Minutes

Special Board meeting	
Date:	**19 June 2018**
Location	**Piccadilly Gate, Manchester**

Attended

Board members:

Jeff Halliwell	JH	Chair
Isabel Liu	IL	Board member
Theo de Pencier	TdP	Board member
Philip Mendelsohn	PM	Board member for Scotland
William Powell	WP	Board member for Wales

Apologies

Arthur Leathley	AL	Board member for London
Marian Lauder MBE	ML	Board adviser

Executive in attendance:

Anthony Smith	AS	Chief executive
Nigel Holden	NH	Corporate services director
Jon Carter	JC	Head of board and governance
Jordan Sargeant	JS	Stakeholder manager
Louise Collins	LC	Senior stakeholder manager
Kate O'Reilly	KOR	Contact team manager
Kieran Watkins	KW	Senior communications officer
Miriam Cummings	MC	Communications assistant
Yvonne Fox-Burmby	YFB	Transport user team coordinator

Guest Speakers:

David Brown	DB	Managing director, Northern
Leo Goodwin	LG	Managing director, TransPennine Express
Patrick Cawley	PC	Director of route sponsorship, Network Rail

Members of the public:

Approximately 40 members of the public attended the meeting, along with many journalists and camera crews.

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transportfocus

Item	Subject

1.0 Chairman's opening remarks; apologies

Jeff Halliwell (JH) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He explained that we were here today to discuss the summer timetable crisis and the disruption it has caused passengers. This has now intensified with further strikes today. In welcoming the board's guests, he noted that Transport for the North had been invited but could not attend.

Transport Focus role was to be a constructive, evidence-based organisation which challenges operators and service providers when required. There was a clear, evidence-based requirement today. This was not a public meeting, but a board meeting held in public. Thus, any questions from the floor would be allowed through the Chair if time allowed. Comments and questions were also coming in via Twitter. JH reiterated that the meeting was not an inquiry as to what went wrong – ORR and TSC are doing this – rather today was about passengers and what the industry is doing to put things right.

The board and its guests – David Brown, Leo Goodwin and Patrick Cawley – introduced themselves.

2.0 Summer Timetable Crisis

2.1 Introduction

Jordan Sargeant (JS) introduced the paper he had previously prepared and published. The focus now was on what Transport Focus had been doing since the crisis began. He explained the extent to which he and his colleagues had been out and about over the network seeing what had been happening in real time, talking to passengers and getting a feel for their dismay and frustration over late or cancelled trains, with frequently inaccurate information and badly informed staff. Transport Focus had also used its extensive online passenger panel to gather experiences, and he briefed the meeting on some of these.

Transport Focus had met with the Rail Minister Jo Johnson, TOC Managing Directors, Network Rail and Transport for the North. It had consistently argued for better service resilience in the short term, restoration of the 165 services that had been cut in the medium term, and a compensation package that properly reflects the reality of the disruption to people's lives.

2.2 Issues and actions: Northern Rail

David Brown (DB) spoke for Northern Rail. He apologised unequivocally for the current situation, which was not one Northern wanted or one that he had joined the company to be responsible for. He had taken the job to do better, not worse. He recognised the service now has a profound, detrimental effect on passenger's travel, business and personal plans.

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He explained that in April 2017, the planning process for this year's summer timetable had begun. Things appeared to be on track until January 2018, including 1500 fully trained drivers in place – enough to operate the whole of the planned May timetable. Then, on 5 January, Northern were told that the electrification schemes, upon which the major changes to the timetable were based, would not be delivered by the date of the timetable change. As a contingency measure, and it being too late to plan a robust, brand new timetable – Northern decided to roll over the December timetable into May. Network Rail, however, refused. Thus, there was only a period of 16 weeks to come up with a workable timetable solution instead of the usual 40 weeks.

The electrification of the Preston – Blackpool route was completed 3 weeks late. This delay had the effect of meaning to all intents and purposes this was now a 'new' route, with 450 drivers having to have significantly more time to retrain and 'learn the route' than anticipated. The timetable that they had to plan was not what they wanted – there are serious, structural deficiencies with some stations and interchanges. The additional re-training requirements would not, of course, be needed for the final timetable.

It had only proved possible to start to communicate with passengers in the first weeks of the new timetable. The interim timetable went live on 4 June, having consulted with DfT and TftN. The primary aims were to stabilise the service, provide certainty to passengers, and continue with driver training. This would buy time to deal with the structural deficiencies as the new timetable emerges.

2.3 Issues and actions: TransPennine Express

Leo Goodwin (LG) also apologised for the disruption to TransPennine Express services. He fully appreciated that journeys matter and when they don't work, people's lives are disrupted. He recalled that DB already covered the sequence of events that led up to the crisis. Going forward, he believed it was not a question of apportioning blame, rather the industry finding a solution together.

2.4 Issues and actions: Network Rail

Patrick Cawley (PC) on behalf of Network Rail also made it clear that he was very sorry for the disruption that had been caused.

Bolton to Manchester / Preston electrification had proved to be a very complex project. In linear terms it was a 13km building site, which had to accommodate an operational railway. It had also involved the use of huge tunnel boring machines (the biggest since the channel tunnel was dug) with many cases of troublesome ground works, largely as a result of abandoned mineworkings. This had challenged Network Rail technically, and it had realised in December that it could not possibly deliver by the May timetable change. The principal contractor had been Carillion – NR had had

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to find a replacement contractor using previous sub-contractors.

The Blackpool project had in fact been very highly advanced when the 'beast from the east' storm happened, resulting in severe delays to the commissioning of the new infrastructure.

PC concluded by suggesting it was not all bad news; it was important not to lose sight of the benefits these troubled projects will ultimately bring. Substantial investment was being made across the Great North Rail programme, in Manchester (for example the Ordsall Chord) and within the Liverpool City region.

2.5 Questions and discussion

The board had a number of questions for its guests. Theo de Pencier (TdP) – noting that all the evidence suggests that restoring confidence in a failing service is often a matter of the quality of compensation and redress – asked what arrangements were being put in place. Was 15-minute delay repay being seriously considered? DB confirmed that suggestions to DfT and TftN had been made; certainly, the package should be good enough to restore passenger trust. Northern currently have a 30-minute delay repay scheme. Both he and LG also confirmed that they were scaling up their resources in their respective customer service centres, so they could deal effectively and efficiently with whatever compensation package was ultimately agreed.

The board – through JH – expressed their irritation that passengers not only continued to experience serious delays and cancellations, but had so far no idea of how or when they were to be compensated for the dreadful service they were getting. Why not just get on with it? DB reiterated that any arrangements that go beyond the current delay repay regime needs DfT and TftN approval.

Isabel Liu (IL) asked what was actually being done to put this situation right. When will the industry actually deliver the summer timetable it had promised? And what were all these 'structural deficiencies' we had heard mentioned so often? DB responded: the temporary timetable has helped stabilise the situation, enabled training to take place, and service performance is better. There is an upward trajectory of improved service levels to end of July when it is planned that the 165 services cut will be restored. In respect of structural issues, Leeds station was a good example, where all operators need to coordinate services and identify and remove conflicting service patterns. For its part, Network Rail reported that good progress was being made on all projects, but some commissioning on Bolton to Preston route would not take place until September, with full infrastructure availability on this route due around November.

The board noted this was just in time for the start of the *winter* timetable. It concluded that the planned summer timetable in the north of England only existed in theory, and not in reality, and that the revised timetable was dependent on

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infrastructure works being complete by the autumn.

Cllr William Powell (WP) noted that effective passenger information was critical, both online and at stations. It was abundantly clear that the industry had failed to communicate effectively in run up to timetable change Why was this the case, and what learning for the future was there? DB agreed that in the run up to the timetable change they had been nowhere near the 12 weeks informed traveller requirement, as they simply couldn't produce a timetable that would work. They had ultimately made a decision to push out timetables as pdfs via their website, although clearly this was no good for advance planning by passengers. Many stations had indeed been very badly effected by short notice cancellations; staff were also in a difficult situation as they didn't know what trains were running either. Northern had needed to wait until there was an interim plan before they could communicate effectively; this was not ideal, but better than simply acknowledging there was a problem, with no plan in place.

WP was also concerned about vulnerable passengers; what was happening here? LG replied that TPE had invested in staff training, and staff were now out looking to help rather than just waiting to react. DB and PC said similar arrangements had been made at stations for which they were responsible.

Philip Mendelsohn (PM) asked how the operators were planning to restore trust between the industry and its stakeholders, none of whom – including Transport Focus – had been forewarned of the crisis. Why should anyone believe anything you tell us in future? DB said he had written on 16 May to the north of England's key stakeholders saying problems were emerging, but he wasn't at that point aware of the enormity of the problems. Going forward, compensation arrangements were essential, and as previously mentioned, these were being discussed with DfT, making sure the interim timetable was robust, and effective planning and delivery of the summer timetable later in the year. LG thought the industry was working hard on all of this; there was lots of investment going into infrastructure and new trains, so that passengers will see a huge difference and help turn perceptions of the service around.

JH asked two questions received via Twitter. 'Greg' asked if Northern would be trying to wriggle out of paying compensation like they did on delay repay. DB replied that there had been no wriggling – Northern had already paid out over £1m in the first year of the franchise. 'Toby' asked how TPE can justify a third fare rise in less than a year when service is so bad? LG said that TPE had introduced many different fares, including a range of discounted tickets, to ensure the overall fares basket remained appealing.

Other questions from members of the public covered the following topics:

- Upper Calder valley, particularly Hebden, and commuters from there to Huddersfield; journeys now take over an hour due to poor connections at

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Brighouse, when will previous journey times be restored? DB acknowledged this was a feature of the interim timetable, but he hopes to have this sorted by the start of the December timetable change.

- Brighouse line, where the Service now allows for only one service an hour – the timetable issues were in Northern's original plan, not just the revised timetable following electrification delays and have been known for over a year, why can't this be sorted? DB noted that the service pattern is part of the franchise agreement, but he would take the matter away for further consideration.
- Lakes Line, which had been transferred from TPE to Northern two years ago, and now has no trains at all. This was surely not just about the timetable change, as there had been major problems since January. It appeared that Northern had simply given up on this route. DB conceded that given the need to address driver training issue, along with so many performance issues, he had concluded it was better to run no trains at all and introduce replacement bus services instead. The plan was for a limited train serviceto be introduced on 2 July, with full services restored by 2 July. JH congratulated all those involved in getting the heritage service up and running between Oxenholme and Windermere, demonstrating what could be achieved with a little resolve and imagination.
- Passengers travelling on the line from Southport were being doubly disadvantaged, having previously had direct services to Manchester Piccadilly delays and unplanned cancellations now mean missed connections to Piccadilly at Salford Crescent. Northern simply not listening – they had been told about these problems for over a year. Passengers had even written to the CEO of Arriva's owning company in Germany. DB confirmed there is a plan in place to resolve the underlying issues by December, but these are complex. A meeting was planned with stakeholders for the following week.
- Are the parties – Network Rail and the train companies - actually being truthful with each other? Problems cannot be sorted unless they are shared. And 40 weeks is not long enough to plan and deliver a timetable. PC said Network Rail shared concerns as soon as they know about them, but often didn't understand the magnitude of some of them. This was the case, for example, on the difficult ground conditions mentioned earlier. Network Rail's approach was to be open and honest with TOC's – working together very closely - all parties were invariably represented on project board. LG agreed; the industry will look very closely at the ORR report of the problems, not least to make sure they don't happen again

JH thanked DB, LG and PC for coming (voluntarily) and looked forward to improved performance very soon. Transport Focus would be watching.

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3.0 Project approval: tram passenger survey

The Board considered the Tram Passenger Survey proposal which, notwithstanding its financial value (meaning it would not normally go the board for approval) was considered by the management team to be sufficiently important to seek the boards views on.

The board **approved** the proposal with the following caveats:

- Third party funding streams must be explored with greater energy. It is clearly worth doing, but cannot be funded after this year, so a medium-term funding plan is now urgent
- Best value may be better realised outwith a formal tendering process, and if so, just get on with it. Tendering and set up costs, if tendered, may be quite disproportionate to the value of the contract.

4.0 Any other business

JH put on record the Board's thanks to everyone involved in putting together today's meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 1448.

Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting:

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Jeff Halliwell
Chair, Transport Focus

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Date

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