

Date: 12 February 2021

Subject: GMCA Response to the Consultation on Timetable Options to Improve Rail Performance in the North of England

Report of: Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Portfolio Lead for Transport and Eamonn Boylan, Chief Executive Officer, GMCA & TfGM.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To set out the proposed approach in response to the consultation into the Timetable Options to Improve Rail Performance in the North of England and recommend next steps in line with this.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Note the content of this report.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Mayor of Greater Manchester, to approve and submit a response to the consultation on behalf of GMCA.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

Bob Morris bob.morris@tfgm.com

Caroline Whittam caroline.whittam@tfgm.com

Equalities Implications:

The consultation affects all areas of Greater Manchester served by rail, including areas of economic deprivation. The premise of the options under the consultation are to change services in order to improve performance leading to passenger trust and higher rail patronage in all areas served by rail in Greater Manchester.

Climate Change Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures –

- 1. The consultation sets out options to improve the reliability of rail services in Greater Manchester. The net impact of which is predicted to be an increase in rail patronage, and a reduction in car usage for journeys which could reasonably be made by rail. Therefore, the overall environmental impact is expected to be positive.*

Risk Management:

N/A

Legal Considerations:

N/A

Financial Consequences – Revenue:

No direct consequences for GMCA, although an increase in the reliability of the railway and predicted patronage increase associated with this would be an economic gain for the region.

Financial Consequences – Capital:

N/A

Number of attachments to the report: 1

Full consultation ‘Timetable Options to Improve Rail Performance in the North of England’ to be included as an Appendix to this report.

Information about the consultation is also available via Transport for the North’s website at:
<https://transportforthenorth.com/rail-franchising-investment/improving-rail-services/>

The consultation is hosted on DfT’s website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/timetable-options-to-improve-rail-performance-in-the-north-of-england>

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

This paper refers to the consultation 'Timetable Options to Improve Rail Performance in the North of England' included as an Appendix to this report.

TRACKING/PROCESS		[All sections to be completed]
Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution?		No
EXEMPTION FROM CALL IN		
Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?		No
GM Transport Committee	Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
N/A	N/A	

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 14 January 2021 the Department for Transport, in conjunction with Transport for the North and Network Rail, launched a public consultation: Timetable Options to Improve Rail Performance in the North of England.
- 1.2 The consultation sets out three options which feature increasing levels of change from the pre-Covid service patterns, planned to be implemented from the May 2022 timetable. The three options affect different routes, and which routes have direct services to Manchester Oxford Road, Manchester Piccadilly, and Manchester Airport stations.
- 1.3 The options have been developed along a set of principles to achieve the objective of increasing overall reliability of services for all passengers. In simple terms these principles are:
 - simplifying and spacing service patterns more evenly
 - reducing the number of services running on the most congested part of the network
 - separating train movements as far as possible to minimise the amount of delay one train may cause on another
- 1.4 The consultation is seeking views on:
 - the principles used to develop these options
 - the details of the options
 - how any proposed changes may affect people's journeys
- 1.5 The consultation closes on 10 March 2021.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The story of rail in Manchester over the last few decades is one of unfulfilled promises and long-suffering passengers. Lack of funding in infrastructure and, until recently, rolling stock, alongside booming economic growth and rail usage has led to overcrowding, poor performance and the Castlefield Corridor being one of very few places in the UK to be declared 'congested infrastructure' by Network Rail.
- 2.2 The plan to rectify this emerged in 2009 as the Northern Hub. This was an ambitious infrastructure project designed to facilitate the objectives of the new franchises set up for Northern and TransPennine Express in 2016. These objectives were rightly hailed as transformative for the North and included new service links, improved frequencies and better rolling stock and station facilities for passengers to support the fulfilment of regional and pan-northern economic potential and environmental targets to shift people to more sustainable modes of transport.

- 2.3 The technical components of the Northern Hub project included the Ordsall Chord to link Manchester Victoria and Manchester Piccadilly (opened in 2017), a full rebuild and remodelling of Oxford Road station and 2 new through platforms and Manchester Piccadilly known as Platforms 15 and 16. These components were designed to work together as a package to deliver the benefits required, the fact they have only been partially completed means that the infrastructure was unable to support the new services which the franchises promised. The result was the failure of the May 2018 timetable when the infrastructure simply could not reliably support the level of services operating on it.
- 2.4 Prior to the pandemic, rail services continued to perform poorly with the infrastructure unable to support the reliable operation of service levels as they were. This consultation seeks to provide an interim solution by reconfiguring the timetable to match the limitations of the existing infrastructure. However, GMCA remains clear that as set out in Our Prospectus for Rail¹, published in September 2019, the long-term solution is to complete delivery of the Northern Hub and the capacity enhancements necessary in central Manchester to improve the rail system throughout the North.

3 THE MANCHESTER RECOVERY TASKFORCE

- 3.1 At the start of 2020, Government asked Network Rail to lead a Task Force to look at the recovery of rail services across the Manchester area. This Task Force had two roles, to look at the short to medium term timetable solutions to improve performance and to look at the infrastructure required to enable the delivery of services to meet the needs of passengers.
- 3.2 Network Rail and the Department for Transport requested that TfGM be a member of the Task Force alongside Transport for the North, Northern and TransPennine Express. The Task Force has been led by the consultancy, Steers, commissioned by Network Rail for this work. TfGM's role in this consultation has been to help agree principles and requirements of the work. One such principle has been to ensure all the options are fully modelled to ensure they would work on the ground to avoid similar problems to those in 2018. TfGM believes that had that timetable been modelled the industry would have realised it was fundamentally flawed. Another principle has been to ensure the process is as clear and transparent as possible. This has led to a full public consultation on both the options and principles behind the planning of the timetable.
- 3.3 Whilst TfGM has provided data and evidence to the Task Force, the Task Force continues to refine the options and to confirm the operational feasibility and business case of each one. Therefore, any enquiries regarding the consultation, especially those of a technical nature, should be made directly with the Task Force team. Contact details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/timetable-options-to-improve-rail-performance-in-the-north-of-england>

¹ <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/transport/rail-prospectus/>

- 3.4 The options have been developed in response to the requirement of the Task Force to look at the short to medium term timetable solutions to improve performance in Manchester. Manchester is at the heart of rail services in the north and thus the consultation refers to performance improvements for the whole of the North of England taking into account the knock on delays caused by and to areas outside of GM by services operating through it.
- 3.5 In developing the options, the Task Force looked at which services historically caused the most delay and analysed why in order to tackle the 'repeat offenders'. The principles were then developed into options by a technical team of train planners.
- 3.6 The results of this are available as part of the consultation document (Appendix 1). It needs to be noted that it is impossible for a timetable change to eliminate delay. Any of the options in this consultation will still see delays in the system. The Task Force's role is to produce a timetable construct which reduces this as far as possible within certain parameters.

4 THE WIDER CONTEXT

- 4.1 The Task Force was set up before the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was understood. Whilst its core remit has not changed the pandemic has caused challenges in a practical sense around availability of operator resource in particular.
- 4.2 The most significant impact of the pandemic on rail services has been the dramatic reduction of rail patronage in Greater Manchester and across the UK. Rail services will have an important role to play in Greater Manchester's post-Covid economic recovery and in achieving local ambitions for a shift to more sustainable travel and a reduction in carbon emissions. Therefore, the need to provide rail services which people can rely on is perhaps more important than ever if passengers are to return to the railway in future.
- 4.3 Other recent developments have also given rise to concerns about future investment in northern rail services and infrastructure such as the National Infrastructure Commission's Rail Needs Assessment published in December 2020, and the announcement last month that Transport for the North's core budget by was to be reduced by 40%. At the other end of the scale a number of improvements to GM stations, due to be funded under Northern's Service Improvement Fund, have been put on hold.
- 4.4 Finally, the government is yet to publish its response to the Williams review.

5 GMCA RESPONSE

5.1 By their very nature the options being proposed will require changes which may provide overall benefits to reliability and performance of services in the short to medium term but which may impact on connectivity. TfGM officers continue to review the impact of the three options as they relate to GMCA's strategic objectives as set out in Our Prospectus for Rail and the Greater Manchester 2040 Transport Strategy. TfGM is also engaging with local authority officers and Manchester Airport to identify wider passenger impacts and understand specific concerns. This work will inform GMCA's final response, but individual local authorities may also wish to respond.

5.2 The consultation closes on 10 March and it is recommended that GMCA delegates authority for the Chief Executive, GMCA and TfGM to submit a response to the consultation on behalf of the GMCA in consultation with the Mayor of Greater Manchester as Transport Portfolio Holder. In addition to highlighting impacts of each options on GM, it is intended to make the following points in the response:

- That we must learn the lessons of the failure of the May 2018 timetable.
- That a first step to improve rail performance and rebuild passenger trust should be 'making best use of what is available now' providing longer, higher capacity vehicles with simpler service patterns to improve reliability and punctuality.
- That deliverability is as important as choosing the right solution. If any of these options cannot be delivered robustly in May 2022 they should not be considered. It is important to implement a robust option and one which will perform well in practice.
- That any changes to the timetable must be part of a wider Covid-19 recovery plan for the railway which helps encourage people back to the railway post-pandemic to support Greater Manchester's economic and environmental objectives.
- That the long-term solution to improving the reliability and resilience of rail services across the north is to deliver infrastructure enhancements in central Manchester at the earliest opportunity.