

Transport for the North Board Minutes

8 December 2025

Microsoft Teams

Present:

Attendee

Cllr Louise Gittins (Chair)
Cllr Michael Gorman
Cllr Denise Rollo
Mayor Andy Burnham

Cllr Davud Tucker

Cllr Phil Riley

Mayor Steve Rotheram
Cllr Anne McCormack (Observer)
Mayor Kim McGuinness
Cllr Stephen Harker
Cllr Jean Flaherty
Cllr John Murray
Mayor Tracy Brabin
Mayir David Skaith

Local Authority

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

Rail North Authorities Attendees

Mayor Claire Ward	East Midland Combined County Authority;
Councillor Ingrid Sheard	Greater Lincolnshire

Business Representatives Attendees

Natalie Sykes	West Yorkshire Business Representative
Mark Rawstron	Lancashire Business Representative

Partners in Attendance:

Rob McIntosh	Network Rail
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Officers in Attendance:

Name	Job Title
Martin Tugwell	Chief Executive
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Katie Day	Deputy Chief Executive
Gary Bogan	Director Rail North Partnership
Joanne Barclay	Head of Legal & Democratic Services
Keith Mitchell	Interim Finance Director
Lisa Pitt	Interim 151 Officer
Rachel Ford	Interim Strategy Director

Item No: Item

1. Welcome & Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. The Chair confirmed that the meeting had been arranged online to facilitate attendance given the importance and urgency of the matters to be discussed later on the agenda. She further confirmed that the meeting was being held as a consultation call under the Chief Executive's delegated powers.
- 1.2 Apologies were received from Mayor Coppard, Mayor Jenkyns, Councillors Hunt and Mason, Isobel Brown, John McCabe, Nick Harris, and Amy Williams. Apologies were also received from Councillor Mundry and Mandy Ridyard, who both sent substitutes to represent them.

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 (TfN) Board held on 15 September 2025 were considered.
- 3.2 The Chief Executive's update and copy of the quarterly operating report were provided for information.
- 3.3 It was noted that:
- It was proposed that TfN write in support of the next Transport and Works Act Order (TWAo) required for the Transpennine Route Upgrade: this was consistent with TfN's approach with previous TWAo applications for the project.
 - The constitution would be updated to reflect the implications of further Mayoral Strategic Authorities once established. This update would be undertaken using the Monitoring Officer's delegated authority in consultation with the Chief Executive.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the TfN Board held on 15 September 2025 be noted* as a correct and accurate record.

*The minutes will be formally approved at the next in-person meeting of the Board on Monday 16 March 2026.

4. Northern Appraisal Playbook Phase 2 Update

- 4.1 Members received the report from the Interim Strategy Director. She reminded the Board that in March 2025, TfN officers had presented Phase One of the Northern Appraisal Playbook. This provided hints and tips to assist constituent authorities in making best use of the flexibilities that already exist within the appraisal framework that help strengthen northern business cases.
- 4.2 She reminded the Board that the Board had previously written to the Chancellor, outlining more fundamental concerns with the appraisal system. This was with the intention of seeking to influence any subsequent revision of the Green Book following its review by HMT officials.
- 4.3 Mr Rawstron, noted longstanding concerns that the Green Book was unfit for purpose, particularly for Northern projects. He commented that the current focus for many infrastructure proposals was mainly on new housing and argued that greater emphasis should be given as to how investment in transport is required to unlock mixed use and included commercial development.
- 4.4 Mayor Burnham noted the need to challenge assumptions about job displacement within the UK, emphasising that such arguments could limit efforts to attract foreign direct investment to the North.
- 4.5 He highlighted the importance of any revision to the Green Book enabling the wider regeneration benefits of transport investment. He cited the designation of Ashton and Stalybridge as locations for regeneration being linked to investment in delivering the Bee Network Rail.
- 4.6 He also queried historic inequalities in the way 'lost time travelling' on northern journeys was considered compared to the South. He queried whether this had been corrected and stressed the importance of addressing it. He also emphasised the disproportionately higher impact that investment in transport services can have for lower-wage workers, including but not limited to carers.
- 4.7 In a similar vein, Cllr Rollo stressed the need to ensure the wider benefit of investment in rural transport services is better reflected in business cases, noting that low population density affects cost-benefit ratios. She highlighted the importance of access to essential services like healthcare and pointed out the economic value of Cumbria's tourism and seasonal transport needs.
- 4.8 The Interim Strategy Director noted that the focus on housing for many business cases reflected successive Government's priority on housing delivery. She emphasised that the advice in the Northern Appraisal Playbook applied equally to proposals enabling commercial development.

She explained that work was ongoing with constituent authorities to ensure the issues associated with rural business cases are recognised, and partners engaged.

- 4.9 The Director explained that the question of valuation of northern journeys compared to London raised an equality issue. Many northern journeys are associated with lower-paid roles and/or caring responsibilities. The importance of addressing this issue had been included in the advice to Treasury. She continued by stating that input from academia had been sought, and further research was required.
- 4.10 The Chair asked the Interim Strategy Director to consider whether the appendices with examples would reflect the breadth of the discussion. The Interim Strategy Director agreed to consider this, whilst at the same time noting the input to date from officers across the North.

Resolved:

That:

- 1) That the Board's feedback on the draft letter to HM Treasury, which identifies further recommendations for appraisal reform for consideration as part of the revised Green Book due to be published in early 2026, be noted.
- 2) That the Board's support for the proposal to share the research report with HM Treasury officials be noted.
- 3) That the Board approves the submission of the letter to HM Treasury prior to Christmas.

5. Transport for the North Offer Update

- 5.1 Members received the report from the Interim Strategy Director who highlighted the key points in the report.
- 5.2 The Chair noted the report and welcomed the visibility provided by the report regarding the extent to which use of the TfN Offer by constituent authorities had grown significantly. The Chair highlighted how the examples of support provided and the benefits it had brought helped bring the report to life. The Chair thanked officers for their work.

Resolved:

That:

- 1) The continued development of the TfN Offer be noted.
- 2) The Board's comment on plans for further work to align outputs with partner's requirements and priorities be noted.

6. Rail North Committee Update

- 6.1 Board received the report of the Head of Strategic Rail following the most recent Committee meeting.
- 6.2 The Chair invited Mayor Burnham as the Chair of the Committee to provide an overview of the meeting.

- 6.3 Mayor Burnham updated the Board on three key items: work to improve rail accessibility; infrastructure overview; and the operational update from the Train Operating Companies (TOCs)
- 6.4 Mayor Burnham reiterated that improving rail station accessibility remained the Committee's top priority. He expressed concern that accessibility improvements had long been treated as a low priority and called for a fundamental change in industry thinking.
- 6.5 He reported that the Committee's request to the Secretary of State to devolve Access for All funding had been refused, the Department citing that all funding had already been allocated. Mayor Burnham noted that the current system often disregarded local priorities and described the decision as disappointing. He stressed the need for the funding available nationally to improve accessibility to be aligned with that held by MCAs and their partners to support regeneration and housing development centred on stations. He concluded that the issue remained unresolved for the Committee and it would continue to make the case for reform.
- 6.6 Mayor McGuinness expressed disappointment at the refusal of the devolution request and thanked Mayor Burnham for championing the cause. She noted that station accessibility levels remained extremely low and questioned how this could be acceptable nationally. She referred to her own local right to request submission, which had gone further by seeking responsibility for stations more broadly, beyond accessibility alone.
- 6.7 Mayor McGuinness asked if TfN or the Rail North Committee received updates from the DfT on delivery of the Access for All programme. She emphasised shared ambitions such as improving station appeal and accessibility, devolving funding, creating retail opportunities, fostering economic growth, and utilising station land assets to support wider growth and spatial planning.
- 6.8 Mayor Burnham stressed the importance of Mayor McGuinness's point, noting that rail station devolution was sought as part of the original 2015 Greater Manchester Devolution Deal but this was reversed by the then Secretary of State in 2017/18. He explained the current focus is on partnership working for station development, considering land needed for railway operations.
- 6.9 Mr Rob McIntosh commented on how there are various ways to seek station devolution, citing Merseyside as an example, which was pursuing devolution for ten stations. He noted that Network Rail had previously divested assets to local authorities where a strong case had been made.
- 6.10 Mayor Burnham emphasised that the Committee continues to call for Access for All funding to be devolved. He noted that the overall funding available is insufficient and called for urgent reform.
- 6.11 The Chair inquired whether a collective letter from all northern authorities regarding devolution of Access for All funding would be considered helpful.

- 6.12 The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the issue had been raised through TfN's submission to the Transport Select Committee's Railway Bill inquiry, the call for which had made specific reference to the issue of accessibility. She confirmed that the Committee were continuing to follow up on its correspondence with the Secretary of State.
- 6.13 Mayor Burnham noted that the Railway Bill was scheduled for its second reading in the House of Commons the following day. He suggested that the Chair write to all northern MPs, highlighting the benefit of devolving Access for All funding. He acknowledged the limited time available but considered the proposal worthwhile.
- 6.14 The Chair agreed that an urgent email to all MPs would be helpful and asked the TfN executive prepare and issue the communication. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that this was feasible in the time available by making use of existing material.
- 6.15 Mayor Burnham then updated the Board on the conversations the Committee had had on infrastructure investment. It was noted that the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) continued to make good progress and was reported to be on time and on budget. It was acknowledged that this was a significant achievement given current pressures within the industry.
- 6.16 Mayor Burnham noted ongoing uncertainty around major rail projects, including Liverpool–Manchester connectivity, Northern Powerhouse Rail, HS2, and a long-term solution to the challenges of the West Coast Mainline, as well as issues east of the Pennines such as the need to address long-standing capacity constraints at Leeds Station. He outlined how the Rail North Committee is working with the industry to develop a single overview of the role for the North's rail system to guide decisions on short, medium, and long-term priorities.
- 6.17 Mayor Brabin welcomed the news that Transpennine Upgrade continued to be on time and on budget, showing the North's capability to deliver major infrastructure projects. She urged Government to confirm next steps on Northern Powerhouse Rail, noting opportunities for further accessibility improvements as part of that investment.
- 6.18 She argued for large-scale infrastructure commitments rather than piecemeal fixes, at individual stations, were necessary to make significant inroads into improving accessibility.
- 6.19 Mayor Burnham noted the ongoing uncertainty about an announcement on Northern Powerhouse Rail before the holiday break and questioned whether any forthcoming announcement would meet expectations.
- 6.20 The Deputy Chief Executive stressed that decisions on investment should align with long-term ambitions and avoid short-term fixes that could compromise future goals.
- 6.21 Mayor Burnham then summarised the key messages the Committee had received through the operational updates from the TOCs.

Northern:

- 6.22 Representatives from Northern had reported that there had been significant operational improvements compared to the same period last year. Cancellations had reduced, although overcrowding continued to present challenges for passengers. It was reported that work to secure agreement on including Sunday as part of the working week was continuing. The earliest this might be resolved would be early in the New Year. The Committee acknowledged the improvements in Northern's performance.

TransPennine Express:

- 6.23 TPE had experienced a challenging autumn and winter period, with high demand in the leisure market and significant weekend demand. However, the timetable lacked resilience, resulting in numerous cancellations, particularly on major event days in Manchester and Liverpool. Chris Jackson acknowledged these issues and assured the Committee that TPE was working hard to address the underlying issues.
- 6.24 Mayor Burnham reported that the Committee had expressed concern that the industry was not doing enough to fully capture the potential of the leisure market nor was it adequately planning for increases in demand associated with planned major events. Examples included severe overcrowding during the recent Rugby League event in Liverpool, which affected services across the North.
- 6.25 The need for improved coordination and resilience of timetables was highlighted by the Committee, particularly with upcoming events such as the upcoming men's Euro Championships.
- 6.26 Mayor Brabin described severe disruption at Leeds Station during the Abbey Dash event, where a signalling issue left thousands of passengers stranded without adequate contingency plans. She highlighted overcrowding, long delays, and lack of adequate information for those affected. She recounted how passengers had resorted to making alternative arrangements, and criticised excessive pricing by private hire operators responding to the spike in demand for their services. Mayor Brabin contrasted how this situation had been with how emergency services coordinate activity in response to incidents through 'gold command' structures.
- 6.27 Mr McIntosh acknowledged the issue, noting that while the industry can plan for major events, improvements are needed with regards to how it deals with unexpected disruptions. He reflected how in part the programme of investment in infrastructure upgrades had temporarily reduced resilience and committed to exploring solutions.
- 6.28 Mayor Burnham supported making weekend resilience a priority for the Committee, citing similar problems in Liverpool and Manchester. He suggested it could work with the rail industry to ensure a more coordinated approach and achieve the cultural change that would help improve the service provided to passengers.

CrossCountry:

- 6.29 CrossCountry had reported that they continued to face challenges relating to industrial relations, with strike action planned over the festive period. It was unclear whether these strikes would take place. There was also recognition of ongoing issues with crew availability, which could lead to potential service disruption.

Avanti:

- 6.30 Avanti reported an increase in services planned from the December timetable change compared to previous levels; however, punctuality remained poor, with only 64% of trains running on time. A separate issue involving a “ghost train” from Manchester had been resolved outside the meeting.
- 6.31 The Chair thanked Mayor Burnham and all the Committee for all the work they do on Rail North.
- 6.32 Cllr Riley raised concerns as to whether resolution of the “ghost train” issue had had implications for the two daily direct Euston to Blackpool trains. He noted Avanti had sought assistance from the Lancashire Combined Authority on this matter. Additionally, he raised concerns about Northern’s high cancellation rate of 9% on the Blackpool to York line and urged action due to its importance for leisure travel and major events.
- 6.33 Mayor Burnham acknowledged Cllr Riley’s concerns and confirmed the issue would be followed up in the new year, noting he had not been aware of the unintended consequences of the earlier intervention. The Deputy Chief Executive offered to discuss the issue with Councillor Riley offline. She explained that the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) had initially decided that 6 services previously scheduled for the West Coast Main Line could not operate, and while one had since been reinstated, five others including the Blackpool services referenced remained affected. She confirmed that this matter would be addressed separately with Avanti colleagues.
- 6.34 The Chair noted that Chester had also experienced a train service being cut. She observed the irony that the reason given for these reductions was a lack of capacity on the network, which had long been a key argument in support of the need for investment in NPR, HS2, and related infrastructure improvements.
- 6.35 Mayor Burnham agreed that there remained an outstanding issue regarding the need to identify a long-term solution for the constraints on the West Coast Main Line. He warned that unresolved challenges could lead to ongoing service disruption and suggested inviting ORR representatives to a future meeting of the Committee to improve dialogue.
- 6.36 Additionally, the Chair emphasised the point made by Mayor Burnham regarding the importance of the rail industry ‘upping’ its game when it comes to considering weekend and holiday resilience. It was further suggested that, with an announcement on Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) imminent, there may be a need to convene an additional meeting

in order that the North might agree a joint response to the Government's proposal, as had been done previously.

Resolved:

That Board notes the feedback from the Rail North Committee.

7. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 16 March 2026 at 1pm in Sheffield.

8. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved:

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Item 9 & 10 on the grounds that:

It involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as set out in Paragraphs 2 & 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.

9. Part 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 9.1 The private minutes of the meeting of the TfN Board held on 15 September 2025 were considered.

Resolved:

That the private minutes of the TfN Board held on 15 September 2025 be noted* as a correct and accurate record.

*The private minutes will be formally approved at the next in-person meeting of the Board on Monday 16 March 2026.

10. Reset of Transport for the North

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

Resolved:

That the report and Members comments be noted.