



2026-27 Business Plan



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TfN is changing. The year ahead will be a transition for us. Working closely with our members, we will respond to a different operating environment.

The devolution of powers and responsibilities to elected mayors, the establishment of additional combined authorities across the North and progress on rail reform all mean that TfN must reset its business model to remain fit for purpose and affordable.

Investing in transport infrastructure and services is key to enabling individuals and businesses to access new opportunities and markets across the North. As recognised by the [Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review](#) (NPIER) and the recently published [Northern Growth Strategy](#), improving transport connectivity enables considerable economic benefits to be realised.

At its core, TfN remains committed to making the case for – and supporting the delivery of – the schemes that will most improve pan-northern connectivity.

We have worked with our constituent authorities to start our reset journey and we will re-focus on those pan-northern functions our members see as critical. As a first step, and in response to the reduction in our core funding, this business plan focuses on three key priorities set by the TfN Board.

As we go through 2026/27, it will be necessary to transition to a new sustainable funding model and associated business model. This will include working with our constituent authorities and the Department for Transport (DfT) to develop and secure approval for a new business and funding model, for implementation from April 2027.

Our plan for 2026/27

Our funding for 2026/27 is made up of three streams:

- Funding to enable and support core activities
- Funding for technical work commissioned by DfT in support of the Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) programme
- Funding for the work undertaken by the Rail North Partnership (RNP) executive.

The funding available for core activities in 2026/27 has been reduced significantly compared with the previous year. The work commissioned directly by DfT in support of NPR is in line with expectations and the funding provided by DfT in support of the RNP executive is broadly similar to the previous year.

Given the funds available, the TfN Board has prioritised three areas of activity for 2026/27:



Enabling delivery: TfN Offer

Using our analytical and technical capacity and capability to share the evidence, data and intelligence to support plan making and business case development



Working collectively on pan-northern rail issues

Providing support for Rail North Committee, including Rail North Partnership, to maintain the ability of the North to work together whilst details of rail reform are developed



Securing pan-northern investment

Providing support and co-ordination of advice on investment priorities delivered through national programmes, both rail and road

These priorities mean there are several activities that we will no longer undertake. However, we will continue to ensure that many of our tools, data and dashboards are easily accessible to our constituent authorities to support their work.

This 2026/27 Business Plan ensures that our work across the three funding streams complements one another, and in combination, support the TfN Board's commitment to realise the North's economic potential.

In taking this plan forward we will continue to work with other pan-northern partnerships – such as The Great North – to ensure that transport's critical role in enabling sustainable economic growth is aligned with other activities across the North and nationally.

Enabling delivery: TfN Offer

The TfN Offer provides our constituent authorities with access to specialist technical expertise that strengthens their plan-making and the development of business cases.

The analytical framework, at the heart of the TfN Offer, provides access to a wide range of data, tools and analysis that gives insight and intelligence at the pan-northern level in ways that can also be applied at a local level.

Since its inception in September 2023, the TfN Offer has enabled constituent authorities to realise savings of c.£1.8m to the public purse. There are three levels of support available through the TfN Offer, designed to be flexible and adaptable to meet the varying needs of our constituent authorities.

Bronze: self-serve

Access to useful tools, dashboards and data that can be used immediately.

This includes access to our Transport Related Social Exclusion (TRSE) dashboard, our Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure dashboard and our carbon tools, as well as access to our datasets.

Silver: tailored help

Custom analysis and insights specifically to support delivery of projects and schemes.

This could include feedback on the strategic narrative for a business case or customising one of our bronze tools for use in a specific area.

Gold: bespoke support

Dedicated one-on-one help from our experts for complex projects.

Due to our resource levels in 2026/27, we do not anticipate delivering any gold offer support. However, we will work with our combined authorities to scope potential areas for support, such as input to place-based business cases.

Throughout 2025/26, we focused on making more of our data, tools and dashboards available to constituent authorities as part of the self-serve offering. This included updated research on TRSE and the Carbon Assessment Playbook.

In 2026/27 we will continue to support our constituent authorities through the TfN Offer, within the resources we have available. This will include both the provision of data and supporting evidence to enable the development of the strategic business cases.

We will continue to develop the scope of the TfN Offer, with priority given to the launch of our rail portal to provide constituent authorities access to more detailed rail data, including information on service performance and accessibility information. As part of our website, we will also launch our Northern Insights and Intelligence Hub as a means of bringing together our data services in one place to enable easier and quicker access for users. We will continue to enhance our analytical framework, where possible, responding to feedback from our constituent authorities.

In 2025/26, we published our Northern Appraisal Playbook and shared our research with HM Treasury (HMT) and the DfT to inform their review of the Green Book: the aim being to ensure that business cases are better able to reflect the circumstances and opportunities that exist across the North.

For 2026/27 our focus will shift to working with our constituent authorities to apply learning from our research to support their adoption of place-based business cases. In this we will work with HMT, the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) and DfT to support the rollout of best practice from the ongoing pilots.

We will put in place mechanisms to monitor the success of our TfN Offer support, including ways to share best practice across authorities and gather feedback to help shape our future offer.

We remain custodians of the NPIER and will support our authorities to access the relevant economic data to support their growth plan priorities. Working with other pan-northern bodies, we will help ensure the case for investment to improve strategic transport connectivity is aligned with economic growth, innovation and digital infrastructure to realise the North's potential.



Working collectively on pan-northern rail issues

The railway system is undergoing fundamental reform, with the creation of Great British Railways (GBR) ultimately bringing track and train operations together under public control. Alongside this, Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) will take on increased statutory responsibilities as part of rail reform.

The Rail North Committee (RNC) has agreed that the North should seek to protect the rail powers currently devolved to it, ahead of advancing to new arrangements to support collaboration, where appropriate, as part of rail reform. We will work this year with our partners and industry to shape future options for the North.

This means for 2026/27, RNC will continue to hold national bodies and operators to account on behalf of the North. In addition, it will continue to use its convening role to bring partners together around pan-regional issues, such as rail station accessibility, network resilience and rail freight.

In addition, through the Rail North Partnership, RNC will be able to inform the North's priorities for services delivered by Northern and TransPennine Trains.

Through our specialist technical capability and capacity, we will also deliver analytical services commissioned directly by DfT to develop the strategic business case for Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) programme and projects, such as Bradford station.



Securing pan-northern investment

Our evidence base, including the NPIER, shows the extent to which poor pan-northern connectivity and a lack of capacity is holding back the North's economy.

Working at pan-northern level, we will continue to work closely with National Highways to ensure that the North's priorities shape long-term planning for the North's Strategic Road Network (SRN). This includes shaping the Roads Investment Strategy (RIS) and working with industry to support delivery of schemes such as A66 Route Improvement and M60/M62/M66 Simister Island, whilst continuing to make the case for investment in schemes such as the A19 north of Newcastle.

The North, through TfN, holds a statutory role in strategic rail investment planning. To ensure the North's views and advice are reflected, we will maintain support and input to strategic rail investment delivery boards, such as Manchester Task Force, Leeds station, West Coast North Modernisation and Transpennine Route Upgrade (TRU).

Additionally, the North of England integration workstream brings together DfT, industry and partners across the North to ensure key strategic rail investments are integrated into the wider network to unlock planned benefits; with a specific focus on TRU.

We will continue to be closely involved in this work and will provide advice to RNC so that where choices are needed, they are presented in a timely and considered way for RNC to offer a view.

We will remain actively involved in working with Network Rail and industry on the assessment of the network's capability to support aspirational passenger and freight service levels, including Northern Powerhouse Rail.

This will provide a thorough understanding of what service provision is needed to achieve the ambitions set out in local transport plans, as well as the North's Strategic Transport Plan. We expect the resulting long-term strategy to provide a route map for phased development of the network, subject to future funding and resources.

Our 2026/27 deliverables

Delivery of the TfN Board's priorities will be reported against the following deliverables:

Enabling delivery: TfN Offer

- Maintain access to the TfN Offer self-service data and tools through the launch of our Northern Insights and Intelligence Hub
- Deliver data and evidence to support business case development and plan-making, including supporting constituent authorities in the application of datasets to a specific geography
- Supporting place-based business case pilots, working with DfT, HMT and NISTA, and helping disseminate best practice across the North

Working collectively on pan-northern rail issues

- Through the RNC continue to hold national bodies and operators to account on behalf of the North
- Work with our constituent authorities to define new arrangements for pan-northern collaboration, where appropriate, that complement MSA partnerships
- Support RNC in championing issues of pan-northern significance, including accessibility, network resilience and rail freight

Securing pan-northern investment

- Deliver technical services commissioned directly by DfT in support of the business case for NPR
- Continue to support delivery of strategic road proposals that form part of nationally managed investment programmes, including RIS
- Provide pan-northern input to rail integration and long-term planning workstreams, supporting RNC to inform choices/decisions on the use/future of the network

Organisational development

- Working with our constituent authorities and DfT, develop and secure approval for a new business and funding model, for implementation from April 2027

People, resource and risk

Our people: resetting the TfN executive

Our greatest asset is our people. We are proud of the bright minds we have attracted, and continue to attract, to our workforce. The capacity and capability within the TfN executive complement the skills held within our constituent authorities.

As part of the reset of TfN's business model for 2026/27 there is a need to resize and restructure the TfN executive. The resulting downsizing programme will deliver an executive that is affordable and contains the skills required to deliver the TfN's Board priorities for 2026/27.

In resetting TfN there is a need to reshape the TfN executive with particular emphasis on:

- Having a culture of delivery: we will work as 'one team' to deliver TfN's Board priorities. We will break down silos within and across teams and focus on working effectively and efficiently in support of our constituent authorities.
- Monitoring and evaluating our performance: we will use data and evidence to inform continuous improvements, as well as continuing to review our capacity and capability to ensure we have the right resources and skills mix to support our members.
- Developing new ways of working: we will continue to gather and apply colleague and stakeholder feedback to help us become more efficient, effective and streamlined in how we work, including simplifying governance and processes to remove unnecessary bureaucracy.

In this way we will ensure that the TfN executive is more agile, as well as more responsive to our constituent authorities' needs.

This approach will also ensure that the TfN executive continues to evolve to reflect the new business and funding model that is needed for implementation from April 2027.

Our resources: budget for 2026/27

For this business plan, TfN is funded almost wholly by UK Government. Core activities are undertaken within the context provided by TfN's statutory role and responsibilities.

For the purposes of the budget, our analytical services in support of NPR and as employer of the RNP executive team are presented as 'hosted services'.

This plan is based on an establishment for 2026/27 of circa. 83 roles. The one-off transition costs associated with the reset of TfN for 2026/27 will be covered using our reserves.

Funding overview

Funding summary	26/27 budget proposed	25/26 budget	26/27 budget v 25/26 budget variance	
	£m	£m	£m	%
Core	4.25	8.35	-4.11	-49%
RNP	1.86	2.07	-0.21	-10%
NPR	5.23	5.70	-0.47	-8%
Total hosted services	7.09	7.77	-0.68	-9%
Total TfN funding	11.33	16.12	-4.79	-30%

Expenditure overview

Expenditure summary by cost type	26/27 budget proposed	25/26 budget	26/27 budget v 25/26 budget variance	
	£m	£m	£m	%
Staff costs	7.34	10.33	-2.98	-29%
Business infrastructure costs	1.21	1.44	-0.23	-16%
Discretionary costs	2.78	4.35	-1.57	-36%
Total TfN costs	11.33	16.12	-4.79	-30%

Note: expenditure includes VAT, as we are unable to recover this on the purchase of goods and services.

Our strategic risks

Risk management is fundamental to how we work: it informs our planning; improves the way we prioritise and deliver; and drives value in what we do. We manage risk through our teams, with clear lines of executive accountability and regular review and challenge by our Senior leadership team.

This business plan is informed by our corporate risk register, which is reported to the TfN Board on a bi-annual basis.



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