Rail North Committee Minutes

Wednesday 20 November 2024
Virtual

Present:

Attendee	Local Authority
Mayor Andy Burnham (Chair)	Greater Manchester Combined Authority;
Cllr Carolyn Renwick	East Midlands;
Cllr Rupert Swarbrick	Lakeland;
Mayor Steve Rotheram	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority;
Cllr Martin Gannon	North East Combined Authority;
Cllr Mark Ieronimo	North of Humber;
Cllr Nick Mannion	Potteries;
Cllr Tim Mitchell	South of Humber;
Mayor Oliver Coppard	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority;
Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe	West Yorkshire Combined Authority;
Cllr Peter Kilbane	York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority;

Partners in Attendance:

Ben Simkin	Cross Country
Matt Rice	Northern
Tricia Williams	Northern

Officers in Attendance:

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

Item No:	Item
1	**Welcome and Apologies**

1.1 The Chair welcomed Members of the Committee and apologies were received from Cllr Harker.

1.2 The Chair began by informing the Committee of the passing of Mr Jim Bamford. He paid tribute to Mr Bamford, placing on record his appreciation for everything that he did to support the Committee and rail in the North. He passed on his condolences and those of the Committee to Mr Bamford's family and friends.

1.3 Mayor Coppard and Cllr Hinchcliffe also paid tribute to Mr Bamford and offered their condolences to his family and friends.

1.4 The Chief Executive added his tribute on behalf of himself and the Transport for the North executive.

2 Declarations of Interest

2.1 There were no declarations of interest received.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

3.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 3 September 2024 and the emergency meeting of October 30 2024 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 3 September 2024 and 30 October 2024 be noted.

4 Accessibility Task & Finish Group – Update

4.1 The Chair introduced this item and reinforced its importance explaining that it remains top of the agenda because "until accessibility is fixed then nothing is fixed" and enabling anyone to use the railway is paramount. He highlighted the unacceptable situation whereby half of the stations in the north are not fully accessible.

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

4.3 Mayor Rotheram informed the Committee that funding had recently been announced to make Rock Ferry Station fully accessible. He stated that over 70% of stations in the Liverpool City Region are now fully accessible which is the highest percentage in the country; he hopes that the remaining 30% will be complete by the end of the decade.

4.4 Mayor Coppard expressed his appreciation that a broader view is being taken to decision making on priorities rather than just an economic assessment. He then asked about the prioritisation process and how local residents' views on stations can influence the list of immediate investment priorities.

4.5 Cllr Hinchcliffe stated that she would like to see the benefits/cost ratio (BCR) abolished as it leads to preference being given to more affluent areas. Referencing the statistics about those who live near a station with a disability, she enquired as to whether this included children.

4.6 Cllr Mannion asked if patronage and service status are included in identifying investment priorities, as his authority has some rural stations that have accessibility issues but have a sparse service in comparison to others.

4.7 As a member of the Task and Finish Group Cllr Swarbrick assured the Committee that the work being undertaken is comprehensive and agreed with Mayor Coppard that a local "sense check" should be made when compiling the prioritisation list. He then highlighted the challenge now faced in considering the different issues that need to be solved and how to make decisions on prioritisation. He added that the Task and Finish group is now looking at starting to develop plans for delivery.

4.8 The Chair stated that devolution also needs to be considered because if some of the station assets were to be transferred to local authorities or local transport authorities then it is likely that this would speed up accessibility improvements. He believes that this will lead to a more creative approach with wider regeneration around station assets creating opportunities to improve accessibility.

4.9 The Chair addressed the issue of prioritisation and local input raised by Mayor Coppard. He explained that Levenshulme station was high up on the Greater Manchester list of priorities but has been dropped from the Department for Transport's list whilst priorities lower down the Greater Manchester list have been accepted by the DfT. He believes that this reinforces the need for decisions on priorities to be made at a more local level.

4.10 Responding to points raised by Members, the Rail Strategy Manager explained that the census figures used include adults and children with disabilities. He added that the matter of patronage and BCR are linked as the BCR takes into account the number of passengers using the station, and this therefore creates a bias towards more affluent areas because they tend to have higher patronage per person.

4.11 The Chair asked if this new way of prioritisation will be accepted by the DfT as the Access for all Funding does not take into account local prioritisation.

4.12 The Rail Strategy Manager believes that there should be an opportunity to make the case for local prioritisation to be give greater weight under the Rail Devolution agenda.

4.13 The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that there are mechanisms in the control of the Members through TfN that can be used to achieve acceleration; he flagged how the Committee's work to date on accessibility is already being reflected in TfN's input into this year's annual Business Plan process for Northern and TPE. He also supported the Chair's comments about the Access for All funding and how, if this is devolved to the North it would create the opportunity to increase the impact of the funding available. He requested that he take this away and return with further advice about how devolution of this funding programme to the North can be pursued.

4.14 The Chair emphasised his point about making a case for full devolution of decision making on this matter.

Resolved:

1) That Rail North Committee endorses the approach to prioritisation outlined which was also discussed at the Accessibility Task & Finish group meeting on 19 November 2024. This includes prioritising accessibility improvements to be delivered through a multi-criteria framework taking account of:

   - The number and proportion of people with disabilities or long-term health conditions living in station catchment areas;
   - The benefits to all passengers provided by the proposed enhancements (as assessed using standard Department for Transport (DfT) appraisal methods);
   - The condition of the existing facilities, as indicated by the number of enhancements needed to bring each station up to Transport for the North's "Desirable" standard.

2) That this prioritisation be provided to Northern Trains Limited and TransPennine Trains to inform their Annual Business Plans for 2025-26

5 Northern Trains Remedial and Mitigation Plan

5.1 The Chair summarised the extraordinary meeting of the Committee of the 30 October. He acknowledged that there have been some improvements since the meeting with average cancellations and 'on the day' cancellations both having been reduced. Whilst noting that progress has been made, he stated that the situation remains unsatisfactory and that the issue of improving Sunday services still has not been rectified. Whilst he appreciated that work onthis issue continues he stressed the importance of finding a resolution at the earliest opportunity.

5.2 Members received the report of Partnership and Programme Manager. Ms Tricia Willaims and Mr Matt Rice provided an update on the current position.

5.3 Ms Williams thanked those Members of the Committee who had met with her and Mr Rice in recent months and explained that their input has helped in shaping the plan before the Committee. She acknowledged that Northern's performance has not been acceptable, noting that some parts of the North were being disproportionately affected, especially on Sundays. She recognised the impact that this is having on customers in their day-to-day activity as well as the impact it is having on the economy. She offered her apologies for the poor level of service, whilst acknowledging the hard work of her staff.

5.4 Ms Williams then addressed Northern's industrial relations issues. Since the last meeting a rest day working agreement has been put in place, which had led to an increase in driver availability, as well as enabling a reduction in the driver training backlog. She emphasised that whilst this was important she did not see it as a "silver bullet."

5.5 She then referenced the ongoing issues with Sunday services specifically relating to the availability of conductors. She explained that a proposal

for an interim agreement would be put to a ballot of the RMT members. Finally, she reminded the committee that Northern's issues are deep rooted, complex and long standing, something that the Rail Minister and industry observers have also acknowledged.

5.6 Mr Matt Rice then provided an update on progress with the short-term stabilisation plan and the long-term improvement plan, the latter would run until 2027. He highlighted that some of the performance numbers for Northern have been poor since 2015, and on a gradual decline for an extended period.

5.7 The Committee heard that the number of on the day cancellations had been reduced. This has been achieved by committing to cancelling a higher number of Sunday trains earlier in the week in order to give passengers more certainty. There is now 70-100 less 'on the day cancellations' daily as a result of this.

5.8 He then addressed concerns around Sunday travel in the run up to and during the Christmas period, stating the importance of having a predictable offer that will give customers assurance. Whilst he hoped the RMT ballot on Sunday working would be positive, he outlined what has been done to ensure reliability for users if this were not the outcome. Measures put in place include increased bus provision on some Sundays. Agreements are in place with TPE, LNER, and Avanti to accept Northern tickets if there are Northern cancellations, whilst TfW and EMR have agreed to accept Northern tickets on their trains in the run up to Christmas.

5.9 The key points of the remedial and mitigation plan were outlined.

5.10 The Chair made reference to Mr Rice's admission that Northern's performance has been in decline since 2015 and stated that whilst the company is not solely to blame, the performance has not been acceptable and has caused a lot of damage. He then challenged the 2027 date for delivery of the long-term improvement plan and asked why milestones cannot be provided indicating what will be improved, and by when.

5.11 In response Mr Rice explained that there will be gradual improvements, but the big changes will need to be linked to events like the December 2026 timetable change, noting that it takes four to six months to have the relevant conversations with those involved. He acknowledged that the business is nowhere near where it needs to be but they are still running over 2,200 trains per day with many passengers having a good experience. He expressed his concern about moving too far too fast with organisational change at a time when the need is to stabilise the offer.

5.12 The Chair expressed his concern as to whether the organisation is unwieldy and using outdated practices, suggesting that the full extent of the changes required to turn the business around won't be known without a deeper dive.

5.13 He stated that a quarterly update process needs to be agreed in order to monitor progress with agreed plans, and identify opportunities exist to

accelerate improvement because 2027 is too long to wait for a decent functional railway.

5.14 The Chair highlighted that Mr Rice had stated that Northern was making progress with ticket acceptance, but stressed that the default position should be that anyone with a valid ticket for travel in the North should be able to travel on any train. He requested assurance that there will be an any operator arrangement in place in the North of England for the upcoming weekend.

5.15 Ms Williams was unable to commit to the Chair's request but stated that they would engage with partners and the DfT on this point to get to a situation where valid tickets can be a used on any operator.

5.16 The Chair expressed disappointment that these arrangements are not already in place and stated that the industry should be working as one to make it as easy as possible for the user affected by disruption to complete their journey. He requested clarification by the end of the week as to who will be accepting Northern tickets in the event of trains being cancelled.

5.17 The Chair sought assurance that once the Sunday agreement is in place then there will be no further 'do not travel' notices.

5.18 Ms Williams explained that if the interim agreement is accepted then this will remove the voluntary element whist gaining a commitment from the conductors to work a certain number of Sundays, which will give a significantly improved service. She added that it is the aim to not have to issue 'do not travel' notices.

5.19 The Chair found this unacceptable and stated the need for a worked-out plan. He expressed his disappointment in the plan that had been presented to the Committee stating that it fails to do what the Committee was seeking.

5.20 Mayor Rotheram was concerned that the presented over the past six years had not necessarily given as complete a picture of the issues facing Northern. He highlighted that the Committee had been pushing the Northern issue for a number of years and raised a concern that there are endemic and systemic problems with the company. He questioned whether the company should be broken up due to it being too unwieldly with a smaller company possibly being more agile.

5.21 He then suggested a number of short-term actions could be put in place including a passenger compensation package, significantly reduced ticket prices and possibly even free travel. He stated that these options need to be considered in order to encourage people back to rail after having had to experience an unreliable service.

5.22 Addressing services to Liverpool he stated that passengers are being presented with two poor choices of having greater certainty created by cancellations and having less certainty due to 'on the day' cancellations. He stated that he does not believe that the Committee is being listened to.

5.23 Addressing the question as to why some of the issues being raised are only just being discovered Ms Williams stated that this is because they are looking at the longer term issues that need to be addressed. She argued that the improvement plan provides the opportunity for a root and branch review of what needs to change at Northern. She reflected on the rail industry is already fragmented and questioned whether breaking it up further would address the root causes of the challenges Northern is facing. She stated her commitment to a long-term plan that tackles those causes and fundamentally improves Northern services.

5.24 On the issue of compensation Ms Willaims stated that the best thing that they can do for customers other than apologise is to improve reliability. Additionally, once things have stabilised, she committed to looking at how passengers of services that have been disproportionately affected by poor level of service might be compensated.

5.25 The Chair stated that any such arrangement should apply to passengers who have been affected on those lines that have been affected by 'do not travel' notices.

5.26 Mayor Coppard highlighted cancellations and delays with Sunday services on the Hope Valley Line. He also asked about Christmas services and expressed disappointment at the lack of detail provided in the plan presented.

5.27 Ms Williams explained that Sundays are not included in the terms and conditions for any of their conductors across the North. However, whilst there is an agreement with conductors in the east, some of the timetabled services operate to/from the west. This is why there are some cancellations and delays in South Yorkshire on Sundays due to crews being unavailable.

5.28 Mr Rice provided an update on plans for Christmas in the South Yorkshire area. He is not expecting there to be a need for any changes to the underlying timetable that goes live in the middle of December as their forecasts of traincrew availability are looking good. He committed to a weekly dialogue with all areas and that if changes need to be made that they are made in consultation with individual authorities.

5.29 He sought to reassure the Committee that there is more detail that supports the plan presented to the Committee.

5.30 Cllr Hinchcliffe explained that West Yorkshire is very dependent on Northern services for travel to towns and cities and when things are not working properly this has a major impact on the economy as well as passenger numbers as people revert to cars due to the unreliable service. This then causes issues in getting additional investment from Government for rail because of passenger numbers being suppressed due to the poor service. She highlighted that West Yorkshire has lost a route as a result of this happening. She emphasised the importance of the Committee being mindful of this when considering the recovery plan.

5.31 She expressed concern that Northern is trying to transform too much all at the same time and stated that she would like to see a plan that is more staged in its implementation.

5.32 In response, Mr Rice explained that the primary motivation for looking at how the business is set up to deliver is so that they can improve the link in support of enabling locally agreed outcomes noting that this might require Northern to challenge themselves as to how they've delivered over the last 10 years.

5.33 Mr Rice explained that as 13% of their trains interact with wider network the punctuality of Northern services can often be impacted by matters outside of the North. With changes to the East Coast Main Line proposed for December 2025, and with further change required in the early 2030s with the completion of TRU, it was important to ensure that a 'one railway' approach was at the heart of decision making. He went on to assure the Committee that measurable milestones will be available quarterly in order that he can be held to account for delivery.

5.34 The Chair requested that the milestones be available for discussion at the next meeting.

5.35 Cllr Kilbane highlighted the differences between what TPE presented 18 months ago for their remedial plan and what Northern had presented to this meeting, commenting that the Committee was able to be more confident that TPE would deliver on their plan given the detail it presented and the inclusion of outcomes that were measurable. On the issue of tickets, he supported the call for that tickets should be able to be used on any journey at all times and not just during times of disruption.

5.36 Ms Williams explained that recovery model used by TPE (where they reduced services in order to reduce driver training backlog) would not work for Northern as the fundamental issue lay with Sunday working. On the issue of ticket acceptance she stated that they do contact operators on the day when there is disruption in order to make arrangements on ticket acceptance.

5.37 The Chief Executive suggested that the Committee may wish to discuss broader issues relating to rail with Alex Hynes and Robin Gisby.

5.38 Mr Ben Simkin provided the Cross Country perspective on acceptance of ticketing issued by other operators. He informed the committee that they are supporting Northern and there is a long standing reciprocal arrangement between the two companies on this when it comes to 'on the day' disruption. On the issue of a blanket approach towards ticket acceptance he stated that it would be something that he would need to consider further but it would be something that they would be open to, although he flagged possible safety issues around overcrowding.

5.39 The Chair requested that the discussions between Northern and Cross Country take place very quickly. He also highlighted the safety issues of passengers being stranded at stations being unable to get home.

5.40 In summarising the Committee's conversation, the Chair expressed his appreciation for the honesty shown by Northern. He stated that this is important in allowing the Committee to gain an understanding as to the challenges facing Northern. He then made it clear that it is difficult for the Committee to hear dates in the future with no plan o in the interim,

and this he stated needs to be rectified. He reiterated the need for a plan to be provided that has milestones that they can be held accountable for.

5.41 The Chair acknowledged that many of the issues being faced are historical and offered Northern the support and help of the Committee as they look to resolve the issues; however, he requested that they are transparent and together they can look to expedite things. He suggested that there should be a follow up meeting before Christmas or early in the New Year.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

1) Notes Northern's Remedial and Mitigation Plans and the Committee's suggestions on further actions or measures Asks Northern to monitor and present back on a quarterly basis on the progress being made on performance, and actions in the Remedial and Mitigation Plans

2) Requests that Northern works with Local Transport Authorities and TfN on local plans for restoring resilience and confidence in the passenger experience.

6 East Coast Main Line Timetable

6.1 Members received the report of the Strategic Rail Lead. The Chief Executive outlined the key points within the report and informed the Committee that a response from the Rail Minister to the Committee's letter was expected shortly and once received would be shared with the Committee.

6.2 Cllr Hinchcliffe asked that the key dates be laid out to raise awareness of when decisions need to be made. With regard to the proposed timetable she sees positives and negatives with it and suggested that thought needs to be given to all the implications of the timetable and any "fail safes" that may need to be put in place.

6.3 The Chief Executive highlighted that both Cllr Hinchcliffe and the Chair have championed the need for the Committee having a single overview of how the investment in infrastructure, new rolling stock investment and timetable changes are aligned. He reminded the Committee that these were brought together in the state of play report which was discussed at the September meeting and warmly welcomed by it. He stated that officers will return to her on the issues she has raised about timelines. Additionally, he reminded the Committee that in its letter to the Rail Minister it had raised the need for work to begin on looking at how to reconcile the timetable on TRU with that on the ECML.

6.4 Cllr Kilbane emphasised that if these changes are to happen the reintroduction of two trains an hour between York and Scarborough needs to happen; he stressed the importance of this to the economic growth of the region. He also referred to the wide differential in the cost of fares and how the reduction of TransPennine Express trains calling at Northallerton will further impact on this as the cheapest tickets fares will be lost. He stressed the need for the harmonisation of fares and that this needs to be part of the public debate.

6.5 The Head of Strategic Rail stated TfN's awareness of the importance of the York to Scarborough two trains an hour proposal and he agreed to write to Cllr Kilbane and his officers setting out where in the process matters have reached, as well as providing clear next steps and timelines to progress the proposal.

6.6 On the issue of the harmonisation of fares he stated that officers would raise this with the operators, emphasising the importance of not disadvantaging passengers because of an industry decision.

Resolved:

That the Committee

1) Notes the rail industry's intention to introduce a new timetable on the East Coast Main Line in December 2025

2) Reaffirms its conditional support to the timetable change subject to a satisfactory response from the Rail Minister to the conditions set out in the Chair's letter

3) Notes that to realise the full benefit of the investment in Transpennine Route Upgrade there will be a need to revisit the East Coast Main Line timetable and a request is made that the Transport for the North Executive works with the rail industry to identify any additional infrastructure requirements and/or changes to service patterns that might be required

4) Reaffirms its request to the rail industry that given the significance of the East Coast Main Line it is appropriate for TfN to be represented on the ECML Programme Board.

7 Rail Reform

7.1 Members received the report from the Rail Reform Advisor who then highlighted the key points within the report.

7.2 The Chair was pleased that the Rail Reform Advisor had referenced the importance and opportunity created by the devolution agenda. He highlighted Greater Manchester's plans for eight of the northern lines to come under the Bee network.

7.3 The Chief Executive noted that one of the report's recommendations is that the TfN executive work with representatives from constituent authorities to develop a picture that brings together what is proposed at the city-region level with that at the pan-Northern level.

7.4 Cllr Mannion reminded the Committee that not all areas have yet been devolved and requested that they should not be forgotten whilst awaiting devolution.

7.5 Reflecting on the role of TfN, Cllr Hinchcliffe noted the added value that comes from looking at the rail system at the pan-Northern level: particularly given that the latter is key to realising the North's economic potential.

7.6 The Chief Executive agreed with Cllr Hinchcliffe and confirmed that this is why TfN wants to work with senior officers to develop a proposal that

reflects the views of the MCAs and LTAs, as well as the pan-Northern perspective. He acknowledged that TfN's role will evolve, and that evolution needs to be shaped by the Members. He reiterated the Government's approach that this is about getting the right solution for the delivery of services to the user, which also includes the freight and logistics sector.

7.7 The Chair stated that he doesn't want ambitions of individual city-regions to be slowed down but wants them to be accelerated with the help of TfN. He wants TfN to be supporting city regions, helping them to keep things moving and unblocking issues where necessary.

Resolved:

That the Committee:

1) Notes comments on the approach and proposed requirements
2) Tasks the TfN Executive to work with senior officials from TfN's constituent authorities to develop a proposition for consideration by this Committee at a future meeting.

8 Infrastructure Update

8.1 Members received the report from the Investment Planning Manager who then highlighted the key aspects of the report.

8.2 Mayor Rotheram commented on the proposed Merseyside Task Force and stated that there has been minimal contact with officers on this.

8.3 The Chief Executive stated that officers would pick this up with LCRCA following the meeting but he reassured that the Task Force is being reflected within the business planning.

8.4 Cllr Kilbane raised the issue of rolling stock stating that 2029 is some time in the future, and with some services restricted by the stock currently available economic growth may be more difficult as a result and a short-term approach to growing the offer also needs to be considered.

8.5 The Chair sought assurance that sub-regional silos are not being created. and regarding the spending review, questioned whether the pace of the work is fast enough to influence the spending review.

8.6 The Chief Executive offered that reassurance and informed the Committee that there will be an item at the December TfN Board covering the spending review.

8.7 The Chair stressed the importance of this work being on time for the Spending Review as there needs to be a plan for major infrastructure changes across the North over the next 10 years and these cannot be delayed by this process.

Resolved:

That progress on the State of Play and associated Task Force Boards and Conditional Outputs is noted.

9 Rail North Partnership Operational Update

9.1 Members received the report of the Rail North Partnership Director.

9.2 The Chair invited Mr Simkin to provide an update to the Committee following the previous meeting where he was asked to return to provide an update on service reductions.

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 need.

2) Notes the updates from train operators.

10 Date and time of next meeting

Tuesday 25 February 2025 11.00am

Additionally, the Chair proposed an exceptional meeting where the Northern Plan which includes milestones can be considered.

11 Exclusion of the Press and Public

To resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Item 12 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

12 Private Minutes of the Previous Meeting

12.1 The private minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024 were considered for their accuracy.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024 be noted.