

East Coast Mainline Consultation Response

Date: 30th July 2021

Transport for the North (TfN) became England's first Sub-national Transport Body (STB) in April 2018, with a Board made up of our region's 20 Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) and 11 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). TfN enables our region to speak with one voice on our transport needs. Together, our members represent the people and businesses of the North of England on transport matters, providing statutory advice to the Department for Transport (DfT) and working with delivery partners, including Highways England and Network Rail, as well as train operating companies.

Since our inception, our advisory Partnership Board has expanded to represent further important interests, including those of trade unions and passenger, environmental, and disability groups. This collaborative work supports the ambitions of the North by advocating for infrastructure investment to unlock inclusive and sustainable transformative economic growth.

Our first-of-its-kind Strategic Transport Plan (STP) and supporting Long Term Rail Strategy (LTRS) and accompanying Investment Programme, were approved in February 2019 to identify the transport projects which should be funded to deliver the step-change required to rebalance decades of underinvestment in our region

The Strategic Transport Plan¹ recognises the importance of sustained investment in rail in the North to support our economic aspirations. This includes full completion of the proposed HS2 network, Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) to link the north's major cities, Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU) together with improvements to the existing rail network for passenger and freight traffic.

In our role we provide statutory advice to the Secretary for State for Transport on investment decisions that will affect our members and travelling public. As an equal partner in the Rail North Partnership, we jointly manage the train service specification and contracts for Northern and TransPennine Express. Our work to date has delivered better outcomes across a wide range of areas, including for passengers after the issues of May 2018, as well as the introduction of the Key Worker Timetables following the pandemic.

Our Response

Transport for the North welcomes the investment that has been made in the East Coast Mainline infrastructure and rolling stock over the last eight years. However, this investment has largely been focussed on the south of England around Kings Cross and around Peterborough. Whilst this uplift in capacity is

¹ <https://transportforthenorth.com/our-north/strategic-transport-plan/>

welcomed it should not be the end of the investment in the route or be balanced off with a lack of investment in the North of England.

TfN is disappointed at the format and process that this consultation has taken. These proposals are being consulted individually by six different Operators. This lack of integration makes the proposals difficult to understand without technical expertise. In the spirit of William-Shapps, a 'guiding mind' approach should have been taken with one consultation showing clear impacts. Passengers and stakeholders are less interested in the Operator and more interested in the impact to their station and connectivity and this consultation has not made it easy for them to identify this.

Positives

There are many positives to be found in these proposals that we welcome:

- The extension of the Transpennine services to Saltburn will open new opportunities for the region and will be welcomed across the Tees Valley.
- The improvements in South Yorkshire particularly between Doncaster and Sheffield, as well as the possibility of further Sheffield to Leeds services in the future is very positive.
- The introduction of services to London for Middlesbrough and North East Lincolnshire.
- The hourly Cross Country service through Northallerton will open up direct connectivity to the Midlands and South West.
- The additional Harrogate to London service, albeit in one direction.

Connectivity across the North

As a result of delayed investment decisions, there are now capacity issues at York Station and north of York.

This has resulted in a proposed timetable that will remove a hugely important path that provides direct connectivity from Manchester to Newcastle (and many key centres in between) to replace it with an additional limited stop London service. Whilst additional services which are faster to London are important and bring additional revenue, they should not come at the expense of regional connectivity - or through removal of services that exist today. The north already suffers from poor and infrequent intercity connectivity and this proposal halves the level of direct connectivity between economic centres in the North East and North West. It also severs the direct link from the North East to Manchester Airport which is contrary to the TfN Long Term Rail Strategy which promotes direct airport links from major centres.

The wider impact of these proposals on Northallerton, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Morpeth and Darlington are unacceptable to the passengers that rely on these services to commute to work or travel for leisure, with many people using these services to arrive at the regional conurbations like Newcastle. Many passengers that have shorter distance commutes will also be affected as less services call at multiple stations. A commuter travelling from Durham to Darlington will have

less choice in May 2022 than they enjoy today. Many of these people will, in the future timetable, have a significant wait between trains as result of this rescheduling of services and will lose direct access to the North West.

TfN has significant concerns of the wider impact of these proposals on key arteries on Northallerton' road network. The proposals have identified at least six TPE trains and possible LNER train that will use the low level route rather passing through the station, which will lead to a significant increase in barrier downtime at Low Gates and Boroughridge Road level crossings that sits on the busy A167, and a further crossing on Romanby Road. For example, Low Gates already has downtime of 4.5 hours out of 24 which is a significant amount of time. It has not been confirmed if other Operators will also use this route, however the wider impact on the local population and changes to level crossing safety risk should be considered before proposals progress.

One of the other major repercussions of these changes will be postponement of the introduction of much-needed regional services along the Durham Coast and the connectivity issues this creates as a result of resource constraints caused by these proposals.

There are also numerous examples where connection times between rail services at locations both on and off the ECML increase, sometimes significantly, as a direct result of the May 2022 timetable proposals.

Such increases in overall journey times for passengers are unacceptable to our member authorities. The aspiration of TfN, and its Members, is to improve journey times, connectivity and frequency to connect the North's cities and towns, and to deliver an end state NPR network. This adverse impact to journey time does not align with our, or our Member's strategy, for reducing the productivity gap across the North.

When the government set out its agenda to 'level up the country' it was not expected that it would mean removing rather than adding connectivity. By way of example, the announcement in the budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer about freeports in the Tees Valley, and new highly skilled jobs from the Civil Service in Darlington were welcomed by TfN. However, this consultation removes 14% of services that will call at Darlington Station thereby reducing the opportunities to attract talent from across the North.

As the government begins to deliver on its commitment to deliver high quality jobs across the country it must also deliver the required investment in transport so that the highest quality candidates can be attracted and retained. It should not be cutting services.

TfN strongly feels that reducing levels of transport between major conurbations does not support an agenda that closes the gap between the North and the rest of the UK. This will not support improvements in Gross Value Added (GVA), and the better and highly skilled employment or productivity that TfN and its members are seeking to help deliver.

North and South Connectivity

Additional direct and faster connectivity with London is welcome especially for those areas where these connections did not exist. The potential Cleethorpes to London services is welcomed and will open new markets for these regions. However, Bradford Forster Square will see services to London halved whilst Sunderland will lose its LNER service in its entirety. Both these cities have the potential to provide great benefit to the economy if they are provided with the transport that allows its constituents the access to available opportunities. Reducing access to these services risks 'levelling down' and further leaving these conurbations behind.

Connectivity with London is also impacted at other key locations such as Darlington which sees the number of services reduced and journey times to the capital increased, both impacts being completely contrary to the regional growth ambitions in that area.

As rolling stock has started to be replaced in the North, we have also seen the introduction of a service that went from Liverpool through to Edinburgh via Newcastle.

This service has been welcomed across the board by our Members as providing something new and making the most of newer and faster rolling stock. These proposals will remove this extension from Newcastle to Edinburgh, taking away an opportunity for Union connectivity.

This will further impact on Transport Scotland's Reston Station that will be served by just eight trains a day despite an investment of £20 million. Further consideration should be given to reinstating the service north of Newcastle to serve stations that will be adversely affected by these proposals.

We welcome the introduction of the Cross Country services at Northallerton as it will open new markets to the Midlands and South West. However further thought should be given to the timing of trains. For example; there are 3 trains an hour from York to Northallerton that leave in the space of nine minutes with no trains for the remainder of the hour.

More thought needs to be given to make the timetables passenger friendly and not industry friendly.

Compatibility with Major Programmes

TfN is further concerned that these changes are not compatible with major investment programmes such as Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU), Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) and High Speed Two (HS2).

TRU is a key early enabler to improving performance, journey time and capacity on the North Transpennine route which will be key to making key economic centres more reliably accessible for more people. However, the removal of the contingent rights for Transpennine Express - and loss of direct connectivity between the North West, North East and Scotland - is contrary to this aspiration.

NPR is TfN's flagship programme to improve connectivity across the East – West axis bring Liverpool in the west and Newcastle and Hull in the east closer together. This will vastly increase the amount of people that have access to multiple cities with one hour of travel which in turn will drive productivity and GVA.

These proposals are a step backwards for our aspirations as they reduce the current baseline of inter-city services across the North at the expense on an additional service to London.

North of Church Fenton, the ECML is also proposed to carry HS2 services. This is key to our aspirations for the eastern leg of HS2.

Next Steps

It is important to note that the Azuma business case work was completed over eight years ago and subsequently much has changed since then. The world is beginning to emerge from a global pandemic and there have been big changes to the way that people travel. Proposals should be relevant to both the moment and the future.

Whilst TfN value further connectivity with London, it should not come as a consequence of services that connect the North of England.

These proposals will lead to a halving of the service to one train between the North East and the North West reducing connectivity between key cities and reducing opportunities for people to explore opportunities across the North of England.

The North has a productivity gap with the rest of the country, and TfN and its Members feel that these proposals will exasperate this gap further. TfN does not believe that this is a trade-off or choice that should be on the table.

Instead, the industry should be working together to deliver the infrastructure for an additional train to London whilst maintaining the current East to West connectivity that exists today.

Furthermore, we encourage the industry to work with TfN to set out clear steps towards a Northern Powerhouse Rail end state.

Network Rail have also developed proposals to deliver infrastructure at York Station and to the north of York that will deliver the required capacity to retain east-west services and also add the additional services from the North East and Scotland to London. These proposals are with the Department for Transport and they await a decision to develop these through the next stages of design.

Unlocking this next stage of development work would demonstrate a commitment to resolving the constraints, but it should be accompanied by a clear roadmap showing how infrastructure and service are developed in tandem towards the outputs specified through NPR.

This timetable is proposed for implementation in just over nine months time in May 2022 from the end of this consultation. TfN has first-hand experience of the problems caused by the May 2018 timetable change that caused significant disruption for passengers and stakeholders following poor governance and planning.

We would expect industry to have learned its lessons from this, and not to allow the timetable to be rushed in without consultation responses being properly considered. We also expect that adequate checks and balances will be completed, and proper industry timescales respected - especially given the complicated nature of such a large scale change.

TfN would like to recommend the following next steps:

1. That the implementation of the timetable in May 2022 is paused and TPE rights to the Manchester to Newcastle path remain in place.
2. That any changes should be integrated and compatible with the work that is being completed through the Manchester Recovery Task Force, specifically in relation to any timetable change in December 2022.
3. That, where positive changes can be extracted from the timetable and implemented as stand-alone items, then these should proceed. For example; extensions to Saltburn, Cleethorpes and Middlesbrough.
4. That a taskforce is established by the government and led by an independent expert to:
 - examine capacity constraints and put forward options to resolve these in the short and long term
 - propose a plan to incrementally introduce services with limited detriment to regional connectivity.
5. And for TfN and the Department for Transport to work in collaboration to work towards producing a roadmap of investment that will increase capacity on the ECML working to an NPR and HS2 end state.

Appendix A: Adverse Impacts to Individual Regions

North Yorkshire and York

- 1) Morning commuting between Northallerton, Darlington, Durham and Newcastle has been reduced to one train arriving before 9am.
- 2) There are three trains from York to Northallerton every hour, however these are concentrated over a nine minute period to fit in with the ECML services. This is not passenger focussed and will severely impact those passengers especially those that are using these for onward connections.
- 3) There are two services between York and Newcastle hourly, however these are 6 minutes apart. Again this is not in the interests of the passenger and should be re-considered across the clock face.
- 4) There is a considerable reduction in services going west toward Manchester and beyond. This will require more changes to be made at Leeds and York.
- 5) There will only be one service per hour from York to Manchester airport. There is a risk that this service will become heavily loaded as a result.
- 6) There will be a reduction in services to between Northallerton and Thirsk potentially affecting the commuter market for the North East.
- 7) There are locations such as Middlesbrough and York where for the local services connectivity to the wider network has been lost or made significantly worse.
- 8) It has been identified that at least six TPE services that will no longer stop at Northallerton will now use the low level route which is primarily used by freight. Clarity is required if this will lead to an increase in level crossing risk at Low Gates level crossing on the A167. Further information is required on any other services that will be using this route, the impact on downtime at Low Gates level crossing and any other level crossings in Northallerton.

West Yorkshire

- 1) Proposal to reduce the Bradford Forster Square to London Kings Cross service from two to one is not in the spirit of 'levelling up' and should be reconsidered. Proposals to increase trains to this under served city should be moved forward rather than reducing services further.
- 2) The last direct London to Harrogate service departs at 16:39 which is nearly an hour earlier than at present. This would provide challenges to both business and leisure travellers. Furthermore we have also identified that the timetable is asymmetrical with seven services to London whilst six in the opposite direction to Harrogate. Consideration should be given to adding the seventh train for the evening peak.
- 3) Trains between Leeds and Manchester Piccadilly will be reduced to two per hour with an increase in journey time to over an hour. The current journey time is 56 minutes which is already unacceptable for such a short stretch of railway between two key cities of the North. Further decrements in journey time should immediately be taken off the table.
- 4) Leeds, Dewsbury and Huddersfield to Manchester Airport reduced to one direct service per hour, meaning a reduction in the long-established twice per

hour service pattern. This may lead to crowding on the remaining Saltburn to Manchester Airport service as passengers seek to avoid interchange particularly if travelling with bulky luggage.

North East and Tees Valley

- 1) The two fast LNER services will “skip” some existing stops north of Newcastle in Northumberland, most notably Morpeth & Berwick and also Durham and Darlington to the South.
- 2) The curtailed Liverpool to Edinburgh TPE service, as well as further reducing the level of services in Northumberland, has its Northallerton stop withdrawn. It will also have an increased journey time of 5 minutes. The North West will also lose direct connectivity to Edinburgh as a result.
- 3) The introduction of a second ‘semi fast’ train per hour along the Durham Coast connecting Newcastle, Sunderland, Hartlepool, and Middlesbrough will be delayed by these proposals, so no journey time improvements there.
- 4) Passengers from Sunderland who currently use the LNER services to/from London will now need to undertake a 28-minute Metro journey to/from Newcastle Central station.
- 5) Connections between local, regional and national rails services are made worse under these proposals both northbound and southbound at numerous North East stations on the ECML. There are also some significant adverse impacts on connections and service provision on the local and regional rail networks away from the ECML, particularly relating to Northern services.
- 6) The table below shows the net effect on the number of trains each day at North East Stations on the ECML:

ECML Station	Dec-19	May-22	Diff
Berwick upon Tweed	56	50	-6
Alnmouth	43	44	1
Morpeth	75	54	-21
Newcastle	172	171	-1
Chester-le-Street	28	38	10
Durham	163	155	-8
Darlington	183	154	-29
Northallerton (to/from Ncle)	43	52	9

- 7) Berwick upon Tweed will lose direct connectivity with the North West as well as losing some connectivity every hour leading to longer wait times.
- 8) Morpeth has had significant investment in the station recently and has recorded an increase in patronage of 13.5%. However, they will the volume of services that they can access hugely reduced.

- 9) Darlington will also see a decrease in mainline services from 6 trains per hour (tph) to 4.5tph. It will also see a big reduction in ECML services calling at Darlington from 180 to 151. This is a reduction of 16% and the highest of all ECML station in the North East. Of greatest concern is the major reduction in East-West connectivity (eg to Leeds, Manchester, Manchester Airport, etc) as a result of the removal of one of the hourly TransPennine Express (TPE) services. The loss of some calls on the existing LNER routes at Darlington means reduced connectivity with some key destinations nationally. The large loss in direct services to/from Edinburgh is particularly alarming as is the unacceptable reduction in the number of services/seats available to London and the increase in some journey times, especially those to/from London.
- 10) Darlington also has a large reduction in direct connectivity to key destinations within its more immediate commuting, education and leisure catchment, compared with December 2019. For example; the volume of services a day from Darlington to Newcastle reduce from 93 to 77. This will have a major impact on loadings and passengers willingness to commute to work. Services to and from Leeds reduce by 11 and 13 respectively. This is reducing the connectivity between the Northern cities and towns and goes against the aspirations of TfN and its partners, and the governments own levelling up agenda.
- 11) As a consequence of Transpennine Express losing its rights for its second train to Newcastle, the North East will lose direct connectivity to the airport. This will require a change at either York or Leeds which will put further pressure on other services.
- 12) Whilst the extension of the TPE service to Saltburn is welcomed, there are a number of concerns with other aspects of the proposed timetable on this route:
 - The proposed reduction in calls between Teesside and Northallerton in the southbound direction from 1 train per hour (every train calling) to 1 train every 2 hours. This is the only regular service providing that key direct rail connectivity.
 - The non-standard departure times for southbound services from Middlesbrough, Thornaby and Yarm. This is confusing for passengers and impacts on some local connections with other services.
 - The increase in journey times for services on this route. They typically increase by 4 minutes in the northbound direction (to Tees Valley) but even more concerning is the 10 minute increase in the southern direction (from Tees Valley) and the even greater increase of 15 minutes in the journey time to Manchester Piccadilly.
 - The significant impact on connectivity at Thornaby between the northbound TPE service and the northbound Durham Coast service (run by Northern). Connection times between these services increase from 10 minutes to 40 minutes which is very concerning for a key interchange.

North West

- 1) Direct services from Manchester Piccadilly and Manchester Airport to Newcastle will be lost with all services terminating or passing through Manchester Victoria.
- 2) Direct services from the Liverpool to Edinburgh will be curtailed at Newcastle removing union connectivity that was only introduced in 2019. Curtailing these services at Newcastle will also remove further direct connectivity with Berwick-upon-Tweed and Morpeth.