

**MINUTES OF THE GREATER MANCHESTER TRANSPORT METROLINK & RAIL  
COMMITTEE**

**HELD FRIDAY, 3 MARCH, 2023 AT THE BOARDROOM, THE TOOTAL  
BUILDINGS, BROADHURST HOUSE, 1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR, 56 OXFORD STREET,  
MANCHESTER, M1 6EU**

**PRESENT:**

Councillor Angie Clark	Stockport MBC
Councillor Doreen Dickinson	Tameside MBC
Councillor Stuart Haslam	Bolton Council
Councillor Aasim Rashid	Rochdale BC
Councillor John Vickers	Wigan MBC

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mark Angelucci	Rail Performance Officer, TfGM
Helen Davies	Senior Governance and Scrutiny Officer, GMCA
Simon Elliot	Head of Rail Programme, TfGM
Victoria Mercer	Metrolink Service Delivery Manager, TfGM
Daniel Vaughan	Head of Metrolink, TfGM

**OPERATORS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Damien Chabas	KeolisAmey Metrolink
Melissa Farmer	TransPennine Express
Chris Jackson	Northern Rail
Nick Smith	Avanti West Coast
Kara Wood	Network Rail

**GMMR 01/23            APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from, Councillors: Mohammed Ayub (Bolton), Damian Bailey (Salford), Naeem Hassan (Manchester), Dzidra Noor (Manchester), Eamonn O'Brien (Bury) and Kevin Peel (Bury).

**GMMR 02/23            CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS AND URGENT BUSINESS**

That Agenda item 9, the Manchester Recovery Task Force, be deferred until the next meeting.

**GMMR 03/23            DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair reminded the Sub-Committee that several Members had not yet returned their Declarations of Interest forms and to do so at the first available opportunity.

**GMMR 04/23            MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Chair noted that during the previous meeting during agenda item 7. Evaluation of the Carriage of Dogs on the Metrolink Pilot it had been queried if the rules around carriage of dogs could be tightened up. The Chair asked for an update on this point. Victoria Mercer, Metrolink Service Delivery Manager at Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) advised that a campaign on this subject was being refreshed and in the process of development.

**RESOLVED/-**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2023 be approved as a correct and accurate record.

Simon Elliot, Head of Rail Programme, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) introduced a report to the Committee on Local Rail Services covering Periods 9, 10 and 11, 13 November 2022- 04 February 2023, and noted the following points:

- Performance declined in Periods 9 and 10 and improved in Period 11.
- Avanti West Coast performance remained poor around punctuality.
- TransPennine Express cancelled over a quarter of services.
- Trespass, fatalities and weather-related events impacted services.
- Progress had been made in the reporting of P-Coding (a process to make advance cancellations, when not enough staff or trains were available) to customers.
- Northern Trains shortfall was a concern at the last meeting, short-forming (the use of a train that is shorter than usual) reduced by half in Period 11.
- During the last meeting, TransPennine Express had mentioned a recovery plan; the Committee heard that within the plan was a proposal to reduce P-coding by half by June 2023.
- Services were operating at 92% of pre-Covid levels, this was not a return to pre-pandemic peaks Monday-Friday.
- There were no strike days during the last period, however further strikes were planned for 16, 18, 30 March and 01 April 2023.

The Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions, there was some discussion that included:

- Thanks being extended to TfGM for both including letters at the end of the report to give context, and ongoing support with the Cheshire Best Kept Stations. The Best Kept Station Awards provided a lot of encouragement to station adoption groups.
- Delays in the Access to All programme of works, specifically around ramps in stations. Clarity was provided that work was being rolled out to better understand inflationary pressures. Schemes were still funded and progress with supply chains was in progress and work would be delivered within the current control period.

- The Committee noted concern in respect of the TransPennine Express recovery plan given the current record of poor performance.
- The Chair noted Stalybridge had been closed for two-weeks, residents had reported that this had resulted in a lack of information, a bus replacement service that was chaotic and queues, she requested that these areas improve for any future closures.

**RESOLVED/-**

That the Local Rail Services Performance Report be received and noted.

**GMMR 06/23            UPDATE FROM RAIL OPERATORS**

The Committee received a verbal update from each of the operators in attendance.

**Avanti West Coast**

Nick Smith, Regional Growth Manager, Avanti West Coast addressed the Committee and noted the following points:

- Avanti was below targets for 'on-time' services, but there were improvements being seen across the network. Cancellations had reduced, all services were covered by train crew, there were no planned cancellations however this did not exclude cancellations made on the day that related to infrastructure issues.
- 83% of journeys had been recovered.
- To try and mitigate instances of disruption on days where industrial action was planned, customers were being asked to sign up for ticket alerts to enable the most up to date information to be made available on the Avanti West Coast website.
- The May 23 timetable was the next significant change, there were no planned changes to Manchester routes.
- At the last meeting, the Committee had raised concerns about staff engagement, whilst the organisation and wider industry was still recovering from the challenges of the pandemic, reassurances were given to the Committee that staff were valued and engagement was a top priority. Updates would be given on this matter at subsequent meetings.

- Avanti West Coast had opened its biggest Driver recruitment campaign to date, 4,000 applications had been received, commitments were given to ensure there was a gender split and applications from women were heavily encouraged.
- A Travel Companion App service had launched last week. This would enable disabled customers to access instant help whilst travelling and had been developed in consultation with the disabled community. The App was accessible through a mobile phone and used the phone number: 07980 037 037 via WhatsApp to connect to the customer.

The Committee noted the improvements being made by Avanti West Coast however, disappointment was registered at the reports that the At Seat refreshment service was being retired as the impacts could be felt by those with young children or older people who would struggle to access the shop.

The Committee was advised that the service had been withdrawn to enable focus towards the train crew and resources on-board the train, however Click and Collect was still in operation and the Travel Companion was available for those who had additional needs both visible or non-visible.

Assurances were given to the Committee that when industrial action was planned, Avanti West Coast was committed to running the best service possible and would rely on staff availability outside of core-staff. Emphasis was made that expectations must be managed when trains were cancelled for infrastructure reasons. Ticket acceptance could impact on other trains and services and Train Managers would declassify trains if more passengers were using a train than accepted, demand must be spread out as much as possible.

Operators work with Network Rail to minimise impacts of industrial action particularly the days following a strike.

## **Network Rail**

Kara Wood, North-West route head of performance, Network Rail addressed the Committee and noted the following points:

- Industrial Action had added a layer of complexity to operations.

- The RMT union had announced industrial action on the 16 March 2023, Network Rail had a tried and tested implementation plan and key routes would open for services to run.
- In instances of action short of a strike maintenance teams had to pre-plan train services and there were a significant number of signals needed to run the network. In places where there were single staff locations, it would not always be possible to cover these positions. Communications around travel needed to be clear, industry would maintain passengers check before they travel.
- Issues were encountered on the first weekend of Wigan electrification when scheduled work overran, a thorough and robust review would establish why that happened and this would show on next report to this Committee.
- Data continued to be gathered to assess how the timetable was performing to ensure it was delivering the expected improvements.
- Network Rail had been nominated for a Golden Whistles Award for most improved infrastructure that related to reliability and the weekend offer.
- Instances of suicide impact the line, the Samaritans had rolled out its Small Talk Saves Lives campaign in partnership with Network Rail, British Transport Police and the wider rail industry at Manchester Piccadilly last Tuesday, this campaign had been to other lines in the locality.
- There were plans to review the Travel Lounge at Piccadilly in consultation with a disability group at the end of March.
- Network Rail had handed back the possession of the Whaley Bridge line.
- The railway line between Manchester and Stalybridge was to be subject to disruption during weekends until the end of May as part of the TransPennine Route Upgrade to electrify the line. TPE had a diversionary route and a bus replacement service for Northern Trains.
- Platform 13 and 14 at Manchester Piccadilly celebrated the success of Christmas works, however there continued to be uneven services. Correction works were planned to install a full set of tactile pavings.

Members noted two areas of concern:

1. That in recent communications from Network Rail to residents, no Councillors or MPs had received any correspondence; and

2. the lack of bus replacement service for commuters had been adversely affected by the rebuilding of Hindley Station.

### **TransPennine Express**

Melissa Farmer, Regional Development Manager, TransPennine Express (TPE) addressed the Committee and noted the following points:

- TPE was working through action plans for strike days, it was noted that strike action impacted on performance.
- Revenue demand was at 67% this was not consistent with the 85% pre-pandemic figure but demand was increasing.
- Performance remained a challenge, P-code cancellations up to the night before travel had continued with a limited ability to plan ahead. The key factor in this situation was the driver backlog, and there was a focus on accelerating the Driver training programme.
- The first proposal on rest-day working was put to the unions in December and rejected, the second was submitted two weeks ago as a final offer proposal. Some changes to the first offer were approved from the Department for Transport (DfT) but this area is still subject to discussion.
- Currently it was not compulsory for drivers to work on their rest days or days off, although they could if they requested. TPE was requesting that this choice be unlocked to help improve performance.
- TPE continued to work on the Driver training programme as an ongoing process, rather than waiting on approval for the recovery plan.
- Assumptions were being made that there would be no service changes in May given the absence of rest day working.
- TPE had been awarded a Diversity and Inclusion in Rail award at the Rail Business Awards in February. The hiring and recruitment statistics showed that 27% new hirers had been women, 31% internal promotions have been women and 14% applicants were from the LGBTQ+ community.

The Committee queried if TPE would hold the franchise in December 2023. Further explanation was provided to the Committee that whilst it was acknowledged there were groups advocating for the removal of the franchise, TPE was within a new contract.

Should a new operator be instated, that would not resolve the current issues related to rest day working, and progress would not be seen until that was resolved.

## **Northern Trains**

Chris Jackson, Regional Director, Northern Trains addressed the Committee with an update and the following points were noted:

- 8-weeks of new the December timetable had been uninterrupted by strike action.
- Northern Trains running was an extra 3k services a week with longer trains, and efficient rosters with enough conductors and drivers to cover the services.
- 3.8% of services saw cancellations over last 4-weeks, this was an exact average for England/Wales.
- Statistics showed a strong customer demand including weekends. Campaigns such as Bolton-Manchester £3 Thursday fares and local newspaper offers were all assisting in bringing customers back to rail travel.
- Staff Sickness was consistently 3-4% higher than it was pre-covid and had been re-benchmarked from 3% to 8% to take this into account.
- Northern Trains needed 50 additional drivers to deliver the plan than was forecast pre-pandemic.
- Acknowledgement was given to the fact that Northern Rail was heavily subsidised at 38p per passenger mile and no routes made any profit. However it was noted that £1 expenditure in Northern Trains equated to £2.50 profit in the Greater Manchester area.
- Northern Trains continued to advocate for reform as latent demand could not be satisfied because Northern Trains did not have the staff to operate a Sunday service.
- The £750,000 upgrade of Hattersley Train Station aimed at improving facilities for passengers had been completed.
- Northern Rail had been awarded a Customer Service Excellence award at the Rail Business Awards in February, for work on Active Travel Simulation to help build confidence for those to travel the network who might not have done.
- Thanks were extended to the committee for ongoing overview and scrutiny.



The Committee noted there had not been as many cancellations to services. Clarity was sought over when construction at Salford Central Station would complete, it was noted this work was on track for summer 2023.

#### **RESOLVED/-**

1. That the Rail Operator update be received and noted.
2. That it be noted that Network Rail agreed to feedback directly to Councillor John Vickers about:
  - a) consultation with Elected Members and MPs ahead of any formal communications to residents or stakeholders by Network Rail; and
  - b) a potential Bus Replacement Service between Hindley to Wigan to accommodate commuters who have been adversely affected by the rebuilding of Hindley Station.

#### **GMMR 07/23 METROLINK PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Victoria Mercer, Metrolink Service Delivery Manager, TfGM presented the Metrolink Service Performance Report for Periods 9 and 10 to the Committee and noted the following points:

- Patronage reached 85% of the pre-covid figure post-Christmas and reached 85% at the end of January 2023.
- Commuter trips, specifically morning and evening peak periods reached 100% pre-covid equivalent numbers between Tuesday-Thursday. Extra services had been scheduled to accommodate these numbers.
- There had been Two incidents during these periods:  
a derailment at St Peters Square, Manchester; and  
a signalling failure at Cornbrook, Manchester  
both had impacted on performance.
- Metrolink was impacted by industrial action, specifically operations to Altrincham, with contingency cover only being provided between 0700 – 1900hrs on strike days and replacement bus operation beyond these hours. Services were not able to operate beyond Timperley.
- Tram availability dropped over the two periods, due to vandalism.

- Despite the cold weather, infrastructure assets continued to improve and achieved best performance during Period 10.
- 241 incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour were reported, a decrease in numbers and assaults reported pre-covid. Criminal damage remained higher.
- 18,000 young people were reached as part of the school and youth engagement over the period.
- The Meet the Manager sessions at Manchester Piccadilly had been well received.
- During World Book Day Transport for Greater Manchester collaborated with Manchester City Council, and donated books to customers.
- The Work Programme within the agenda detailed works planned until the end of April.

The Sub-Committee positively noted the initiatives to educate young people about criminal damage and the ongoing pilots with schools to try new approaches to education.

A Member enquired about any plans that related to trials of Tram-Trains in the eastern conurbation of Greater Manchester. Some clarity was given that Tram-Trains were complex and required development.

#### **RESOLVED/-**

1. That the Metrolink Service Performance Report be received and noted.
2. That it be noted that Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) agreed to feedback directly to Councillor John Vickers on any plans that related to trials of Tram-Trains in the eastern conurbation of Greater Manchester.

#### **GMMR 08/23          UPDATE FROM METROLINK OPERATORS**

Damien Chabas, Service Delivery Director of KAM provided a verbal update to the Committee.

- Performance had dipped towards the end of 2022 and staff sickness had contributed towards this.

- Since the start of the year, Metrolink performance had achieved above 99% reliability, and this continued to be good.
- Last year the safety record for Metrolink was not good and did result in some incidents. Metrolink reflected on the lessons learned and did proactive work in this area and for the 8-weeks of the festive period, customers and staff were supported by deploying staff to key hot spots to engage and monitor those locations. Communications were released for defensive driving for hot spot locations and the city-centre. There were no significant incidents during the festive period.
- Increasing resilience of the network continued to be a priority, especially asset and staff availability.
- Staff sickness continued to be monitored as did driver vacancy opportunities with other networks and the potential consequence of the loss of drivers from Metrolink.
- There had been a high-level of criminal damage to Metrolink carriages, it was noted that adverse weather and special events, put pressure on the network.
- Metrolink continued to work in partnership with TfGM to minimise any disruption for customers when city centre events were planned (such as the Manchester Marathon) or disruptive works during the summer.
- TfGM and the Travel Safe Partnership launched a new campaign “Better Than That” that aimed to improve safety on public transport in Greater Manchester. Better Than That used the first-hand experiences of young people who had been involved in antisocial behaviour, or who had been affected by it, and asked them to put themselves in the shoes of others before they behave in a way that may be seen as intimidating or threatening. The campaign involved customer service officers and drivers attending sessions in schools to help educate young people.
- Metrolink was working on financial sustainability, specifically fare compliance and improvement over the next few months.

**RESOLVED/-**

That the Metrolink Operator update be received and noted.

**GMMR 09/23**

**MANCHESTER RECOVERY TASK FORCE**

**RESOLVED/-**

That the Manchester Recovery Task Force item be deferred until the next meeting.

**GMMR 10/23**

**WORK PROGRAMME**

**RESOLVED/-**

That the Work Programme be received and noted.