Transport for the North Rail North Committee Consultation Call Minutes

Date of Meeting	01 September 2026
Time of Meeting	11am
Venue	Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Members:

Cllr Steve Harker (Chair)	Tees Valley Combined Authority
Cllr Michael Gorman	Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority
Cllr Hans Mundry (Observer)	Cheshire & Warrington Combined Authority
Cllr Mark Fryer	Cumbria Combined Authority
Cllr Jonathan Brook (Observer)	Cumbria Combined Authority
Cllr Anthony McKeown	East Midlands Combined County Authority
Cllr Ingrid Sheard	Greater Lincolnshire Combined County Authority
Mayor Bev Craig	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Cllr David Tucker	Hull and East Yorkshire Combined Authority
Cllr Phil Riley	Lancashire Combined County Authority
Mayor Steve Rotheram	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Cllr Colin Feguson	North East Mayoral Strategic Authority
Cllr Peter Mason	Staffordshire County Council
Cllr Eleanor Thomson	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Also in Attendance:

Tom Finnegan-Smith	South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority

Partners:

Neil Grabham	East Midlands Railway
Simon Preedy	East Midlands Railway
Chris Wright	Network Rail
Tricia Williams	Northern Trains

Officers in Attendance:

Katie Day	Chief Executive (interim)
Gary Rich	Democratic Services Officer
Gary Bogan	Rail North Partnership Director
David Hoggarth	Head of Strategic Rail
Gavin Legg	Senior Solicitor (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

1. Appointment of Chair

1.1 The Deputy Monitoring Officer welcomed Members to the meeting and explained that, as the Committee did not currently have a Chair, a Member needed to be appointed to chair the meeting. A permanent appointment could not be made as the meeting was a consultation call. Cllr Steve Harker indicated his willingness to chair the meeting, and this was seconded by Cllr David Tucker.

Resolved:

That Cllr Harker be appointed Chair for the meeting.

2. Welcome and Apologies

2.1 The Chair welcomed those present and acknowledged the contribution of Mayor Andy Burnham and Cllr Susan Hinchcliffe during their time as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee. In particular, he recognised their work in highlighting and examining accessibility issues at railway stations across the North. He also welcomed Mayor Bev Craig, the new Mayor of Greater Manchester, to the Committee. The Chair highlighted that the meeting would focus on dialogue with the rail industry on current issues of concern to the North.

2.2 Apologies were received from Mayors Skaith and Coppard and Cllrs Ravilious and McCkusker. Apologies were also received from Mayor McGuinness who was represented by Cllr Ferguson.

3. Declaration of Interest

3.1 There were no Declarations of Interest received.

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 04 February 2026 were noted by the Committee as a correct and accurate record; these will be formally approved at the next in-person meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the Rail North Committee be noted.

5. East Midland Railway Operator Update

5.1 The Head of Strategic Rail introduced the item, noting the Committee's role in engaging with and holding to account rail operators serving the North. The Committee received an update from Neil Grabham, Interim Managing Director, and Simon Preedy, Commercial Director, on East Midlands Railway's operational challenges and recovery plans.

5.2 The Committee was advised that reliability issues affecting the new Class 810 and ageing Class 222 fleets, together with the planned return of some Class 222 units, had reduced fleet availability and led to a temporary reduced timetable. Mr Grabham apologised for the resulting disruption, cancellations and reduced-capacity services. The reduced timetable had improved operational stability Given positive progress, services had

recently been restored to 92% of the planned timetable, including 45 additional weekly services serving Sheffield and Nottingham.

5.3 Members were informed that services had been reinstated in consultation with the relevant combined authorities and Transport for the North. Passenger support included improved information, ticket acceptance with other operators and refunds where appropriate. East Midlands Railway was also working with Hitachi and the Department for Transport Operator on a recovery plan focused on improving fleet reliability, identifying alternative rolling stock and introducing further Class 810 units once their reliability had been demonstrated. Fleet performance would continue to be monitored as services were restored.

5.4 Tom Finnegan-Smith, speaking on behalf of Mayor Coppard and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, welcomed the partial restoration of services but highlighted the continuing impact of the temporary timetable on passengers and businesses. He requested a clear timetable for restoring all services. Mr Grabham confirmed that indicative plans had been shared with Mayor Coppard and explained that services would be restored in stages to ensure that the improvements were sustainable. He undertook to keep South Yorkshire informed as the plans and dates were finalised.

5.5 Mayor Rotheram and Cllr Thomson raised concerns about recurring reliability and maintenance problems when new trains were introduced. They stressed that trains should not enter service before they were sufficiently reliable and called for lessons to be learned to avoid further disruption to passengers, staff and the wider network. Mayor Rotheram also questioned whether the recurring problems reflected fragmentation or wider weaknesses within the rail industry. Mr Grabham acknowledged that similar problems had affected the introduction of the Class 777 and Class 810 fleets and agreed that this was unacceptable. He proposed reviewing both programmes once the immediate issues had been resolved to identify lessons for future train introductions. The Chair confirmed that Mayor Rotheram's question would also be referred to the DfT Operator for a response.

5.6 Cllr McKeown raised concerns about occasions when an additional train (providing more capacity) had not been added to the Norwich–Liverpool service at Nottingham. He sought reassurance that enough space would remain available for passengers travelling beyond Nottingham to South Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. Mr Grabham acknowledged the capacity concerns and agreed to discuss the matter further with Cllr McKeown outside the meeting.

5.7 The Chief Executive proposed writing to the Department for Transport Operator to set out the Committee's concerns about recurring problems with new rolling stock and to seek lessons for future train introductions, including those planned for TransPennine Express and Northern. The Chair supported this action, noting that such problems affected more than one rail operator.

5.8 Cllr Sheard asked when Greater Lincolnshire would receive the Class 810 trains expected in 2024–25 and whether newer or improved services would now take priority. The Interim Managing Director said he did not have the

details available and agreed to look into the matter further and speak with Cllr Sheard after the meeting.

Resolved:

1) That the Committee note the update
2) That a letter be written to the Department for Transport Operator outlining the Committees concerns about recurring problems with new rolling stock.

6. Rail Industry Delivery

6.1 Members were advised that Transport for the North was reviewing its work alongside the development of Great British Railways and future partnership arrangements. Discussion focused on current rail issues, with representatives from train operators and Network Rail present to answer Members' questions.

6.2 The Rail North Partnership Director summarised updates on Northern and TransPennine Trains, the TransPennine Route Upgrade, station accessibility, network performance and resilience. He emphasised that reliable services were essential to increasing passenger numbers, providing value for money and supporting future partnerships with Great British Railways. Both operators were working to improve performance and services, introduce new rolling stock and increase the reliability of existing trains.

6.3 Mr Chris Wright of Network Rail updated Members on the issues that had impacted services on the 6 August 2026. He reported that there had been a 90-second power cut affecting the Manchester Rail Operating Centre which had caused widespread disruption across Manchester and routes to Liverpool. Most backup systems had operated correctly, but the telecommunications system linking the control centre and trackside signals had failed to restart and required several hours of repair. The signalling system had responded safely, although trains were brought to a standstill and disruption continued into the following morning.

6.4 Mayor Craig highlighted the continuing effect of poor summer performance and reduced Sunday services in Greater Manchester on passengers, major events and economic growth. She asked when an independent review of the 6 August incident would be completed and how power resilience would be improved. She also raised concerns about the reliability and quality of ageing trains and sought an update on the procurement of replacement rolling stock. Mr Wright advised that lessons from the recently published review of earlier disruption at Manchester Piccadilly would help to accelerate the investigation and that recommendations were being implemented with rail operators across the North.

6.5 Ms Tricia Williams of Northern acknowledged the effect of poor summer performance on passengers and explained that hot weather had required some older diesel services to operate with fewer carriages. She advised that the procurement of new trains was progressing and suggested a Committee letter supporting the social, environmental and economic growth benefits of the business case. The Chief Executive noted that the matter would be raised at the next meeting of the Transport for the North

Board so a letter of support could be considered. Ms Williams also advised that the Department for Transport Operator had established a role focused on improving the introduction of new trains and emphasised that Northern and TransPennine Trains should apply lessons from other operators before introducing their new fleets.

6.6 Cllrs McKeown and Riley called for full Sunday services to be restored as soon as possible, noting that reduced services had continued for more than 18 months. Cllr Riley asked whether agreement on harmonising staff terms and conditions could proceed separately from the unresolved issue concerning the role of guards. Northern advised that the matters formed one agreement, but confirmed that discussions with the trade union remained constructive, progress was continuing and the operator recognised the effect of reduced Sunday services, particularly for services sourced from the North West.

6.7 Cllr McKeown requested further information on the amount of third-party funding required to improve access at Chinley station, including the provision of a lift. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Rail North Partnership team would respond after the meeting on this specific point.

6.8 Mayor Rotheram and Cllr Thomson raised concerns about network resilience and the information and assistance available to passengers during disruption. They stressed that unreliable services discouraged travel, affected local economies and could leave passengers stranded without clear support. Network Rail confirmed that it was working with train operators to improve coordination and communication, particularly where disruption occurred after journeys had begun. Cllr Thomson also sought action to reduce cancellations of Northern's Sheffield–Leeds service and reassurance that proposed connecting services would not leave passengers stranded or significantly increase journey times. The Chair confirmed that further responses would be provided outside the meeting on these specific concerns.

6.9 Cllr Fryer explained that unreliable services north of Preston affected Cumbria's businesses and increased costs because passengers often had to travel the previous evening to reach London or Manchester for morning appointments. He also requested a clear timetable and full progress update for reopening Bransty Tunnel. Network Rail advised that the work involved several agencies, including the Environment Agency, and agreed to meet Cllr Fryer to discuss the work undertaken, current progress and expected timescales.

Resolved:

1) That the updates by the rail industry be noted
2) That the actions taken by the Rail North Partnership be noted.

7. Date and time of Next Meeting

7.1 The next meeting will be on 24 November at 11am.

8. Exclusion of the Press and Public

8.1 It was resolved that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of

the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and public interest would not be served in publishing the information. This was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Fryer.

9. Private Minutes of the Previous Meeting

9.1 The private minutes of the meeting held on 04 February 2026 were noted by the Committee as a correct and accurate record; these will be formally approved at the next in-person meeting of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the private minutes of the Rail North Committee be noted.

10. Autumn 2027 Proposal

Resolved:

1) That the Committee's consideration of the Autumn 2027 proposals be noted.