie French explained that the paper reflected the investment currently confirmed through to the early 2030s, including TRU, Manchester and Leeds upgrades. The aim was to align outputs from these schemes to create a baseline that could support future enhancements such as Northern Powerhouse Rail.

- Members questioned proposals for additional surface platforms at Manchester Piccadilly, noting a preference for an underground option and highlighting the difficulty of prioritising while major strategic decisions remain unresolved. Concern was raised that piecemeal investment with incremental additions, risked creating a more complex and inefficient station layout, as opposed to a single comprehensive redesign.

Charlie French advised that additional Piccadilly capacity will be required in the early 2030s regardless of long-term station design. Short-term interventions would still be usable even if an underground station is developed later.

Katie Day, Deputy Chief Executive of TfN acknowledged the concern and noted that the paper reflected only confirmed investment and that future decisions would need to take account of unresolved issues such as Northern Powerhouse Rail. The Committee noted that further discussions with government and industry would be needed to ensure short-term decisions do not compromise long-term ambitions. In the meantime, any feedback from Committee members on the draft prioritisation criteria would be helpful.

Rob Bolton, Operating Strategy Director, Network Rail confirmed the need for clarity on the long-term vision for northern rail investment, noting that without an understanding of the long-term ambition, it was difficult to make fully informed short-term decisions.

- The following points were raised:

- the prioritisation criteria need to reflect inequalities, station accessibility and wider social outcomes, not just economic value.
- the practicalities of improving access to Manchester Airport from West Yorkshire via routes south of Manchester was highlighted, querying how regional priorities across the North will be balanced and consulted on when determining future service priorities.

- freight, noting that ports such as Liverpool and Hull have significant ambitions that must be considered alongside passenger service planning, and that that passenger and freight services should be de-conflicted wherever possible.
- the urgent need for investment on the Furness and Energy Coast lines.
- outstanding issues raised with the Rail Minister, including schemes north of York. How and when these would be delivered and whether government was awaiting prioritisation advice from the Committee. Members requested that any prioritisation be undertaken through a pan-Northern consultation.
- the need to separate long-standing, clearly needed schemes from those dependent on wider long-term decisions.
    - Members emphasised that the North should continue to press government for major schemes, including Northern Powerhouse Rail, Sheffield station expansion and Midland Main Line electrification. Also, the importance of viewing the network as a "northern growth corridor" and ensuring transport investment supports a single labour market, wider connectivity and access to jobs and housing.

Katie Day noted the points the Committee had raised and proposed to bring further evidence and recommendations on freight to the next committee meeting, with the intention of integrating freight priorities into the State of Play.

- Members queried if the timetable changes expected in 2030 and 2035 represented a return to the 2018 timetable.

Charlie French explained that future timetables will be based on available infrastructure and current market needs, not simply a reinstatement of 2018 patterns. Some previous services may return, but the focus was on designing the most suitable service structure for today's demand. He proposed reviewing the State of Play to identify schemes that were widely supported and ready to progress, and those that required further strategic consideration.

The Committee endorsed this approach.

RESOLVED: That:

a) the changes to the North of England investment plan as shown in the updated State of Play (Appendix 1) and including partner aspirations, be noted

b) it be noted that further investment or service trade-offs are likely to be required at future timetable points linked to infrastructure changes, and that the industry will require appropriate resources to deliver the planned level of change

c) Members views be provided on the proposed decision-making criteria to inform future prioritisation.

6. Rail North Partnership Operational Update

6.1 Gary Bogan, Rail North Partnership Director, presented the report to the Committee noting that operators continued to face challenges with rolling stock availability, but confirmed a strong joint focus on improving performance, attracting passengers and reducing subsidy requirements. As part of the annual business planning process, both Northern Trains (NTL) and Trans Pennine Express Trains (TPT) were working closely with the Department for Transport (DfT) to meet budget expectations in a difficult funding environment. Northern was progressing work to shift its cost–revenue balance by growing patronage, with promising proposals expected over the next three years. TPT was further advanced in this area.

6.2 Positive recent achievements were noted, including Northern winning the "Most Life-Changing Station" award for Ashington, and TPT winning "Large Station of the Year" for Hull Paragon, demonstrating the impact of new investment and service improvements.

6.3 The Chair noted the phenomenal growth in rail demand across the North, but poor passenger experiences risk deterring users. He stressed the need for operators to better anticipate major events across cities to improve service planning and deliver a more integrated approach across the network.

Northern Trains

6.4 Tricia Williams, Managing Director of NTL, reported continued performance improvement, with cancellations down by two-thirds on last year and performance tracking below target for ten months, supported by the current improvement plan.

6.5 The Committee was advised on the ambition for a seven-day railway, noting that reduced Sunday services, particularly in the North-West, remained a priority to resolve, with positive progress being made in discussions with unions. Fleet availability issues persist due to heavy maintenance requirements on older trains, though work continues to minimise cancellations.

6.6 Final tenders for new trains had been invited after DfT approval, with preparations well advanced for the major 14 December 2025 timetable change on the East Coast Main Line. Improved performance has driven record post-Covid patronage of 8.2 million journeys, up 4.7% year-on-year, supporting subsidy reduction and wider economic benefits across the North.

6.7 The Chair congratulated NTL on the efforts of the team and the clear improvements since Autumn 2024 and opened the item for questions.

- Members asked about high cancellation levels on the Blackpool–Calder Valley–York route, particularly on Sundays, and raised concerns about overcrowding and short-forming due to limited rolling stock. It was queried as to whether NTL has sufficient trains and whether units could be cascaded from elsewhere.

Tricia Williams explained that two-car units were the minimum currently available, increasing to three-car with new trains. Fleet availability remained challenging due to the age and variety of units, limited opportunities to cascade stock from other operators, and a temporary issue affecting part of the new fleet. Additional units had been deployed on some routes to support maintenance pressures. NTL confirmed it was working to manage the fleet as effectively as possible in the short term while progressing plans for new trains in the longer term.

- Members highlighted ongoing concerns about the Blackpool–York line, noting that it continues to lag behind other routes despite very high passenger demand, with significant reliability issues discouraging further growth. It was stressed that the line serves a large proportion of Lancashire's population and has strong potential for increased ridership if performance improves.

Tricia Williams acknowledged the concerns, noting links to new train availability and confirming that the leadership team will review the route, particularly Sunday services, which remained dependent on volunteer staffing.

- Members welcomed signs of growing rail demand and highlighted the need for greater capacity across the network. The Committee noted the innovative pay-as-you-go GPS fare trial between Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster, and welcomed the new hourly fast Leeds–Sheffield service, while expressing concern that it will initially operate with only two carriages. Assurance was sought that additional capacity will be pursued as soon as possible.

Tricia Williams confirmed that while the new fast service (stopping only at Wakefield) will launch in December, limited spare fleet meant further strengthening may take time. Demand will be reviewed as more data becomes available.

TransPennine Express

6.8 Chris Jackson, TPT Managing Director, provided a joint update on behalf of TPT and Network Rail, reflecting closer integration across the industry. He reported progress on major infrastructure works, including TRU accessibility upgrades, lift installations at Mirfield, and significant repairs to the Bransty Tunnel near Whitehaven, expected to complete by spring 2026. He also noted a strong cross-industry response to the recent Shap derailment and outlined substantial investment in earthworks across Lancashire and Cumbria to address climate-related risks.

6.9 Upcoming engineering works include major signalling upgrades at Preston, a new M6 rail bridge near Penrith, overhead line renewals north of Carlisle, junction renewals at Ardwick, and TRU works between Leeds and York, with efforts focused on keeping passengers on trains rather than buses wherever possible.

6.10 TPT cancellations had fallen 75% since May 2023, though further improvement is needed. Work continued on driver terms reform and Class 397 (electric trains used on West Coast Main Line services) reliability. Service upgrades including more Newcastle–Edinburgh trains,

longer Sunday trains, extra late-night services and 4,000 extra seats weekly across the Pennines.

6.11 TPT was progressing the procurement of 29 new trains, with evaluation underway and updates expected mid-next year.

6.12 The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions:

- Members raised concerns about the rail industry's ability to plan effectively for major events, noting that recent increases in leisure travel, such as those linked to the new football stadium in Liverpool, had not always been anticipated, leading to reputational risks. They asked whether operators were now working in a genuinely integrated way, rather than in the fragmented manner associated with privatisation, and sought assurance that planning for upcoming events such as EURO 2028 and the BRIT Awards was sufficiently coordinated.

Tricia Williams confirmed that joint planning with Network Rail and operators has improved, though recent events such as the Liverpool parade highlighted lessons still to be learned.

Chris Jackson acknowledged that there had been occasions where capacity planning fell short, including three Saturdays where services between Liverpool and Manchester were affected, but noted new processes are now in place to prevent recurrence. Both operators gave examples of increased collaboration, including sharing services during major engineering works to ensure adequate capacity.

The Chair emphasised the need for a stronger public-service ethos and more integrated, passenger-focused planning as the system moves toward greater public control.

- Members raised concerns about how major events will be planned for under Great British Railways (GBR) and future rail devolution, noting that decisions in one region can have knock-on effects elsewhere. They also highlighted the growing impact of climate-related landslips, which have previously closed lines for long periods and permanently altered travel habits, and requested a future update on Network Rail's resilience planning. Questions were also asked about how TPT intends to rebuild passenger numbers after prolonged blockades and whether more can be done to attract customers back.

Chris Jackson noted that TPT can add services flexibly for major events and is already doing so for occasions such as the Edinburgh Fringe and Co-op Live. Significant work was underway across the network to address landslip risks, and a more detailed update can be provided at a future meeting. On patronage, TPT reported strong underlying growth, around 10% year-on-year, but acknowledged that extensive engineering work (444 days over two years) was suppressing demand.

Tricia Williams noted industry-wide work was ongoing to identify climate-related hotspots, and proposed bringing a fuller update back to the Committee on this subject.

Avanti West Coast

6.13 Andy Mellors, Managing Director, Avanti West Coast provided a short presentation to the Committee. The Committee noted that since 2023, the focus had been on delivering a more dependable service, with cancellations significantly reduced, though punctuality remains challenging and is being addressed through a joint improvement plan with Network Rail and other operators.

6.14 Further timetable uplifts are planned for December, increasing service frequency. January's major engineering works will be supported by shuttle services to maintain connectivity.

6.15 Avanti West Coast has completed its new fleet rollout and refurbishments, strengthened staffing, and delivered customer-experience training. Work continued on adapting fares and loyalty products for a leisure-focused market and improving stations, with recent recognition for quality.

6.16 Andy Mellors highlighted strong social value delivery and confirmed that the priority remains improving punctuality and reliability while working with regional partners to support economic growth.

- Members welcomed progress since the post-pandemic period but raised concerns about low punctuality levels, noting that only 64% of services are on time.

Andy Mellors explained that a joint performance strategy with Network Rail included over 100 actions to improve reliability, alongside timetable adjustments planned for December to support better punctuality. However, challenges remained, including recent access rights refusals by the Office of Rail and Road and the wider tension between running high service volumes and maintaining network resilience, an issue that GBR will need to address.

CrossCountry Trains

6.17 Shiona Rolfe, Managing Director, CrossCountry Trains, outlined that CrossCountry has made strong progress since early 2024, with passenger numbers up 15% year-on-year and reliability, capacity, and customer experience significantly improved. Extra seating and more train-crew recruitment cut cancellations by 30% despite running more services. Collaboration with other operators has eased overcrowding, weekday cancellations halved, satisfaction improved, and targeted fixes like better Wi-Fi and ticketing reduced delays.

6.18 Further capacity would be added in the December timetable. The Voyager fleet refurbishment programme had begun, with all 70 units to be upgraded over the next two years, alongside refurbishment of Class 170s. Work was also underway with the DfT to develop the business case for new rolling stock to replace the Voyager fleet.

6.19 CrossCountry will introduce a reduced but reliable Sunday timetable from December to stabilise performance, while working with unions and the DfT on long-term reform. The operator is also managing an ongoing RMT dispute and seeking a negotiated resolution to prevent further disruption.

6.20 The Chair welcomed Shiona Rolfe to her first committee meeting, noting that her update reflected similar improvements reported by other operators, while recognising that further progress was still needed.

RESOLVED: That:

a) the information in the report including the actions that Rail North Partnership (RNP) is taking to ensure operators focus on delivering the services passengers need be received and noted.

b) the updates from train operators at Appendix 1 be received and noted.

c) that representatives from CrossCountry and Avanti West Coast be thanked for attending the meeting alongside NTL and TPT.

7. 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 17 February 2026 at 11:00am, via Microsoft Teams.