

## Transport for the North Board - Item 4

**Subject:** Operational Rail Update

**Author:** Salim Patel, Programme Manager

**Sponsor:** David Hoggarth, Strategic Rail Director

**Meeting Date:** Thursday, 11 June 2020

### **1. Purpose of the Report:**

- 1.1 To update Members on operational rail matters, particularly in respect of the response to the Covid-19 crisis, future impacts as lockdown measures are relaxed, and longer-term challenges post Covid-19.
- 1.2 To provide background information for inputs from the rail operators, the TUC and Transport Focus at the meeting. There will also be an update on the Northern 100 Day Plan.

### **2. Executive Summary:**

- 2.1 Transport for the North and Rail North Partnership have been working to support the rail response to the Covid-19 crisis in the North of England. The response to the industry's introduction of a key worker timetable, initially running just under half the normal services, was positive. Local authority representatives provided feedback as part of the North of England Contingency Group and outcomes have been shared with Local Resilience Forums to try to ensure Covid-19 emergency responders are sighted on the north's rail activity.
- 2.2 Since lockdown, rail passenger usage across the North has been around 5-10% of normal levels and footfall across Network Rail's major stations has been significantly reduced. In general, the public have heeded the messaging to 'leave the trains clear for those who really need them'. Whilst services have increased recently to 63-75% of normal levels, social distancing means that capacity is only 10-20% of normal levels. The reduction in demand (and uncertainty about the route back to normality) means industry finances are under severe pressure which will have implications for future services and investments. It is critical that a roadmap to recovery is developed that works for the North's passengers and businesses and that Transport for the North plays an integral part in the decision-making to come.

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### **3. Background Information:**

#### **Transport for the North's role in responding to the Covid-19 crisis**

- 3.1 Transport for the North has supported the rail industry in its response to the crisis by working with partners to shape service propositions to meet key worker requirements and by reinforcing the messaging that those who don't need to travel should not do so to protect capacity for essential users.
- 3.2 The main mechanism for this has been through Transport for the North's coordination of the North of England Contingency Group – bringing together lead officers with representatives of the industry. This has helped ensure a direct link between industry planning and local needs. Train operators have responded very positively to suggested changes to the timetables taking into account specific local requirements.
- 3.3 Transport for the North's focus during this period has been on communication (principally about what the railway is providing during the Covid outbreak and who should travel); ensuring consistency across the operators on the approach they are making and where they are prioritising; ensuring the sustainable delivery of the timetable, and services; and preparation for recovery when conditions permit.
- 3.4 Communicating rail service availability has been central to managing rail usage throughout the pandemic and the Great North Rail Project Strategic Communications Group has also met regularly to share messaging and report on issues and developments. This work, supported by Transport for the North, has helped ensure clear messaging on managing travel during the pandemic has been rapidly cascaded across the North whenever needed.

#### **The Current Position**

- 3.5 Changes to the Covid regulations came into force on 1 June 2020 (these include some limited retail openings such as car showrooms and outdoor markets and the ability for people to meet in outside spaces in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines). In addition, some schools have started phased returns. Further lockdown easement, contingent of Covid-19 tests being passed, is expected on 15 June 2020 when, for example non-essential retail outlets are expected to be allowed to re-open with appropriate social distancing provision.
- 3.6 Both Northern and TPE have successfully introduced a stable Key Worker Timetable which has gone through several iterations and was shaped by insight gathered from the North of England Contingency Group.

- 3.7 Services are, in the vast majority of cases, performing well with the Public Performance Measure (PPM) regularly in excess of 90 per cent for both Northern and TPE. Final data from TPE and Northern is expected imminently but shows continued strong performance. For example, in May, Northern averaged 96% PPM and TPE had a PPM of 95%.
- 3.8 At the beginning of the lockdown, passenger numbers dropped quickly and stabilised at around 5% of the usual total for Northern and TPE. Since the initial lockdown, demand has steadily increased to between 5 and 10%. Since the lockdown was eased in June, operators have reported only a relatively small increase allowing appropriate levels of social distancing to be maintained. Train operators and the Department for Transport (DfT) are carrying out passenger research to understand future demand better. This has been supplemented by very useful weekly surveys into passenger behaviours by Transport Focus.

3.9 **Next Phase of Rail Service Operations**

Operators have been asked to prepare for a potential further uplift from the current circa 70% service level in early July and again in September.

- 3.10 Future pandemic easement measures, including school returns and retail re-openings are likely to be more difficult to manage for the rail industry and the travelling public. We don't yet know how passenger sentiment will alter travel behaviour. Operators report relatively low levels of face-covering usage by current rail users and the industry does not have legal powers to enforce social distancing.
- 3.11 Challenges around the introduction of new fleet, driver training etc. have in many ways been exacerbated by the Covid outbreak and restrictions - the impacts of which we will need to work on with the operators to fully understand. Alongside this, Northern is expected to shortly complete its 100 Day Plan and Richard George will provide a verbal update on this at the meeting.

3.12 **Medium and Longer-Term Implications for Rail**

The impacts of the pandemic may have longer term implications for the rail sector including in the North of England. Rail services help keep the economy moving and supporting rail services over the coming months and years will underpin the recovering economy, signal that Britain is open for business and help achieve the national decarbonisation goals. A significant proportion of rail demand is from office workers and those who work in service sectors supporting the working week. It is probable that the legacy of successful remote-working will endure, with 'Teams' and 'Zoom' allowing productivity to be maintained without having to make as many journeys. This provides both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that passenger numbers and revenue will be reduced for a period of time. The opportunity, given the ongoing challenges of congestion, air

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quality and climate change, is that this 'released capacity' could provide an opportunity to persuade car users to make a shift to rail.

- 3.13 This will only happen when confidence in travelling on public transport returns, and those who are willing and able to travel by rail do not think services are being reserved for essential travel and key workers. There is some way to go in the easing of restrictions (and potential Covid case reductions) before encouraging the population to use public transport. The picture is likely to remain uncertain for some time, not least because many organisations and businesses are assessing their long-term office strategies in the light of successes (and adverse effects) of remote working. Further, the impact of the pandemic on the economy is likely to suppress travel (both road and rail), so the congestion 'nudge' to encourage car users to rail may have been weakened.
- 3.14 This makes it all the more important to focus efforts, resources and messaging on the key messages of transport integration and allowing people to make the right travel choice at the right time, particularly incorporating active travel as well as wider travel enablers such as flexible, multi-modal ticketing and contactless journeys.
- 3.15 Currently, the Government has fully underwritten railway operations - taking full revenue and cost risk for all franchises - at least for the 6 months of the Emergency Measures Agreements (which have replaced conventional franchise agreements for the period). Northern Trains Ltd (Northern) is already under government ownership although it will work to the same principles. There will be significant pressure to control and minimise costs in the light of reduced revenue streams, possibly exacerbated by lower passenger inclination to travel in crowded environments.
- 3.16 Recovery from the pandemic in the medium and long term relies entirely on passengers feeling confident about using services. Restoring and maintaining this confidence will be a delicate balance between reassuring people that their safety concerns are being addressed, whilst being realistic about the risks of travelling.

#### **4. Recommendations:**

- 4.1 That the report is noted.
- 4.2 That the Board considers inputs from the rail industry, the TUC and Transport Focus.

## List of Background Documents:

There are no background papers to this report.

## Required Considerations

### Equalities:

Age		No
Disability		No
Gender Reassignment		No
Pregnancy and Maternity		No
Race		No
Religion or Belief		No
Sex		No
Sexual Orientation		No

Consideration	Comment	Responsible Officer	Director
Equalities	A full Impact assessment has not been carried out because this is a paper for information only	Salim Patel	David Hoggarth

### Environment and Sustainability

	No
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Consideration	Comment	Responsible Officer	Director
Sustainability / Environment – including considerations regarding Active Travel and Wellbeing	A full impact assessment has not been carried out because this paper is for information only.	Salim Patel	David Hoggarth

### Legal

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Consideration	Comment	Responsible Officer	Director
Legal	There are no direct legal implications to Transport	Julie Openshaw	Dawn Madin

	for the North identified in this paper.		
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### Finance

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<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Director</b>
Finance	The paper highlights the financial impacts of Covid-19 particularly as a result of reduced passenger revenue. Financial risk on rail services is borne by the DfT.	Gareth Sutton	Iain Craven

### Resource

	No
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<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Director</b>
Resource	There are no direct human resource implications to Transport for the North identified in this paper.	Stephen Hipwell	Dawn Madin

### Risk

	No
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<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Director</b>
Risk	There are new risks highlighted in this paper relating to the impact on rail services from the Covid-19 crisis. These have been included in the relevant risk register.	Salim Patel	David Hoggarth

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Consultation

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<b>Consideration</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Director</b>
Consultation	A consultation has not been carried out because the paper is for information	Salim Patel	David Hoggarth