

19 March 2026

Rt. Hon. Heidi Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport

Department for Transport
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Louise Gittins
Interim Chair

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Sent by e-mail

cc. Lord Hendy, Minister for Rail

Dear Secretary of State,

Statutory Advice: Unlocking the rail freight benefits of the Transpennine Route Upgrade in full

Our vision is for a thriving North of England, where world-class transport supports sustainable economic growth, excellent quality of life, and improved opportunities for all. This requires a reliable, resilient, and sustainable transport network with the capacity to enable inclusive growth and support the region's net-zero ambitions.

We welcome the Government's continued commitment to deliver the Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) programme, as well as more recent announcements on Northern Powerhouse Rail. These investments will help transform connectivity for passenger and freight services and deliver benefits across the wider North and beyond.

The Business Case for TRU includes the boost for rail freight associated with the 15 additional freight paths per day in each direction, Monday to Saturday, along the TRU core corridor between Manchester Victoria and Ravensthorpe. However, it is recognised by the rail industry that these new paths will impact existing services both within and beyond the TRU core corridor. Current planned investment will be insufficient to address those concerns and enable usable and resilient freight services between the North's ports and inland freight terminals via TRU infrastructure.

The Rail North Committee, working with our constituent authorities and drawing on our shared evidence base, has identified a series of targeted interventions that would best support the North's rail freight growth aspirations in the short-medium term.

Our analysis demonstrates that a focused and relatively modest package of *off route* interventions is essential in ensuring the full value of the £11bn investment in TRU is realised.

This statutory advice sets out the specific schemes that TfN considers should be prioritised to ensure the economic benefit of the TRU investment is maximised. Appendix A provides more detail, but the priorities include:

- 1) Delivery of a set of high gauge (W12) clearance interventions - critical to supporting end-to-end freight paths between ports and inland terminals east and west of the TRU corridor (referred to as the TRU freight benefit realisation minimum viable product).
- 2) Delivery of the Northallerton – Eaglescliffe W12 gauging works - is critical to supporting the most efficient routing to/from Teesport and an initial step towards resolving issues of congested infrastructure on the East Coast Mainline. A scheme paused in the 2025 Spending Review; it would complement recent funding announcements in respect of Northern Powerhouse Rail.
- 3) Approval and delivery of additional, complementary rail freight terminal capacity in the North West served by the Chat Moss rail corridor, which is critical to ensuring the additional freight volume can maximise the use of the paths being delivered and avoiding congested infrastructure on the Castlefield Corridor.
- 4) Delivery of an extension to the Eccles passing loop (loop lengthening to 775m and turnout speed improvement) and delivery of a new passing loop at Patricroft, which are needed to support enhanced regulation of rail freight traffic across Manchester.
- 5) Remitting and funding the Manchester and North West Transformation Programme (MNTP) to develop and deliver further capacity interventions – closely linked to the passing loops above, the MNTP needs to increase network capacity through Manchester to make best use of the 15 additional freight paths per day created by TRU.
- 6) Government support for the delivery of interventions designed to unblock operational issues, both east and west of the TRU corridor, identified as critical in feasibility studies undertaken by Network Rail. The issues identified by these studies, such as resilience, maintenance and safety requirements and potential power supply, need to be addressed to maximise the benefits of investment in TRU.

Our shared goal is to ensure we maximise the benefit of investment in TRU for passengers, freight customers, and the wider economy.

Progress with delivery of TRU to date is strong, aided in no small part by a strong collaborative approach between the Government, the North's political leadership and the rail industry. Our advice builds on that success and looks to ensure the full benefit of TRU is realised.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Louise Gittins
Interim Chair, TfN Board

Appendix A: Detail of short term infrastructure interventions to unlock TRU freight benefits in full

In support of our statutory advice, the table below sets out the interventions that have been identified as critical to the delivery of TRU freight benefits in full. The overall cost of these interventions is still to be confirmed, and funding is subject to business case approvals. Whilst this investment is not insignificant, it is relatively small scale compared to the overall investment across the TRU programme and will have a transformational impact on rail freight growth across the North unlocking huge economic and environmental benefits.

Ref	Scheme	Description	Rationale, Benefit and Criticality	Cost	Status
1	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Milford Jn – Port of Hull	Connects Port of Hull to existing high gauge network. Creates potential for new services to Scotland, Midlands, and Doncaster as well as trans-Pennine flows upon completion of the TRU programme and wider high gauge clearance interventions listed below.	Total for schemes Ref 1 - 10 circa £30m	Decision to Deliver - This is currently the only TRU high gauge clearance scheme beyond the TRU core to have secured 'decision to deliver' status.
2	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Thornhill LNW Jn – Turners Lane/Calder Bridge Jn	Fills the eastern gap between TRU geography and the existing high gauge network (W10/12).		In Development Schemes Ref 2 - 10 have achieved decision to design.
3	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Adwick Jn/Carcroft Jn -Skellow Jn -Applehurst Jn	Provides a second high gauge cleared (W12) route between Immingham and the TRU corridor /Wakefield area.		Funding now subject to business case.
4	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Pontefract East Jn – Sherburn Jn	Provides a second high gauge cleared (W12) route in Yorkshire towards Port of Hull and Teesport and has the potential to re-route up to four daytime intermodal services away from the existing congested high gauge cleared route between Shaftholme Jn - Colton Jn.		

5	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Stalybridge Jn – Ardwick Jn	Provides a high gauge clearance route to / from Trafford Park via the TRU high gauge clearance investment.
6	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Manchester Vic – Deal Street Jn	Fills the western gap between the TRU high gauge cleared (W12) route with Port Salford and the WCML in the Newton-Le-Willows area.
7	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Ardwick Jn – Trafford Park Reception GF	Uplifts the route clearance from Trafford Park from W10 to W12.
8	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Newton-le-Willows Jn – Tuebrook Sidings	Uplifts the route clearance for Port of Liverpool & ILP North SRFI from W10 to W12.
9	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance at Dragon Lane, Whiston.	A listed bridge at Dragon Lane, Whiston requires a track to be lowered to support high gauge clearance. As this intervention is critical to supporting a high gauge cleared end-to-end freight path to Port of Liverpool, we understand this now forms part of the Newton-le-Willows Jn – Tuebrook Sidings work package.
10	TRU freight benefits realisation high gauge (W12) intervention.	W12 gauge clearance between Tuebrook Sidings/Olive Mount Jn – Port of Liverpool	Uplifts the route clearance for Port of Liverpool from W10 to W12.



11	Northallerton - Eaglescliffe high gauge (W12) clearance	W12 gauge clearance between Northallerton and Eaglescliffe.	<p>We understand this requires works to four non-compliant structures: 1) Yarm Tunnel 2) Green Lane Bridge 3) Fullicar Lane Bridge 4) Northallerton Tunnel</p> <p>Gauge clearance of this line would be a positive step towards a more balanced and efficient use of the ECML corridor and would complement future investment such as the reinstatement of the Leamside Line, which would provide an alternative path for freight trains, freeing up the congested ECML between York and Newcastle.</p>	Circa £25-£30m	<p>Funding paused in CSR 2025.</p> <p>TfN understands some funding to support the business case has been retained by Tees Valley Combined Authority and a programme is being agreed with Network Rail.</p>
12	Regulation of freight traffic in Manchester	Passing loops in Greater Manchester at Eccles and Patricroft.	Concept timetable planning undertaken by Network Rail has identified the need for the passing loop at Eccles to be enhanced (loop lengthening to 775m & turnout speed improvement) and a new passing loop at Patricroft to support the daytime pathing of additional freight services through Manchester.	£unknown at this stage	<p>Identified in concept timetable planning</p> <p>Enhancement is subject to a business case but uncertain if this would be funded through the TRU Programme.</p>
13	Track capacity for TRU freight paths in Manchester	Track capacity in Manchester	Managed through Manchester Task Force, the Manchester and North West Transformation Programme is investing to increase network capacity through schemes such as Manchester Oxford Road remodelling, but the programme is not currently remitted or funded to deliver any interventions to complement the investment in TRU and support the realisation of the additional 15 trains per day.	£unknown at this stage	<p>No remit or funding in place</p> <p>MNTP is currently not remitted or funded to deliver interventions to complement the investment in TRU to support freight outcomes.</p>
14	North-west rail freight terminal capacity	Delivery of additional rail freight terminal capacity in the North-west accessed from Chat Moss line.	Current plans assume most new TRU freight services will operate via Manchester Victoria and Chat Moss. However, without additional terminal capacity directly accessed from the Chat Moss line such as Port Salford and ILP North, Manchester-bound freight will have to use the Castlefield corridor, designated as congested infrastructure, and currently unable to accommodate additional services.	Private sector funding	<p>In Development</p> <p>ILP North: currently at pre application stage.</p> <p>Port Salford: Peel L&P is working with Network Rail, Peel Ports and potential funding partners to deliver the rail freight terminal.</p>

15	Operational requirements east and west of the TRU core corridor	Network Rail feasibility studies to consider operational requirements for freight paths beyond the TRU core.	Feasibility studies currently being undertaken by Network Rail are considering resilience issues, operational issues, maintenance issues, capacity issues, power supply issues and level crossing risk.	£unknown at this stage	In Development Feasibility studies are expected to be completed by the end of 2026. Funding for delivery of any identified enhancement would be subject to a business case.
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