

Transport for the North Board Minutes

17 March 2025

Discovery Museum, Blandford Square, Newcastle upon Tyne

Present:

Lord McLoughlin (Chair)

Attendee

Cllr Phil Riley

Cllr Anne McCormack

Mayor Kim McGuinness

Cllr Martin Gannon

Cllr Stephen Harker

Cllr Carl Quartermain

Cllr Hans Mundry

Cllr Jean Flaherty

Cllr Peter Thornton

Mayor Tracy Brabin

Cllr Peter Kilbane

Local Authority

Lancashire Combined County
Authority;

Liverpool City Region Combined
Authority

North East Combined Authority;

North East Combined Authority;

Tees Valley Combined Authority;

Tees Valley Combined Authority;

Warrington;

Warrington;

Westmorland and Furness;

West Yorkshire Combined Authority;

York and North Yorkshire Combined
Authority;

Business Representatives

Mark Rawstron

Natalie Sykes

Lancashire Business Representative

West Yorkshire Business

Representative

Partners in Attendance:

John Hall

Richard Leonard

Rob McIntosh

Department of Transport

National Highways

Network Rail

Officers in Attendance:

Name

Martin Tugwell

Gary Rich

Katie Day

Joanne Barclay

Rachel Ford

Lisa Pitt

Gavin Legg

Job Title

Chief Executive

Democratic Services Officer

Deputy Chief Executive

Head of Legal

Interim Strategy Director

Management and Financial Accountant

Senior Solicitor

Also in Attendance

Rachelle Forsyth Ward

North East Combined Authority

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

- 1.1 The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming Members to Newcastle and congratulated Newcastle United on their cup success at Wembley the day before.
- 1.2 The Chair explained that as a result of a number of new Combined Authorities having been created since the December Board, there were a number of changes to the makeup of Board. Whilst not new to the Board, the Chair welcomed Cllr Phil Riley in his new capacity as Member for the Lancashire Combined County Authority. He also expressed his thanks on behalf of the Board to Cllr Rupert Swarbrick (Lancashire County Council and minority group Vice Chair of TfN Board), Cllr Lynn Willaims (Blackpool Council) and Cllr Mark Ieronimo (Hull City Council) – all of whom had now left the Board - for the tremendous amount of work that they have done for TfN over the years.
- 1.3 Apologies for the meeting were received from Mayors Burnham, and Coppard, and Cllrs O'Brien, Hunt, Gittins, Rollo, Handley, Gorman, Mannion, Hill and Mitchell as well as Nick Harris, Stephen Parnaby and Clare Hayward.
- 1.4 Due to the number of apologies, the Chair informed the Board that the meeting was not quorate.
- 1.5 The Chief Executive noted that even with the impending arrivals of Mayor Brabin and Cllr Kilbane, the meeting would still be inquorate. He therefore proposed that the meeting would be conducted as a Chief Executive's consultation meeting as set out in the constitution. He explained that under his powers in the constitution, he would be seeking the Boards view and steer at various agenda items and that this would then be followed up with Members who were not present.
- 1.6 Mayor McGuinness asked whether the meeting being inquorate was a regular occurrence.
- 1.7 The Chief Executive explained that this was not a regular occurrence and that unfortunately several Members had sent their apologies overnight.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Transport for the North Board held on 9 December 2024 were considered.
- 3.2 Members received the update from the Chief Executive following the last meeting as well as the Quarterly Operating Report.

Resolved:

- 1) That the minutes of the Transport for the North Board held on 9 December 2024 be approved.
- 2) That the Chief Executive's update and the Quarterly Operating report be noted.

4. Presentation from North East Combined Authority

- 4.1 The Chair invited Mayor McGuinness to give her briefing to the Board on her priorities for the North East.
- 4.2 Mayor McGuinness welcomed everyone to the North East. She set out that her focus is to create equal opportunity for all across the North East, a place that is on the map nationally and internationally and somewhere where they are creating great jobs, building great houses and ensuring that things are in place that enable all children in the North East to have the opportunities that they deserve. She then stated that transport is key to these ambitions.
- 4.3 She explained that the North East is just about to submit its Growth Plan and highlighted the key missions set out in it. These include the North East being a place of opportunity, of a growing vibrant economy for everyone, a place they're proud to call home and the home of green energy and global trade. She then emphasised that transport is fundamental to all these things.
- 4.4 She informed Board about the approach the North East had taken with their Local Transport Plan consultation which she described as 'the biggest conversation' that they have ever had with the public about what transport means for them. She highlighted how improved transport unlocks opportunity, and the bold ambitions she has to make it safer, more integrated, more connected and greener. Additionally, she outlined their plans for bringing the buses back under public control, the expansion of the Tyne and Wyre Metro system whilst at the same time renewing the rolling stock. Looking forward a strategic priority for her was re-opening of the Leamside Line. She finished her opening remarks by noting that the Great North is stronger together than the sum of our parts.
- 4.5 Members received the presentation from Ms Rachelle Forsyth Ward who outlined in more detail the Mayors priorities and the work of the North East Combined Authority.
- 4.6 Responding to a question from the Chair, Cllr Gannon stated that it is a challenge introducing new rolling stock on any system and matters were further complicated for the North East by the need to maintain the old trains whilst introducing the new ones. He explained it will take up to two years to introduce the new stock. He stated that the new rolling stock is being rolled out, with more to be introduced this summer.
- 4.7 Mayor McGuinness described the new trains as transformational and set out her ambition for the new trains to be rolled out as quickly as possible given the huge difference to service reliability, comfort and safety and help that comes with them. She highlighted that the expansion of the system to Washington was a key priority. She explained that this would

effectively be an initial step in opening up the Leamside Investment Corridor.

- 4.8 The Chair noted the safety aspects of the new trains and suggested that these will make people feel a lot safer.
- 4.9 Cllr Mundry asked about the buses. He specifically enquired about bus fares and how much NECA will be investing to keep fare prices low in order to get passengers back on the buses.
- 4.10 In response, Cllr Gannon stated that the issue that the North East is facing is one of long term decline in bus usage. He highlighted the funding which the North East requested as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to increase usage by approximately 10% over 10 years, and that the £169m received would help in this regard. The funding has been used to support and introduce fare schemes. He stated that the only way to improve air quality, environmental protection and congestion is to provide a world class public transport system which requires funding.
- 4.11 Cllr Mundry thanked TfN Officers who have worked with Warrington to make sure that the interests of authorities who have municipally owned bus companies are protected under the Buses Bill.
- 4.12 Mayor McGuinness informed Board that in order to keep passenger numbers high the NECA had made a decision to continue to cap fares at £2.50, with a £1 fare for young people. She described the low fares as economic interventions and believes that the £1 fares for children will help in tackling child poverty. She believed that this was a key consideration for Government when they make a decision on the current national £3 fare cap.
- 4.13 In relation to the 'Green Book', she stated that she was pleased that the government was setting a clear intention to address the disparities in funding between the North and South. However, she stated that it was more than just about changes to the 'Green Book' but also about fairness, equality and growth across the country.
- 4.14 The Chair reflected on how the TfN offer was helping constituent authorities with their work. He continued by suggesting that it is essential that the North works as one in making the case for changes required to the 'Green Book.'
- 4.15 Mr Rawstron asked how important social and economic value considerations have been whilst devising and implementing the local transport plan.
- 4.16 Mayor McGuinness stated that these were considered in great deal. She explained that she wanted to use social and economic value considerations to help boost the regional economy and this fits with the objectives of a growth plan that puts social value at the heart of everything. She expressed her desire to build on the original model of devolved powers which were focused on economic growth and job creation, to fulfillment of a broader social agenda as well.

- 4.17 Mr John Hall stated that the DfT are keen to use devolution to put transport at the heart of things. He stated that this will enable growth and opportunity in tackling social exclusion.
- 4.18 The Chief Executive stated that as a result of Warrington having flagged the issue with their municipal bus company, TfN were then able to help Blackpool address the same issue.
- 4.19 On the matter of TfN's support for the Leamside line, the Chief Executive advised that the TfN executive had been working in support of Nexus who are putting the business case together on this. Additionally, he noted that TfN is working with Officers from the NECA with regards to the business case for improvements on the A19. He explained that the TfN executive is working with NECA officials to ensure the business case better reflects the opportunities afforded by the investment.
- 4.20 The Chair congratulated Mayor McGuinness on all her achievements over her first 10 months in office.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

5. Budget and Business Planning 2025 - 2026

- 5.1 Members received the report of the Finance Director. In the absence of the Finance Director, the Chief Executive highlighted the key points within the report.
- 5.2 The Chief Executive advised that as the meeting was being held as a consultation call, the main focus was on recommendation 2.1f and he was seeking the Boards support for the proposed budget as set out in the papers. He informed the Board that Mayor Burnham and Cllr Gittins had indicated that they are supportive of the approach to the budget. Additionally, he stated that the view of other Members who were not in attendance would be sought in writing.
- 5.3 Mayor Brabin and Cllr Harker arrived at 13.40.
- 5.4 Mayor Brabin enquired about publication of the gender pay gap for Transport for the North.
- 5.5 The Deputy Chief Executive advised the Board that TfN employs less than 250 people, therefore there is no requirement to report on gender pay gap. However, she explained that the senior leadership team do monitor and discuss TfN's diversity on a monthly basis, with 37% of the TfN staff being female. These officers work across a range of roles within the organisation, including senior leadership roles, Heads of Service positions and Transport Planners. She said that she would take it away and consider if it was something which the executive could report back on in more detail.
- 5.6 Mayor Brabin stated that the percentage of female staff was better than she anticipated it would be and requested that even though it is not a statutory obligation for TfN to report on the gender pay gap she encouraged them to do so.

- 5.7 The Monitoring Officer explained that as the meeting was being held as a consultation meeting formal approval for the Budget would be secured through a combination of the support of the Members present and via e-mail consultation. Both of these actions are being undertaken using the Chief Executive's delegated powers under the Transport for the North constitution.
- 5.8 In terms of Recommendation 2.1f, she stated that officers were seeking the Board's support and explained that this decision would be ratified at the next Board meeting on June 23. Noting that the decision to approve the Budget is specifically reserved to TfN Board, she advised that by getting the Board's support at this meeting, together with confirming the support of those not in attendance via an e-mail consultation, it would allow TfN to operate lawfully within its Budget from the 1 April 2025.
- 5.9 This proposal was moved by Cllr Mundry and seconded by Cllr Riley.
- 5.10 Mayor Brabin asked about the TfN establishment and the direction of travel for roles as rail reform moves forward.
- 5.11 The Chief Executive acknowledged that there are roles within the establishment that will need to evolve and change as a consequence of rail reform and noted that the Rail North Committee is engaged in the rail reform conversation. He reminded the meeting that the Rail North Partnership executive is employed by TfN, and funded by the Department for Transport. Their role is to manage the delivery of the TPE and Northern contracts. As rail reform moves forward there will be a need to work with the DfT to understand in more detail what the implications are for the RNP executive. Additionally, he reassured the meeting that the TfN executive would continue to work with the Mayors over the coming months to identify how the work of Rail North Committee needs to evolve.

Resolved:

That Board:

- 1) Noted and endorsed the draft Business Plan for 2025/26 (included at Appendix 1)
- 2) Delegated the steps required to finalise the Business Plan to the Chair and Chief Executive
- 3) Noted the projected closing core reserves as of 31 March 2025 is £4.5m
- 4) Approved the proposed use of core reserves of £0.75m in 2025/26
- 5) Approved the proposed use of RNP reserves of £0.06m in 2025/26
- 6) Agreed the budget for 2025/26 subject to ratification at the June Board
- 7) Approved the proposed approach to the 2025/26 member contributions for the financial year 2025/2026 and delegated to the Rail North Committee (RNC), in conjunction with TfN officers, to undertake a review of financial contributions of the Rail North Authorities in future years
- 8) Noted the medium-term financial sustainability assessment and reserve strategy.

6. Constitutional Amendments: Attendance Requirements

- 6.1 The Chair explained that changes to the Constitution require a supermajority. He explained that the changes were a consequence of changes due to additional devolution arrangements being put in place.
- 6.2 The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the proposed changes on quorum had been considered and were recommended by the General Purposes Committee.
- 6.3 Mayor McGuinness stated that she believed that there was a more fundamental issue than just meeting quoracy requirements. She viewed the devolution agenda as a significant constitutional change and suggested that there is a need to reflect on the role of Transport for the North in the devolved landscape.
- 6.4 She highlighted a number of wider questions that need addressing including, the shape of TfN as an organisation, its' fitness for purpose, how it will fit with and support the work of the Great North Partnership, and how TfN remains focused on the North's priorities.
- 6.5 The Chair accepted the points raised by Mayor McGuinness and stated that the points raised needed to be part of a conversation that the Mayors have together with what they want to feed in as part of the great Northern debate. He added that the report was dealing with the consequences of the changes that have been brought about and the fact that the funding letter had been received from the Secretary of State for the next 12 months. He stated that there was a need for conversations to be had over the issues raised by Mayor McGuinness over the next 12 months as to the longer term vision for Transport for the North and how Transport for the North could be useful to constituent authorities.
- 6.6 The Deputy Chief Executive acknowledged that the world around TfN has changed significantly with the commitment to further devolution. She continued by noting that the changes proposed to the Board enabled TfN to reflect the changes that have taken place to date but there is also recognition that further work is required as the devolution agenda continues. She noted that rail reform will give elected Mayors a statutory role and that there is a need to consider the implications of this for TfN. She continued by noting that conversations are already taking place with officers from constituent authorities as to how TfN can support and enable authorities in their agendas going forward. This would enable a discussion with Members and the intention was for an initial report to come to the June meeting where ideas can be developed further.
- 6.7 Mayor Brabin supported the comments of Mayor McGuinness. She highlighted the importance of time and that things need to move quicker.
- 6.8 The Chief Executive also acknowledged the comments made by Mayor McGuinness and Mayor Brabin and accepted that TfN needed to work with the Constituent Authorities to shape the future of TfN.
- 6.9 Mr Rawstron highlighted the fact that TfN does not just reflect the Metro Mayor areas. He noted that there are still large areas that aren't

currently represented by Metro Mayors and it is important that these areas do not lose their voice within TfN.

Resolved:

As the proposed constitutional amendments on attendance requirements arise solely from legislative changes that are the result of additional Combined Authorities having been established, the Monitoring Officer, under her delegated authority from the Board, following consultation with the Chief Executive will amend the Constitution in line with the recommendations of the General Purpose Committee.

7. Communications and Engagement Strategy

- 7.1 Members received the report from the Deputy Chief Executive who outlined the key points within her report.
- 7.2 Cllr Thornton asked about the discontinuation of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and asked if another group would pick up this work.
- 7.3 The Chair stated that there was a lot of effort put into the APPG for Transport for the North with attendance from MPs at the meetings held being variable. He explained that there many examples of where APPGs exist to support specific transport issues in the North. Moving forward, the proposal is that TfN aligns itself with the work of those APPGs.
- 7.4 Mayor Brabin welcomed the change and believes that this is the evidence of the new world. Addressing the issue of the discontinuation of the APPG, she reflected that in the world of devolution things are moving far quicker than a traditional approach through the use of APPGs. She stated more excitement needs to be created about TfN being at the centre of growth.
- 7.5 Whilst recognising that the North needs the support of parliamentary colleagues to get what the North needs, Mayor McGuinness reflected on how a focus on APPGs encouraged debates in London, when in reality the debates need to be in the North.
- 7.6 Mr Rawstron welcomed the approach and was supportive of working collaboratively with partners and business, seeing it as essential. He also highlighted that messaging from TfN needs to be sharper and shorter.

Resolved:

That the report and Board feedback be noted.

8. Northern Appraisal Playbook Briefing

- 8.1 Members received the report of the Senior Policy and Strategy Officer and the Analysis Manager. The Interim Strategy Director then highlighted the key points within the report.
- 8.2 Mayor Brabin was supportive of the work and believed the argument needs to be made that investment in the North's transport is about social inclusion and growing northern economies. She believed that the Chancellor was likely to reflect the need for changes in the 'Green Book' along the lines of TfN's work.

- 8.3 Responding to a question from Mayor Brabin, the Interim Strategy Director confirmed that the letter would be sent following Board approval.
- 8.4 Cllr McCormack provided Liverpool City Region's support for this work believing that it would provide a more level playing field for northern transport schemes.
- 8.5 Cllr Kilbane highlighted that one of the big issues with the 'Green Book' in its current form is that it does not measure social value when evaluating transport schemes.
- 8.6 Cllr Mundry believed that this was the first step to addressing the imbalance in investment across the country.
- 8.7 Mr Rawstron stated that it is economically illiterate for the Treasury to downplay the advantage of economic growth from a very low base in North compared to the South. He believes that the reverse is true and that to increase growth from a low base has a disproportionately bigger beneficial economic impact, whereas spending more in the South just the basis of economic value alone misses the wider benefits of any investment. He suggested that this should be the overriding message that can wrap around the submission.

Resolved:

- 1) That the report and the initial findings be noted
- 2) That Board's feedback on the draft letter to HM Treasury (HMT) on how TfN can support their review of the Green Book be noted.

9. Spending Review Submission

- 9.1 Members received the report of the Chief Executive. He apologised for the report being late and noted the earlier comments from Members about not having had the time to read the report. He invited Members to come back to him by the end of the week with any comments on the draft submission. He said that a revised version of the submission would be circulated to Members prior to its submission.
- 9.2 Mayor Brabin was satisfied with the suggestion. She advised that Constituent Authorities had been asked to submit their transport submission by mid-February and asked whether the TfN submission was going to be a collective northern one and how it relates to those of the constituent authorities.
- 9.3 The Chief Executive clarified that the intention was to amplify messages that individual authorities have already made. He informed the Board that he had reflected on comments made at the Convention for the North and two of the big messages he took away were that transport should be treated as a protected budget and that there should be a commitment to a long-term investment programme.
- 9.4 He advised that this submission was looking to build on the key building blocks already in place. This included projects such as completing work on the Transpennine Route Upgrade, moving forward with Yorkshire Mass Transit, and delivering the A66 improvement.

- 9.5 Mayor Brabin emphasised that this is also an opportunity to reiterate the consistent messaging for long term projects such as the T-shaped station at Leeds.
- 9.6 Cllr Mundry requested that Warrington Bank Quay as a key hub needed to be included in the paper in the Manchester Liverpool corridor.
- 9.7 Cllr Kilbane asked about what process would be used to decide which projects will be included within the submission.
- 9.8 Cllr McCormack highlighted Liverpool City Region's disappointment in the omission of any specific mention of development funding for major enhancements to the rail network. Additionally, there was no mention of Liverpool Central in respect of funding and seeking a commitment from Government to work in partnership with them to deliver transformation to the city and regional connectivity.
- 9.9 Cllr Thornton requested that he would like to see something included about investing in maintaining and fixing failing assets. He specifically highlighted concrete structures that need to be rebuilt.
- 9.10 In response, the Chief Executive noted the Board's comments. In respect of the Leeds to Hull electrification, he reminded Board that this has always been part of the Boards position relating to NPR 'in full' and has previously been seen as a quick win.
- 9.11 In terms of process, he asked for all Members to submit comments by the end of the week, this will then be redrafted and circulated the following week for comment on the final version.

Resolved:

- 1) That Members submit their comments on the draft by the end of the week.
- 2) That a redrafted version of the report to be circulated to Board for final comment before being submitted.

10. TfN Offer

- 10.1 Members received the report of the Principal Policy and Strategy Officer and the Service Manager. The Interim Strategy Director then highlighted the key points in the report.
- 10.2 Mayor Brabin expressed her thanks as they currently use the service a lot and sees this continuing.
- 10.3 The Chair thanked Members for making use of the TfN Offer and he said that this is a practical way in which TfN can help.

Resolved:

That Board noted the key updates regarding the TfN Offer, its value to the Mayoral Combined Authorities and Local Transport Authorities.

11. Corporate Risk Register and Risk Management Strategy Report

- 11.1 Members received the report of the Risk Manager and the Chief Executive highlighted the key elements within the report.

Resolved:

That Board noted TfN's corporate risks and risk management activity over the last 3 months.

12. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Monday 23 June 2025 at 1pm.