

The Blake Jones Review of

The Rail North Partnership

The May 2018 timetable crisis

&

Recommendations for the future role and functioning of the Partnership

Summary Report

Foreword

Last year's introduction of the May timetable changes did not go well. Cancellations, delays, overcrowding and late-running caused significant disruption to the lives of passengers, and trust in the railways' ability to provide reliable services was severely affected.

Whilst the December 2018 and May 2019 timetable changes were introduced without further significant disruption, there is still work to do to fully restore passenger confidence in the North's railway system.

Northern are now operating 2,000 more services each week compared with the start of the franchise but there are still concerns in the North with over-crowding, short formed trains, reliability and bottlenecks in a network which remains a cause for concern.

This Review recognises that more work is needed to address these basic passenger expectations. The failure of the rail industry to deliver a satisfactory service for passengers through the latter part of 2018 signalled the need for significant reforms, and this was one of three reviews that were commissioned to look at the problems and what could be done about them.

This Review focuses on the arrangements for managing the devolved Northern and TPE franchises with an emphasis on learning from the problems in the Spring and Summer of 2018. It looks at what led to these problems, their impact on passengers and business in the North, and what is needed to prevent them happening again.

The Department for Transport is responsible for rail franchising. The Rail North Partnership has been established to enable the Department and Transport for the North to jointly oversee the Northern and TransPennine franchises working closely with Network Rail to ensure the successful provision of train services for passengers in the North. This review has been informed by, not just its own research into the issues that led to the problems of 2018 and the feedback from our surveys from rail users and other stakeholders, but also from the work of the other main rail review, the ORR Report by Stephen Glaister.

Our recommendations focus on two overall areas: enhancing what passengers can expect from the industry, especially when it comes to timetable changes – a new 'Passenger Promise'; and improving the lines of accountability behind the scenes to clarify and make more transparent who is responsible for key decisions.

In addition, our Review raises longer term questions about more fundamental reform to be considered in the Williams Review that is underway and which will be a key report for determining the shape and future of rail services in the UK. These questions include how devolution within a much more integrated rail industry can provide a train service which will effectively support the North's growing economy.

Our sincere hope is that this Review will help inform those responsible for future decision-making be equipped as needed to take the decisions required to reform the rail sector with the prime focus throughout being on the needs of passengers. The recommendations of this report, together with the industry changes already implemented, should provide the foundation for the introduction of further enhancements for passengers in the coming months – including the provision of new trains, better facilities and smarter more responsive information systems.

Andrew Jones MP
Rail Minister
Department for Transport

Councillor Judith Blake
Leader Leeds City Council
Lead Transport Member
West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Introduction

The late spring/early summer of 2018 was planned to see the start of the first set of major service improvements implemented by Northern to transform their hitherto basic, but usable, rail service into something much better. Instead, for many passengers in the North of England the service faced totally unacceptable levels of disruption.

Passengers who up until then had been able to, for the most part, rely on train services to go about their business, lost their trust in the system. Basic rail services failed to operate; trains were often either late or cancelled – and when they did run they were often short-form trains, half the length of those that passengers had come to depend on.

As the crisis developed, information from Train Operating Companies (TOCs) was poor, and passenger anger at the disruption to services was aggravated by a lack of clarity over where responsibility lay. They were understandably bewildered as to why the situation arose and whose job it was to put it right.

The May 2018 timetable change – a change that had originally been supposed to offer better and more frequent services for rail travellers – proved quite simply inoperable. Delays to completing infrastructure upgrades led to poorly planned timetables – the failure of which meant that emergency measures had to be introduced in a bid to restore some semblance of a rail service – and for many months afterwards, TOCs struggled to offer a level of service that was anywhere near acceptable.

Those who suffered most were regular commuters travelling to jobs which help to power the North's economy.

The severe May 2018 disruption of rail service provision in parts of the North and beyond led to a series of reviews, designed to contribute to the reshaping of the rail industry. The actions from these reviews are part of a concerted effort to make sure such a failure never happens again.

The responses to this Review were all provided during the Summer of 2018

> *"Daily stress travelling to work. Never know if the train will be on time and have all its carriages. I have a disability so not being able to find a seat or worrying about trains causes me stress. I had to be home at a certain time today and left work early to catch an earlier train to ensure I made it."*
>
> (Passenger, Chorley to Manchester)

This Joint Review is one such initiative. Its focus is on how the franchises in the North of England are managed, how the current arrangements played out before and after the timetable problems and how they can be improved in the future. It sits alongside the work of the Office of Road and Rail (ORR) Inquiry chaired by Professor Stephen Glaister and the Department for Transport's (DfT) Williams Review - but does not seek to duplicate the remit of either.

Instead, this evidence-driven Report focuses on using the feedback of passengers and the elected local representatives who form part of the Rail North Partnership together with evidence from user groups, industry experts and the industry itself to improve the working of the Rail North Partnership in order to drive through better outputs for rail passengers.

The strength of feeling around the impact of the May 2018 timetable change was unprecedented.

> *"Total disruption to my commute for a week or more... The low point was Thursday with no trains to Urmston at all between 1546 and 1846. Last-minute changes and cancellations, no substitute bus service... Just terrible terrible terrible."*

(Passenger, Urmston to Colwyn Bay via Warrington)

The Joint Review

Objective

The objective of this Review is to jointly consider the arrangements for improving the existing collaborative management between DfT and Transport for the North (TfN) of the devolved Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) rail franchises through the Rail North Partnership. This collaborative review intends to learn from the May 2018 performance issues, the steps that led to them, and will recommend solutions. This will ensure that passengers are at the heart of future joint decision making and will help avoid a similar crisis of this scale happening again. The Review has been led by Councillor Judith Blake, the Leader of Leeds City Council and Andrew Jones MP, Minister for Rail who replaced Jo Johnson MP, the Minister for Rail at the time of the original commissioning of the Review.

Gathering evidence

The team conducting the Review comprised officials of the DfT, TfN, and West Yorkshire Combined Authority.

A mix of research, interviews and questionnaires was used to gather evidence, with analysis of the findings tailored to ensure the balance of input was accurately reflected.

> *"Before the timetable changes there was a direct train from Stockport to Kirkby… I now have to go Stockport to Salford Crescent then from there to Kirkby. The first day of the new timetable the journey took 4.25 hours due to cancellations. The second day took 3 hours or so. By the third day I gave up and borrowed my son's car which I have done every day since."*
>
> (Passenger, Stockport to Kirkby)

Much more detail on the approach to gathering evidence, the evidence itself, and the framework in which both the franchises and the Rail North Partnership operate can be found in the Technical Annex to this Report.

This Summary Report aims to communicate the context in which the Review's proposals and recommendations are being made and what those proposals and recommendations are.

Understanding the 'landscape'

The full Technical Report accompanying this Summary Report explains the 'landscape' of rail operations and services in the North of England, the legislative environment in which it sits, the history and development of these two elements, and the structure and evolution of the Rail North Partnership itself.

This highlights the complexities of the way in which operating companies, Network Rail, DfT, the Rail North Partnership and TfN need to work together given the links between franchise development ambitions, rail infrastructure development plans and operational rail services.

Clearly reflected in the Review is a frustration among elected members in the North of England that the arrangements in place at the time of the timetable problems showed they have less ability to directly influence the planned and unplanned events that shape the provision of rail services for passengers than they would like.

This Review makes a number of recommendations on how this might be improved and how elected members, as local representatives of the passengers and communities served by the network, may be better equipped to be able to influence outcomes where choices need to be made. It comes at a time when confidence in the rail industry has been severely dented and at a time when required enhancements to rail infrastructure mean, unless the industry can be more effectively managed and overseen in the future, there is a real risk of further significant problems ahead.

A fundamental finding of the Review is the need for the interests of the passenger to take a greater role in driving the behaviours of the industry and those who have responsibility for overseeing it.

Rail in the North of England

To fully understand the May 2018 rail crisis, it's worth taking a look at how rail services, and the franchises that have provided them in the North of England, have developed.

TfN and DfT both recognise rail's critical role in supporting economic growth, and for improved quality of life, and sustainable development. This role will only increase, as the economy grows, particularly for commuting. Success relies on good journey times and reliability, adequate capacity, and clear passenger information.

Historically there has been a severe lack of investment in rail in the North, especially on local services, with the Northern franchise let in 2004 as a 'no growth' franchise. This has stunted the growth of both infrastructure and service provision. As a result, passengers have missed out. TfN's Long-Term Rail Strategy, which informs its Strategic Transport Plan, identifies how rail can play a critical role in matching skilled workers with appropriate

employment and help develop the North's economy towards its full potential.

Recognising this, the Government through Network Rail has commissioned major investment in infrastructure – collectively known as the "Great North Rail Project". Part of this included the opening of the Ordsall Curve linking the rail termini in Manchester, together with significant route modernisation and electrification of the network in the North West.

The opportunity to exploit these enhancements came through the simultaneous re-letting of the Northern and TransPennine Express franchises in 2014-16, driven by the shared ambition of local and national politicians to transform rail provision in the North of England.

At the same time, leaders from across the North came together to propose rail devolution to ensure local knowledge was fully utilised in driving transport investment and running effective services. In 2014, Rail North Ltd was formed as a consortium of all local transport authorities covered by the Northern and TPE franchises and in 2018, Rail North Ltd was subsumed into TfN as the new sub-national transport body, helping deliver the Northern Powerhouse.

The new franchises were specified by DfT with major input and ownership by Rail North Ltd to provide step-change enhancements for rail provision in the North. Together, through the competitive process, they secured a £1.5 billion investment in rail, with a major increase in services, over 500 new carriages, a more than 40% increase in capacity, £60 million for stations, and 2,000 extra services a week by 2020 as well as the complete withdrawal of the 'pacer' trains. This was unprecedented.

The Rail North Partnership and the franchises

As a first stage of devolving powers to the North, the Rail North Partnership (RNP) was established for the DfT and TfN to jointly manage the Northern and TPE franchises on their behalf and thereby fulfil their shared ambition to transform rail services in the North. A locally-based management team (the RNP team) was established in Leeds, reporting to a Rail North Partnership Board, with equal representation of officials from each partner and an independent Chair to assist the Board to reach consensus.

While most franchises are managed by a commercial management team within the DfT, it was the RNP management team which, under the Partnership Agreement, assumed responsibility for managing the Franchise Agreements for Northern and TPE. Funding was provided to allow for this, and the RNP team was given full access to all DfT support services.

Some matters in the Partnership Agreement are reserved to the DfT (primarily relating to finance and risk), and some are delegated to TfN (which manages them through the Rail North Committee, a body set up following the absorption of Rail North into Transport for the North). Others are delegated to the RNP team, and still others sit with the RNP Board

(which is intended to be a strategic body).

The current partial devolution of franchise management is set out in a Partnership Agreement which was agreed and commenced at the start of the new franchises in April 2016. The TfN governance was not fully established at this point and it is appropriate in the light of events in 2018 to update the workings of the Partnership Agreement to create clearer accountability between the members of the RNP Board and their respective political representatives.

Since April 2018, TfN's role and functions within the RNP have been overseen by the Rail North Committee comprising 11 elected members drawn from the transport authorities. In addition, from the start of the franchises, officials from all the local authorities involved have had extensive involvement with detailed service changes in their areas through Officer Steering Groups. These arrangements for managing TfN input into the management of the franchises (which were in their infancy at the time) proved insufficient given the time pressures which dictated decisions around the May 2018 changes.

It's important to note that many service enhancements in franchise bids are based on assumptions of future planned infrastructure delivery, and where this is not delivered or is late, the risk usually sits with the DfT should such non-delivery affect finances. There have been a number of service enhancements planned in the franchises which have been delayed by late infrastructure delivery.

To fully understand the May 2018 rail crisis, it's worth taking a look at how rail services, and the franchises that have provided them in the North of England, have developed.

How rail franchises are specified and managed

A key point to note is that under the current franchising model, the point at which political leaders (nationally or locally) have the greatest ability to influence the provision of rail services is when the franchise is specified prior to being tendered.

Having set the specification, and agreed the commercial model, the competitive process then takes place according to the terms of the Invitation to Tender. Bids are received and evaluated by officials who then contract the offer of the winning bidder – including service enhancements above the minimum specification – into the Franchise Agreement. At this point the minimum agreed outputs for the next franchise term are fixed. This is the legal basis on which services are provided and the franchise is managed and enforced, and all decisions needed, whether taken by officials or directed by political leaders, must be consistent with the Franchise Agreement.

If the TOC fulfils its obligations in the Agreement then any requirement by officials or political leaders for it to 'do more' must be negotiated and potentially paid for as a Variation to the Franchise Agreement. There is more need for proactive decision making when the franchise is unable to deliver its contractual obligations, either for reasons beyond its control or not, and this is where officials may need to seek ministerial direction or agreement depending on the circumstances and the arrangements for using delegated authorities.

The timetable changes in the North were rooted in the specifications for the new franchises, but some changes, such as the new routing of TPE services through Manchester, had their origins in the earlier 'Northern Hub' infrastructure programme. This was overlaid with the TOC's own planned enhancements as part of the competitive bidding process for the new franchises. All these elements then had to be made to fit together as part of the timetable development process, leading to further changes.

Under 'business as usual', it was envisaged that the RNP team would agree minor changes and ensure compliance, and the RNP Board would be the strategic body focusing on franchise development and agreeing significant changes, seeking direction from ministers or elected members as required.

Prior to May 2018, this arrangement was adequate, however it did not provide for the level of political direction and 'real time' decision making needed to manage the risks and issues which emerged during the lead up to the May 2018 timetable changes.

Network Rail

There is currently no direct formal relationship between the RNP team and Network Rail although Network Rail is a 'delivery partner' member of the TfN Board.

The DfT has a contractual relationship with the TOCs (managed in the case of Northern

and TPE on a day-to-day basis by the RNP team), who in turn have a contractual relationship with Network Rail, especially with respect to access to the network on a day--to-day basis. In terms of enhancement schemes, the North of England Programme Board, chaired by the DfT, with representatives from Network Rail, TfN, the RNP team and the TOCs, is the platform on which these get shared visibility. However, Network Rail, despite being the infrastructure delivery organisation essential for franchise delivery, is not part of the Rail North governance. There was a clear desire from Northern leaders for greater local involvement in and accountability for Network Rail decision making.

There are currently two Network Rail Route Directorates, along with the System Operator and the Infrastructure Projects team, affecting the North. Network Rail has appointed a North of England Director as a single point of contact. Network Rail attends TfN Board, and the two organisations work closely together to make the case for and deliver investment and enhancements. These arrangements are expected to change following the recently announced re-organisation of Network Rail.

Events that led to the May 2018 problems

The development of the May 2018 timetable was a massive failure on the part of the rail industry that led to severe hardship for passengers and businesses across the North.

Although the originally proposed May 2018 timetable had been endorsed by Northern authorities, this timetable had to be changed at very short notice due to infrastructure delays. It should be noted that the train operating companies did raise concerns about this and Northern had requested the December 2017 timetable be rolled over. The situation was further compounded by a failure, on the part of the industry, to adequately communicate the rationale for the changes - or leave sufficient time to take on board local feedback.

"I now get to work 15 mins later than I used to. My trains home (services between 5pm and 6pm) have now reduced by 33%, and of those that still run, they do so from different train stations... in the first working week of the changes, I submitted five delay repayment claims, over double the number I submitted in the three years prior to timetable changes."

(Passenger, Rainhill to Manchester Victoria)

As the ORR Inquiry reported, the infrastructure improvements supporting a major uplift in passenger services were delayed and the subsequent late substitute plans were flawed in their delivery.

Delays to the Manchester-Preston electrification scheme were the root cause of the complete failure of the new timetable for much of the North in May 2018.

The industry mitigation for the delays (when they became apparent in January 2018) was a proposed 'hybrid timetable' for Northern, as there were no credible alternatives at that late stage. The plan to develop and implement the revised plan in the 16 weeks available rather than the usual 40 weeks proved to be overly-optimistic and too complicated.

These problems were then compounded by two further problems not foreseeable at the time of the decision to implement the hybrid timetable in January 2018; firstly, the fact that Northern and ASLEF were unable to renew an agreement for drivers to work rest days from February 2018, which was not resolved until June, and secondly the unexpected extension by three weeks of the blockade to ensure the completion of electrification between Preston and Blackpool. This meant that 1,350 additional driver training days were needed which severely reduced their availability until towards the end of the summer.

Neither political leaders in the North, nor Ministers, were sighted on the full implications for passengers of these compounding issues, and rail performance was further compromised by the Castlefield bottleneck in the months that followed.

A failure to fully communicate the revised plans, and the risks inherent in them, led to a situation where Ministers, officials, elected members and stakeholders were unaware of the potential problem looming.

Even at the last minute the industry failed to identify and properly communicate the scale of the potential problem and take mitigating actions to avoid the severe disruption to people's lives.

As this review confirms, the Rail North Partnership governance arrangements did not cause the timetable failure, however what happened has highlighted opportunities for increased scrutiny of TOCs and greater local planning and involvement.

"The unique devolved governance structure under which the Northern and TPE franchises operate, involving authorities from the North of England alongside the DfT, is complex and subject to a separate review in light of the May 2018 timetable disruption; the Blake Johnson Review (now Blake Jones)

(ORR Review)

Even at the last minute the industry failed to identify and properly communicate the scale of the potential problem.

"On the basis of the evidence reviewed by this Inquiry, we find no reason why this structure created risks that were material to the failure to introduce an operational timetable by Northern, subject to the conclusion of that review."

(ORR Review)

This is fundamental to the recommendations of this Review, and better working relationships, greater empowerment and clearer lines of communication between the officers on the Rail North Partnership and the elected representatives on the Rail North Committee has already begun in response.

It was also unfortunate that during the period leading up to and after May 2018, the old arrangements for elected members to come together were being changed to reflect the new statutory body of Transport for the North. The timing of the change meant that there was a vacuum of communication and engagement with elected members at a time, in hindsight, when it was most needed. Strengthened TfN governance will enable the TfN Rail North Committee to give clear direction to the TOCs' choices in the timetable process.

Office of Road and Rail (ORR) findings

The ORR Inquiry found that risk first emerged in delays to the planning and delivery of the North West Electrification Programme (NWEP). This reduced the time available to develop the timetable and then further compressed the time for train operating companies to prepare for implementation of new services. The scale and impact of these interdependent risks became apparent in May 2018, without any of the parties responsible seemingly aware of the scale of the potential consequences until after the disruption occurred.

The Inquiry made findings attributable to Network Rail, the TOCs, the DfT and the ORR about the failures to identify these risks and properly manage them.

It found that:

- Network Rail's System Operator managed the timetable process and was in the best position to understand and manage the risks, but did not take sufficient action, especially in the critical period in autumn 2017;
- Northern was not properly aware of, nor prepared for, the problems in delivering the timetable and that they did not do enough to provide accurate information to passengers once disruption occurred;
- DfT and ORR have responsibilities overseeing most aspects of the industry and neither organisation sufficiently tested the assurances that they received from the industry about the risk of disruption, despite having information and powers that would have allowed them to do so;
- The rail industry's processes for planning and managing major timetable changes do not adequately manage the risk arising from the engineering and other projects on which they depend, or prioritise the impact on passengers when making decisions about these risks.

Specifically, the Inquiry found that the diffuse nature of accountability nationally for different programmes across the industry and government resulted in a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities for the oversight and control of complex system risks.

The Inquiry also found an apparent gap in industry responsibility and accountability for the management of systemic risks, and the industry process needed to change to accommodate these responsibilities.

This is the finding which lay behind the Inquiry's central conclusion that 'nobody took control'.

"[The] findings of this Glaister Review clearly highlight that there is a real need for radical change in the way the rail industry operates. Fundamentally, as our members have said from the outset, changes are needed so we can be sure passengers' interests are put front and centre of every decision made. The Report's summary highlights the Rail Delivery Group's statement that 'the timetable is our promise to passengers'.

This summer, in the North of England, and elsewhere, that promise was broken.

That is unacceptable.

It was passengers who suffered - and that must not be allowed to happen again."

(Barry White, Chief Executive of Transport for the North)

Response to the events

Feedback to this Review has confirmed widespread perceptions that the initial industry response to the May 18 timetable crisis was, at the very least, 'poor'.

Transport Focus found that the services provided by both Northern and TransPennine Express trains were not what passengers felt they were paying for. They said this had practical and emotional impacts and that it had affected people's work and home life and led to passengers having to wait longer for the much-needed improvements they were promised – and in some cases, are still waiting for.

It highlighted a failure to warn passengers in advance of the unprecedented disruption after the timetable change on 20 May, as well as very poor information 'on the day' in the immediate aftermath of the timetable implementation. It said this frequently made reliable journey planning impossible, with last minute cancellations and severe overcrowding.

Transport Focus' view is that there was a lack of openness in how the industry communicated with passengers that is likely to have damaged trust, not only in Northern and TPE, but in the railway as a whole.

"The first issue is that confidence has been lost by stakeholders into the rail industry's ability to deliver and manage a timetable change. No matter how well the information is communicated, if the service isn't delivered as promised (on the scale of the May 2018 timetable) then the reputation of all partners (TOCs, DfT, Network Rail, TfN and local authorities) is severely tarnished."

(Warrington Borough Council)

"Network Rail must be accountable for the impact of its decisions on passengers in the North. The Transport for the North Rail North Committee should be a formal consultee of Network Rail and be able to nominate on to key decision-making boards within the Network Rail governance."

(West Yorkshire Combined Authority – Written Response)

"They've suffered a catastrophic loss of trust amongst the public."

(Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester)

"The Rail North Partnership was aware that the North West, and certain parts of it in particular, were most at risk of problems associated with timetable changes due to the lack of delivery of planned infrastructure. Could this have been mitigated if more contingency planning had taken place?"

(Lancashire County Council)

"If this disaster had happened a year or so later and the TfN arrangements had been running a little longer, then perhaps that might have helped. I don't think it would have been good still, but it might have helped. But here we had an unhappy conjunction of newly established arrangements with a largely unprecedented level of problem."

(RNP Chair)

"I think there needs to be a stronger ability to hold people collectively responsible, rather than allow space for individual entities to argue against each other."

(TfN Board Member)

(Member's comments provided to the Review, Summer 2018)

TfN and DfT Response

In the days following the timetable change, and in response to the severe problems experienced by passengers as a result of the shortage of trained drivers for the new timetable, TfN and DfT both took action and immediately escalated the issue with Northern. This was done through the RNP team and directly by each organisation.

Action Plan

A number of urgent meetings were held to discuss an action plan to improve the situation for passengers. Northern indicated that they were developing an interim - or emergency timetable to bring stability. This was discussed with ministers and elected members of TfN and DfT later in the week when they raised a number of concerns about the interim timetable plan, and also agreed to instigate this Review.

But by this stage the severe disruption in much of the network was well underway.

Performance deteriorated further, and Northern took the operational decision to upload the interim timetable to industry systems so it could commerce from Monday 4 June. This included the complete replacement of the train service on the Lakes Line to Windermere with buses.

> *"I will say that passengers collectively would say that they are not happy with the level of communication that is quite often borne of disruptions and passengers very often feel they're not communicated with properly during disruptions and they are probably right."*
>
> (RNP Board Officer)

Whilst the original interim timetable was implemented without the time for formal approval, amendments to the timetable (including the phased return of services to the Lakes Line) were subsequently discussed and agreed with Transport for the North.

The interim timetable ran until 31 July 2018 when Liverpool Lime Street Station re-opened after a successfully managed major blockade. The timetable stabilised the initial disruption, albeit with a lower number of services operating than originally planned, and with a level of performance still below acceptable levels.

An independent expert to oversee the recovery

Despite the stabilisation of Northern services as a result of the interim timetable, it became apparent over the summer that the overall performance of both Northern and TPE was not improving as expected. Focus turned to the performance of TPE as well as Northern and particularly to issues on their North Route, which included problems of congestion through central Manchester.

TPE made two proposals to the TfN Board to improve performance for the December timetable but these were not endorsed.

TfN members therefore called for an independent leader to be brought in to oversee performance recovery in the North. Richard George, an industry expert, was subsequently appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport to oversee the industry's performance recovery, reporting jointly to the DfT and TfN and producing a report and action plan in early 2019.

Network Rail responded to the May 2018 timetable issues by establishing a Programme Management Office (PMO) to oversee all national timetable planning and change.

One of the first recommendations by the PMO was to limit changes in the December 2018 timetable (in the North of England and some other parts of the country) to improvements targeted at performance recovery to limit the risk of another chaotic change in December.

In the North, there were originally a number of further timetable changes planned which were dependent on infrastructure delivery. These were held over until May 2019, with the focus for December being on some quick 'fixes' to improve performance and reliability, and whilst these have had a positive impact, further improvements are needed.

Improvement plans are now being taken forward through an industry performance working group as well as the North of England Route Supervisory Board.

The RNP team also brought in additional resources to scrutinise the TOC's own preparedness and readiness plans for each timetable change including working on infrastructure, such as platform extensions, and rolling stock. This aligns with feedback to the Review.

The RNP team also required each TOC to provide a written statement of readiness in advance of the timetable change. These actions helped to ensure that the December 2018 timetable change passed without incident. There have been encouraging signs of recovery, although TfN and DfT are very closely monitoring progress and holding the industry to their committed recovery plans.

Compensation

Following the disruption, TfN members called for compensation for affected passengers

and businesses and DfT agreed, quickly arranging for Network Rail to fund an industry compensation scheme. This was a significant first step and paved the way for Transport for the North to extend the scheme.

TfN worked closely with the TOCs and Transport Focus to develop an extension to this scheme. Season ticket compensation was announced in July and this was subsequently extended to cover regular non-season ticket holder travellers (those travelling an average of 3 or more days a week). This was the first such scheme in the country. Both schemes ran until December 2018 and passengers made over 13,000 successful claims. This is a comparable claim rate to other similar schemes and a total of around £2 million paid out at the time of this Report being produced.

Recognising the economic damage caused by the disruption, TfN members were also keen that businesses which suffered as a result of the disruption benefited from compensation. As a result, £500,000 was allocated to local authorities where there had been particular disruption to leisure markets. The funding was directed to encourage visitors, and therefore support local businesses.

The compensation scheme is a good example of the Partnership working together in practice, with DfT providing the allocation and ensuring consistency with other schemes elsewhere, and TfN providing the required local knowledge and understanding of the issues and priorities to tailor the package.

TfN is currently working with the TOCs and Transport Focus on the potential next phases of the compensation schemes. The aim will be to encourage a return to rail, and a return to the tourism economies. Initiatives are expected to include a combination of ticket give-aways and targeted offers plus funds used as a 'smart incentive' to encourage migration to smartcard season tickets.

The key issues

This Review has taken a slightly different approach from the other industry reviews. It has used the other reviews and the evidence gathered to clearly identify the key issues for the North of England and used these to identify a series of recommendations and actions.

Focus on passengers

At the heart of everything sits the passenger. Without the passenger a rail service is nothing. And yet consistently, those providing feedback to this review felt there were clear differences between the actions of the industry and the basic interests and priorities of passengers.

"I think what the rail industry lacks is any sense of an accountable system of provision, all of the entities can argue against each other and it feels to me it's very difficult to disentangle."

(TfN Board Member)

Passengers have to be put at the centre of decision making across the industry. Whilst functioning reasonably well during 'normal times', in many ways the current arrangements within the industry and the Partnership have been shown to be dysfunctional. This implies that real change is needed including a change in culture that recognises that passengers' interests should be at the heart of everything

First and foremost among the key issues identified by the Review is the need for greater 'Passenger Focus'.

"It is often, not only unclear to passengers if, or how, their interests have been considered in decision-making, but also often which industry bodies are involved and their roles in decisions affecting them."

(Transport Focus)

First and foremost among the key issues identified by the Review is the need for greater 'Passenger Focus'.

The Review is clear that current arrangements need to be strengthened with a much greater focus on the impact of actions on passengers. This includes addressing the lack of prior information about disruption. It is also clear on the need to better engage decision-makers in strategic choices and franchise development.

It's hard for local politicians to reconcile their own observations about the impact of poor performance and cancellations on the travelling public with the statistical information presented by the rail industry.

Accountability & the 'golden thread'

It is clear from the feedback gathered by this Report, that there is a lack of clarity over the ownership of problems, obligations and remits in the rail sector. Interlinked with, and alongside this, many contributors believe there is no sense of appropriate influence or accountability for decisions on the part of Northern elected members. The lack of a 'golden thread' between their views and the service and infrastructure decisions which impact on passengers is a significant cause for concern and needs to be resolved.

The review has highlighted deep scepticism among the North's elected members that the rail industry displays the accountability to passengers common amongst other industries or to other public services. The feeling is that current governance arrangements, which initially worked well, have been shown to be inadequate in the face of difficulties and have not served passengers or local politicians well.

> *"We need to take a hard look at the plethora of things that have been created. We need to map those and identify where there is overlap and we need to look at where we can, simplification and, at the very least, clarification of roles of the different bodies and processes and we need to get their various functions better understood between parties and the appropriate communications protocols agreed between those parties for different topics."*
>
> (Independent Chair)

Communications & Transparency

It is clear that communication of, and within, the decision-making process is an area that needs improvement.

The risks and opportunities that come with change and the impact on passengers need to be clearly visible and there needs to be, wherever possible, transparency with more accessible records of discussions and decisions.

> *"Rail North has to have the ability to communicate far quicker and 'more' effectively with Members"*
>
> (Transport for Greater Manchester Representative)

Although problems with information flow to members, often for valid reasons, was identified as a key issue in the Report, views were also expressed about the role elected members should, or should not, take in management decisions with respect to the rail industry.

During the review period, elected members have expressed surprise that, in a plethora of industry statistics and performance data, getting detailed information about services on a particular line or route, or on passengers left behind on station platforms (due to short formations and/or cancellations), cannot be provided by the TOCs. They believe this needs to change, albeit that it would add obligations to the existing Franchise Agreements and would require negotiation

Trust & Responsiveness

Passenger and business trust in the rail industry has undoubtedly been undermined by recent events. Local and national government trust of the industry has also been tested. To rebuild trust, ownership of the process needs strengthening, the industry made more responsive, and the exchange of information improved.

> *"Early honest and open communication at frequent intervals and at the appropriate level of seniority is essential"*
>
> (Liverpool City Region Combined Authority)

Recommendations

A stronger local sense of ownership of the railway and its complex decision-making processes is essential to restoring trust.

The lessons of the May 2018 timetable debacle are clearly captured in this Report and further evidenced in detail within the ORR Report by Professor Glaister which the full Review summarises.

Reflecting the views and voice of passengers and elected members, and other expert input, the Blake Jones Review is clear on its nine key recommendations.

Immediate changes - to be taken forward from April 2019 and which should be deliverable without amending current Partnership Agreement or Franchise Agreements

1. Work with TOCs on a new 'Passenger Promise' to ensure passengers are the central focus of decisions by the rail industry and the Rail North Partnership. It will set out the standards and behaviours passengers can expect. This will include:

    a. Developing new proposals for improved passenger information, to ensure communication is effective particularly during periods of disruption.

    b. Giving passengers a stronger voice, by promoting and expanding opportunities for passengers to engage with decisions about their local services.

    c. A new collaboration between the Rail North Partnership and Transport Focus, as well as stronger links with businesses in the region, to seek out opportunities to consider the passenger perspective in decisions made by the Partnership and get better information on passenger perspectives to shape future plans.

    d. A regular sector-wide snapshot of performance and passenger experience enhancing existing reporting arrangements to ensure impact is fully understood. This approach will bring together local intelligence, operational performance information, passenger feedback, and infrastructure updates, to consider future impacts on passengers, rather than merely reporting historic operations, with suitable early warning systems for foreseen problems.

2. A package of measures to provide greater political oversight of the decision-making process within the RNP. This will ensure there is a 'golden thread' between political decision making, implementation by officers, and outcomes for passengers. This will include:

    a. Empowering political leaders to be responsible and accountable for strategic decisions that impact on services to passengers in the North, enabled by a new formal scheme of delegations to set out how and where key decisions are made.

b. A revised Terms of Reference for the Rail North Committee, setting out how meetings will operate, its role and remit reflecting the new scheme of delegations, and highlighting the ability to escalate matters within Transport for the North's governance in order to engage directly with Ministers for the Department for Transport.

c. Direct reporting of the Rail North Partnership Board Members who represent TfN to the Rail North Committee, along with an explicit role for the Rail North Committee Chair to give direction on behalf of Northern leaders to those Board Members on urgent matters arising between meetings of the Committee.

d. An annual review of the Rail North Partnership arrangements jointly held by the Secretary of State, or relevant minister, and Northern Leaders to establish a forward look of the major risks, challenges, and priorities of the year ahead, alongside use of provisions within the Partnership Agreement to have more frequent reviews if required.

e. Agreement of a new MoU between the DfT, TfN on behalf of Northern authorities, and Network Rail, to set out appropriate governance arrangements that are consistent with the ORR Inquiry and will deepen collaboration, aid coordinated decision-making, and ensure that there is appropriate input from the North into all rail issues.

3. Establishment of an Information Protocol with a presumption of maximum transparency while respecting legal and commercial constraints and respective accountabilities of the parties where necessary, including:

   a. Access to all appropriate information needed for decision-making in line with the new scheme of delegations as per Recommendation 2, formalising the arrangement whereby reports, options and analyses are made available to DfT and TfN jointly and in parallel by default.

   b. A review of confidentiality provisions to ensure as much information as possible is available to decision-makers consistent with the legal obligations in the Franchise Agreements and the DfT's other obligations.

   c. A strengthened audit trail and greater public visibility regarding decisions made by the Partnership.

4. Development of an Integrated Forward Plan for the RNP, reflecting the Passenger Promise and new scheme of delegations by establishing a collaborative work programme for the Partnership that brings together its delivery milestones and decision points joined up with the wider rail industry, covering:

   a. A jointly developed Communications Protocol covering the Partnership, the TOCs and other industry players, to ensure greater accountability of TOCs to passengers through communication to them that is clear, honest and insightful.

b. This Communication Protocol will reflect the obligations on the TOCs to meaningfully engage on changes that impact on passengers, including to the detailed timetable and the Train Service Requirement.

c. Progress against agreed benchmarks for passenger-facing measures in the Franchise Agreements, and the delivery of relevant elements of TfN's Strategic Transport Plan.

d. A clear read-across with TOCs' annual business plans.

e. A clear read-across to Network Rail's annual business plan. Additionally, a proposal for Network Rail to provide a regular dashboard that brings together progress on infrastructure and operational issues where relevant to RNP decisions. This mirrors the dashboard Highways England provides to the TfN Board.

f. The annual review between the Secretary of State, or relevant minister, and Northern Leaders discussed above.

5. Enhanced resourcing, in terms of both adequate levels and effective use, of the Rail North Partnership, specifically:

   a. Additional resources for the RNP Team and TfN Strategic Rail Team, recognising that as well as using and coordinating existing resources more effectively, there may be a need for an increase to deliver these recommendations. The DfT and TfN are committed to working together to provide this resourceand will establish how this could be funded, considering existing contributions from the DfT, TfN, support from TfN's constituent authorities and the availability of future funding.

   b. To further support the use and management of existing resources, a member officer code of conduct for the Rail North Partnership and improved communications regarding the role of Rail North Partnership officers will be developed.

Additional longer-term considerations

The additional long-term considerations are those which would require changes to the relationship between the Rail North Partnership, the rail industry and local and national government

As previously discussed, the Williams Review has been established in order to investigate wider changes to how the industry should work. In the circumstances it is agreed that making recommendations for more fundamental changes to the current arrangements and relationships would not be appropriate as these will be considered by the Williams Review. The recommendations would also need to be consistent with whatever wider reforms to industry structure and commercial models begin to emerge.

Transport for the North is starting work on a business case for the next phase of devolved

powers, reflecting the original aspiration for the North to assume full control of the process by the next franchising period, and will be feeding in to the Williams Review.

In addition, the Rail North Partnership Joint Review recommends that the following are considered by the Williams Review:

6. Whether, and how, a more effective 'guiding mind' for rail services in the North that considers system-wide risks and issues can be put in place, and the extent to which devolved bodies could have a greater role in this.
7. Whether and how there can be a more explicit, integrated focus on the North by Network Rail together with greater accountability to TfN as part of this.
8. Whether and how future rail services can be integrated across track and train (including how Network Rail and others will strengthen alignment between future service delivery and infrastructure availability) and aligned with the North's aspirations, as set out in Strategic Transport Plan produced by Transport for the North.
9. Whether and how further devolution of rail responsibilities to the North will operate within any emerging overall rail industry structure.

Short-term actions to make a real difference to passengers

The short-term recommendations are designed to help to avoid a repeat of the chaos and put passengers' interests at the heart of decision making. They have been reviewed from the perspective of both passengers and elected members to help test how the proposals address the issues and meet the objectives of the review.

From the passengers' perspective

In the short term, the proposed Passenger Promise will help to restore trust and ensure the impact of future industry decisions on passenger's lives is central to the decision-making process.

This means a greater voice for passengers in how the system is planned and operated, for example earlier involvement in proposals for amended timetables or new services before they have been developed in detail, as well as better information on planned changes and improved 'on the day' real time information.

The Rail North Partnership will use the development of the Passenger Promise to ensure TOCs provide more granular and more relevant information for passengers, for example information about the number of passengers left behind at stations due to short-

formations, to drive better operational planning. Central to this will be seeking a change in behaviours from all those involved in planning and delivering rail services so that existing passenger interests are put first, for example to ensure that extra carriages are allocated to the services which are currently most crowded ahead of introducing new services.

Transport Focus, through their on-going research, have a strong understanding of the needs and priorities of passengers and the new collaboration, as per the Review recommendations, will ensure that this insight is deployed more fully than previously.

(For example: following up the reasons for particular examples of poor satisfaction and developing detailed action plans).

The additional resources will help ensure that the right plans are developed in response to the research and that the existing contractual levers are used to drive the change and that these are followed through to implementation and their effectiveness monitored and reported upon.

The improved transparency and increased information (for example about how the industry is performing against agreed targets) will allow greater scrutiny and challenge of those responsible for delivering services.

Ultimately though, public trust is best restored by the rail industry delivering reliable and punctual services -day in, day out.

From the Northern leaders' perspective

The short-term changes, including the overhauled decision-making process and agreement of an MoU will ensure that where appropriate, for key decisions impacting on passengers, their elected representatives have a much better oversight of risks and issues when making the strategic decisions (operational decisions will remain the responsibility of the industry).

- An example would be a significant proposed timetable change (like some of the amended calling patterns for local services implemented in May 2018) where there could be 'winners' and 'losers'. By re-setting the governance arrangements and delegations within the Rail North Partnership, elected members will have better information, in a more-timely manner, to advise the RNP Board and RNP team in making informed choices. In this example balancing the needs of local people affected by a change with the wider benefits to those travelling on the route.

The proposed 'Passenger Promise' will help to ensure that even where a change is allowed within the terms of existing agreements, TOCs are consulting in advance and flagging the changes to politicians at a point in time where feedback can be acted upon and changes made to the plans if necessary.

The improved flow of information will ensure that politicians can make the right informed

choices, and through new 'early warning systems' they'll be aware of impending problems.

The ORR Review identified the critical role of Network Rail in the timetable process and their part in the passenger impact of the timetable problems. It is therefore essential that Network Rail are part of any revised management arrangements.

Longer term actions structural changes and better economic outcomes

The short-term actions proposed will help make a real difference to passengers and should help avoid a repeat of the 2018 failures.

However, more structural changes are set out in the questions which have been remitted through TfN to the Williams Review.

These questions, to be developed through more detailed input by TfN to the Williams Review, seek to determine how the level of service the North needs and passengers and businesses deserve, can best be delivered. For example, such ideas might include simplifying decision making and 'doing the right thing' by having an integrated railway joining up 'track' and 'train' and closely aligned to the North's strategic and economic plans.TfN's input is likely to include consideration of further devolution of responsibilities to the North so that both decision making, and accountability is located where the benefits and impacts are felt.

Conclusion

The result of this new way of working, and the new protocols that would support it, should be a better and more transparent change process that is clearly linked to passenger benefits and impacts.

Greater local 'ownership' and visibility of the process should ensure better outcomes for both industry and passengers. The message below from Transport Focus to the TOCs applies equally to those that support and work with them.

> *"It is important not only to deliver a punctual and reliable service, but also to build a stronger relationship, based on communicating openly and honestly directly with passengers.*
>
> *"This is especially true of passengers who rely heavily on the train, such as commuters, and can be highly engaged with the service and TOCs' plans.*
>
> *"Northern and TPE, like most TOCs, need to use all communication channels to offer value to passengers and more effectively explain the challenges they face and what they are doing to improve."*
>
> (Transport Focus)

Taken together with other industry initiatives, these recommendations are designed to help ensure that not only can the problems of the of Summer 2018 never happen again, but the lost trust is regained and passenger interests are put back where they belong – at the heart of the railway.

This, in combination with the next phase of improvements in completed infrastructure, extra services, and over 500 new carriages over the coming year, will ensure that the railway in the North can once again play the role it needs to in supporting the North's economic ambition and making a positive impact on people's lives.