

**Railfuture** is a national, independent body that advocates a modern and effective passenger and freight railway in Great Britain.

The North East is one of twelve branches in England along with Railfuture Scotland and Railfuture Wales that make up the national organisation.

Web site: [www.railfuture.co.uk](http://www.railfuture.co.uk) Twitter: @Railfuture and @RailfutureNEast

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### **From the Editor's Chair**

Welcome to the **November 2017** edition of our twice-yearly Branch Bulletin.

The past six months have been significant for the country as well for the railway. A General Election in June, Brexit on-going, rising concern about air quality, the Grenfell fire and the Westminster sexual harassment revelations are but five national happenings that continue to consume extensive media engagement.

For the railway an industrial dispute about driver door operation, now effecting five TOC's, refuses to lie down; after a long period of steady passenger growth there are signs of some stagnation; worries have arisen about the financial health of Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC); a big cut-back in the rail electrification programme was announced in July; Metro unreliability seems to be rearing its head with greater frequency; and a large influx of new rolling stock nationally is imminent, so large there is a real prospect that carriages still with years' of running 'life' left in them will be scrapped.

At least on the railway front there is some encouraging news as well. *Northern* and Trans Pennine Express (TPE) have new trains under construction which will begin to take to the tracks late 2018; both operators are lining up additional services and *Northern* are making improvements at numerous of its stations; Virgin Trains East Coast (VTEC) will be introducing the first *Azuma* (IEP) trains into passenger service next year and are planning additional destinations including Middlesbrough; the Ordsall chord in Manchester will become operational shortly and will have a likely positive 'knock-on' effect for TPE services coming to the North East; a big upgrade was completed at Liverpool Lime Street in October; and, locally, it now looks certain that the new station at Horden on the Durham Coast route WILL materialise.

Most of these rail matters are touched upon in the Bulletin. And of course, as always, we detail the work our Branch has been undertaking since we last reported.

So, happy reading!

The logo for Railfuture, featuring the word "railfuture" in a bold, sans-serif font. "rail" is in black and "future" is in green.

NE Branch News

**Job changes:** Damian Bell has now started to “shadow” Treasurer Gordon Barclay with a view to taking on management of the Branch’s finances from next year. He has been succeeded as Branch Press Officer by Dennis Fancett who has wide experience of dealing with the media. Many thanks to Damian and Dennis for agreeing

these job changes and effecting them so smoothly.

## North East Branch Committee Meetings

There were meetings on 16 May, 25 July and 20 September.

The Committee agendas, as always, included a core set of organisational matters about future (and past) Branch activity plus a review of inter-action with the national *Railfuture* organisation. We also considered rail matters specifically related to the North East as well as receive reports from local Rail User Groups(RUG’s) and Community Rail Partnerships (CRP’s).

Our Chair, Trevor Watson, wants it known that there is an invitation for any Branch member to attend a Committee Meeting in an observer capacity. ***The next meeting is on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> November at Shakespeare Hall, in North Road, Durham 6pm - 8pm.*** Venue location details are available from Secretary Ian Walker if needed.

***Also, anyone who would like to receive email copies of the Committee Meeting notes are asked to give their details to Ian at [ian.walker@railfuture.org.uk](mailto:ian.walker@railfuture.org.uk)***

Topics receiving attention at the last three meetings have included:-

- The five NE rail infrastructure projects being promoted by the Branch. *(See p 10)*
- Horden Station *(See p11)*
- Durham – Bishop Auckland line – the case for reinstatement
- Branch membership
- *Railwatch* (national journal of *Railfuture*)
- Our branch budget
- The *Railfuture* national Summer Conference in June 2019: to be organised by NE Branch
- Branch input to Northern’s consultation process for May 2018 timetable
- Branch AGM 2018
- Change of Press Officer post
- Branches and Groups Day (26<sup>th</sup> October) at Birmingham *(See p2 below)*
- Recent conferences/events attended by NE Branch reps
- Freight and the dropping of the rail element of Merchant Park development
- VTEC and their removal of barriers at Durham Station and their financial outlook *(See p4)*

- Electrification retrenchment. (See p12)
- A report from emergency Leeds Transport Summit 23<sup>rd</sup> August. (See p13)
- Metro (See p8)
- The *Northern* strikes and the sharing of information etc. (See p5)
- Need for local stopping service between Newcastle and Berwick

**Branches and Group Day, Birmingham, 26<sup>th</sup> October.**

This meeting was called and hosted by Chris Page, national Chair of *Railfuture*. Each Branch was asked to nominate two reps. Damian Bell and Dennis Fancett did the honours for us.

The day was divided into sessions majoring on attracting new members, criteria for mounting campaigns and a SWOT analysis of each Branch.

Agreed that role of branches was to recruit new members and to campaign on local issues, and persuade RUG's to campaign for compatible objectives. Branches should concentrate any campaigns on projects which make economic sense, but which no-one else is mentioning. There should be focus on a limited number of clear objectives before deciding what support is needed from the national Board.

The relationship between branches and nearby RUG's was considered: should campaigns focus on improving services on existing lines or re-opening new ones?

Both Damian and Dennis have written short reports on the day for sharing with Committee colleagues ahead of their meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November.

***Railfuture* National Summer Conference – “Rail Revolution in the North”- Leeds 17<sup>th</sup> June.**

Trevor Watson (Branch Chair), Keith Simpson (Vice-Chair) and the Editor attended. Organised by Yorkshire Branch it attracted a total of seventy delegates. The Lord Mayor of Leeds gave a sparkling welcome. The morning session comprised major inputs from TPE and *Northern* senior managers – most of their material already familiar to us NE people. There was also an interesting, and somewhat unusual address by a railway chaplain giving insights to the range of tasks, some emotionally demanding, that comprised her workload. After lunch came a very competent presentation by reps from 'Welcome to Yorkshire' who highlighted the importance of the visitor economy to the County and the key roles played by rail and bus in helping promote tourism.

## Around the TOC's

### Virgin Trains East Coast



Both the *Journal* and the *Guardian* ran stories at the end of June (2017) that Virgin/Stagecoach, the partners in East Coast, had been in talks with the DfT about the franchise on account of a **profits slump**. The *Guardian* report (29 June) was headed “We paid too much for East Coast Line”.

In a letter issued by David Horne, the CEO, there was confirmation that the company “is currently loss making”. Horne said that “the tough economy, political uncertainty and recent terrorism incidents had had an impact on travel in the UK, including the level of rail use.” He went on to say that VTEC was meeting all of its financial commitments to government, but the growth they were seeing had not been at the level to cover current costs. He also laid blame for VTEC’s financial issues at the feet of Network Rail for delays in delivering specified infrastructure upgrades. An operating loss of some £87 million is forecast for 2017/18, but VTEC believe they will return to profit in 2019.

In August VTEC announced a big **half-price ticket sale** running from mid-September to late December.

We noted that the **ticket barriers at Durham** station had recently ‘disappeared’. Secretary Ian Walker subsequently made contact with Mick Ross of VTEC who told us that the barriers did not form part of the franchise agreement so VTEC at liberty to remove them. Mr Ross said he recognised the concerns identified by Ian, namely station security, fare evasion and assistance for passengers. He said VTEC hoped to employ more ‘floating’ staff at stations where barriers had gone. *(Any members seeing or personally experiencing difficulty at Durham due to the lack of barriers are invited to contact Ian).*

Test runs of the new IEP “**Azuma**” **high speed trains** (Class 800) built at Hitachi’s Newton Aycliffe factory are taking place on the ECML, mostly at night. The first day-time run across the Scottish border (to Dunbar) was in August.

### Arriva Rail North

*Northern* is promoting **walking** – really! The Company has commissioned 12 specially designed walks within its travel area. Joanne Morley, *Northern’s* Head of Brand and Business said: “With more than 450 stations, our network allows us to take people right into the heart of the region. Our trains stop at remote villages and thriving cities and once there you will find no better way to explore than on foot”.

Daniel Candish, who works at Heaton Depot in Newcastle, has become the **Northern Apprentice of the Year**. He was nominated at the Company's award ceremony at the National Rail Museum, York, on 28<sup>th</sup> April.

Since May *Northern* Passengers have been able to buy **off-peak advance purchase tickets** on the day of travel. They are available on some routes up to 15 minutes before departure and can be used with rail cards. But note, they are only obtainable on line.

The first of the **Class 769 trains** are expected to be ready in December. The 769, alias a former 319 EMU now fitted with an auxiliary diesel engine, has come about as a result of delays and cancellations in the electrification programme. The 769's will operate initially in the North West.

Thankfully an **electrification project** that will happen is Manchester to Preston via Bolton and Preston to Blackpool. Both schemes are currently under way with completion scheduled for 2018/19.

David Brown, previously Chief Executive at Transport for the North (TfN), is the **new Managing Director** of Arriva Rail North Ltd (which operates the *Northern* rail franchise). He succeeds Alex Hynes who left the company in the Spring to take on management of the Scottish (rail) Alliance. David started in his new post in September.

**Industrial action** by *Northern* guards has continued. There were strikes in July (three days), in September and October (both two days) and a one day strike on 8<sup>th</sup> November. For the latter *Northern* claim the company was able to run more services than on the previous occasions. All told five TOC's were affected that day. Mick Cash, General Secretary of the RMT union, believes the Government is deliberately blocking meaningful negotiations between the TOC's and the union because it is adamant that trains don't require a second member of staff with a safety role.

Concern was expressed at the Branch's September Committee meeting that *Northern* was not communicating adequately with passengers about alternative provision on strike days. For instance, some Cross-Country trains were making additional calls at Morpeth: and the fact that *Northern* tickets would be accepted by other TOC's didn't seem to be known by many would be passengers. *(Ed – I think self-evidently there is now increasing frustration amongst passengers that there seems no end in sight to the present stalemate. Meanwhile the Welsh Government has committed to retaining a conductor on all trains during the 15 year term of the next Wales and Borders franchise.)*

*Northern* have made it known that, like *Railfuture*, it favours the Stillington (Ferryhill – Stockton) route for its proposed fast '**Connect**' service between Carlisle and Middlesbrough (via Newcastle). But no word yet on whether Network Rail are willing to do the necessary Stillington upgrade. Meanwhile a strong objection to using that route has been voiced by Sunderland City Councillor Mike Morley who is adamant that because

of the size of Sunderland’s population the ‘Connect’ trains should travel via there. (See *Modern Railways*, November 2017 at p 19 “Battle in the North East”).

**TransPennine Express**



Branch Chair Trevor Watson was one of eighty attenders at a TransPennine Express **Stakeholder Meeting** held at York on 6<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

Leo Goodwin, TPE’s Managing Director, confirmed that construction work on the new trains at CAF in Spain was under way. Closer to home the existing 185 fleet is being transformed internally at York depot with one 3 car unit refreshed each week using local suppliers for the furnishings. Everything on schedule for a big uplift in services in 2019.

Subjects addressed in an ensuing “panel” session included:-

- Speeding up and increased frequency of TPE services
- Overcrowding
- Delivery of TPE route upgrades by Network Rail (NR)
- NR’s apparent reluctance to put passenger needs higher up their agenda: production of lots of GRIP Studies no substitute for action
- TPE calling patterns at Chester-le-Street
- Call for closer co-operation between TPE, DfT, NR and TfN
- Investment differential between Northern England and the SE.

Graeme Meicklejohn, Regional Development Manager at TransPennine Express (TPE), was our guest at the **Railfuture Branch meeting** on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017. He took as his subject the idea of “Taking the North further”.

Graeme started with a punchy promotional video emphasising TPE as a provider of prime connections between Northern cities for business, education and leisure purposes.

He outlined TPE’s new train order, details had been noted in the last Branch Bulletin, and described the ambitious upgrades to existing carriages.

The North has one of the largest economies in Europe and it was TPE’s duty to support this. One in three people in the North choose the train for long distance travel. TPE is determined to grow its patronage and is using TV advertising to aid this under the strapline “Where next?” Last year (2016) TPE carried 27 million passengers, one million more than in 2015. It is intent on promoting itself increasingly as an “inter-city” carrier rather than just a regional one.

Looking ahead TPE is hoping to introduce some cross-modal bus/train tickets, a new ticket for group travel and one for young (16-18 year old) job seekers. The company will attempt to connect up with bus operators, notably First Group (who don’t have any operations in our area!). There was to be an additional call at Chester-le-Street on

Saturdays. From December he anticipated that a Manchester Airport to Newcastle service via the new Orsdall Chord would commence, meaning Newcastle would be served by two TPE trains per hour one from Liverpool (due to continue to Edinburgh from 2019) and one from Manchester Airport.

**NB.** The November 2017 edition of *Modern Railways* (page 50) carries a review of current plans for allocation of new TPE stock. The rakes of Mk5A coaches, hauled by Class 68 locos hired in from DRS, will be deployed on the Scarborough and Middlesbrough services with delivery starting in 2018: whilst the 19 Hitachi built five carriage bi-modes, delivery starting in 2019, will operate Liverpool-Newcastle services, the service that will be extended to Edinburgh from December 2019.

Grand  
Central



**Class 180's** have started to arrive from GWR: the remaining HST's are expected to finish work soon on the Bradford and Sunderland runs.

In the May Bulletin (at p 9) there was reference to GC's intention to order four **Pendolino trains** for its proposed London – Blackpool service. Seems, however, that GC has been unable to procure these. They now appear to be planning to use Class 91's and, we assume, carriages made redundant from the East Coast by entry into service next year of new Azumas.

## Rolling Stock Matters ...

Eversholt  
Rail

Tim Burleigh, Head of External Relations at Eversholt Rail who are one of the major train leasing companies in the UK, was our guest at the Branch meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017. He spoke about **“Rolling Stock Planning in a changing environment”**.

Tim Burleigh meets with the Branch Committee every six months to consider developments on both the local and national fronts. Committee members have found these meetings extremely useful given that Tim is well versed in the workings, and idiosyncrasies, of the modern railway. At the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September, however, Tim addressed the wider branch membership.

He described the Eversholt company and its activities: gave an overview of the current rail market landscape in Britain: updated on progress with new stock for TPE and *Northern*: and listed contemporary challenges and opportunities confronting the railway.

Here is some of what he shared:

- Eversholt commands 26% of the UK rolling stock market: the company owns 3453 passenger vehicles (with 577 new ones on order) plus 83 freight locos.

- Eversholt is strongest in the London commuter belt and Scotland, but also has substantial commercial involvement with TPE and *Northern*.
- After a long period of sustained growth, there is recent evidence of some stagnation in the passenger market. (See P 19 of this Bulletin).
- There is growing competition from the automotive sector – with greater fuel efficiency, development of electric and hybrid vehicles, availability of cheap finance for car purchase, not to mention the prospect of driverless autos, all contributing to making the car more attractive as a travel option.
- An increasing focus on air quality. (See P 18)
- Changes to be faced specifically within the rail industry include probable modifications to the existing franchise set-up: the impact of HS2: devolution of transport powers from central government to the regions: and the desire for more on route competition.
- A recurring challenge is the difficulty in securing infrastructure enhancements on schedule: this means that cascading programmes of existing stock and arrangements for introducing new stock are having to be changed.
- Many good quality carriages will be found surplus to requirements due to the big influx of new ones. At present about 50% of the rail fleet has been introduced since the demise of BR, but this proportion will shoot up in the immediate future.
- The present new builds for both TPE and *Northern* are progressing well. Tim highlighted the big uplift in passenger comfort that would be experienced when the new EMU’s for the Manchester Airport to Glasgow route enter service.
- Opportunities for rail included the likely rise, certainly in the long term, of passenger demand and innovative uses for existing, but redundant, stock. There is an increasing desire for higher frequencies and new destinations coupled with the expanding scale of open access options (such as Grand Central). Finally the railway has self-evident sustainability and environmental advantages.

This was a highly informative session about some important aspects of the contemporary railway. Tim certainly got us to lift our eyes above the local parapet!

**Tyne and  
Wear  
Metro**



The *Journal* reported on 1<sup>st</sup> August that a row was likely between DfT and the leaders of the North East’s seven LA’s over how funding was to be arranged for **replacement of the existing Metro fleet**. Increasing unreliability and the difficulty of

securing spare train parts, plus recognition of the importance Metro plays in the region’s economy, had led DfT to acknowledge that fleet replacement was necessary at an estimated cost of £435m. The problem is that one of the finance options being considered by DfT was a PFI arrangement whereby the money would be provided “up

front” from a private sector source and paid back by the LA’s over 35 years with interest on top. The PFI “route” would likely delay the replacement process by up to three years. It seems that the LA leaders are minded to reject PFI on cost grounds. They say that PFI was ruled out as an option for funding both HS2 and Crossrail so why should it be suitable for Metro?

On 4th November (*Journal*) a mood change was evident. Reported that Nick Forbes, Leader of Newcastle City Council, had revealed that talks with the Treasury about a new Metro fleet “had made progress”. Councillor Forbes said there could be a major announcement about the new trains “in a matter of weeks”. *Railfuture* members will know the folly of counting chickens and all that but at least the situation does sound more hopeful than at the beginning of August. (*Scrutinise Chancellor Hammond’s Autumn budget for a possible announcement. –Ed*)

There have been recent **track and wiring upgrades** in the Longbenton area. In August replacement of the Killingworth Road Bridge was completed in what Raymond Johnstone of Nexus described “as the biggest engineering project in Metro’s 37 year history”. Costing £5m the work was completed within a very tight schedule and services resumed exactly as had been planned.

There was an almost complete shut-down of the Metro system on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October when a **major power feed at Gosforth depot failed** at 5 30am. Press reports the next day catalogued a series of issues that need to be addressed. These included poor communication to intending passengers, lack of replacement buses, refusal of bus drivers to accept Metro tickets (allegedly) and failure to get some bus assistance in place until the afternoon. A limited train service resumed in the early evening.

The *Journal* carried an item on 7<sup>th</sup> November suggesting that once funding had been secured for a new train fleet, and the fleet was actually in service, attention could then turn to **expansion of routes**. They suggest that if the new trains are up and running and “bedded in” no later than 2025 then detailed planning for first new line will be completed by 2030, with construction beginning as soon as possible after this. Preference likely to be given to a line going to Team Valley and Metro Centre, followed by a service to Washington.

*(Why not keep this Bulletin on your mantelpiece and look at it again in 2030? – Ed)*

Nexus are raising most **Metro fares** in January by 3.4%. This will mean 10p is added to the price of single and day saver paper tickets. But a new special low fare is being introduced for young people aged 16-18, as part of a drive by NEXUS and the local bus companies to improve the lot of both those staying on in education and those taking up their first jobs or apprenticeships. The price of both the area and out of area ‘gold’ cards remain at £12 and £24 respectively.

A detailed feature by Philip Sherrat under the heading of **Modernising the Metro** appears at page 70 in the October 2017 edition of *Modern Railways*.

**Late News Extra:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced, as part of his Budget, a grant of £377m to NEXUS to pay for new rolling stock. This removes the possibility that a PFI would be imposed, but has led to some speculation about the figures. As we reported (above) the last NEXUS estimate we had seen suggested that £435m would be required. The BBC are now reporting that this estimate is out of date, and that the revised estimate for *trains* (*our emphasis*) is now £362m. They also report that NEXUS have already identified the £25m balance, presumably from their own reserves. As always: the devil is in the detail and we look forward to learning what, if anything, has been cut from the project to bring the figure down from £435m to £362m.

## Main Line Infrastructure



**The Branch’s five nominated infrastructure projects** – these were listed in the May Bulletin at page 13. To remind you: reinstatement of Leamside: upgrading of the Stillington line to passenger standard: new stations at Ferryhill and Team Valley: and upgrading of the Blyth and Tyne line to support a passenger service from Ashington (and beyond).

Since *Railfuture* is a campaigning body the Branch Committee has agreed to major on these particular projects over the coming months. To this end details are being entered on the national web site. They are not intended to bind us for ever. Changing developments may require us to withdraw a specific project or add new ones.

The Committee recognise there are a host of other infrastructure suggestions we could have made, but felt it better to restrict our limited energies to the five nominated ones.

(Members may recall we sent them for consideration by the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) in a NECTAR submission last February).

*Mail on Line* (26 October) carried a lengthy, illustrated piece about the Campaign for Better Transport’s report to Government naming 12 closed lines that should be prioritised for reopening. Among the twelve were **Leamside and the Blyth and Tyne!** For Branch members who are not aware, there is a ‘Leamside Line’ group on *Facebook*. A ready welcome awaits anyone who wishes to join. Though nostalgia appears to be the abiding theme there is occasional reference to ‘the need for reopening’. When anything

stirs on the Leamside reinstatement front our Branch might wish to have a formal liaison with the group members? Strength in numbers etc.!

Network Rail and train operators have announced a **new Route Supervisory Board for the East Coast Main Line (ECML)**. The Board will ensure there is one voice representing customers, aimed at holding the rail industry to account and ensuring the different elements work together to drive improvements. Representatives from ‘passenger groups’ will be allowed to seek membership of the Board.

The journal *TransportXtra* (14<sup>th</sup> September) reports that the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has called on the Government to “seriously explore” the construction of a **new cross-Pennine rail line**. LCCI said “it was in the best interests of the whole UK that new strategic transport infrastructure is not concentrated mainly in the South East”. Sam McKee, policy director of LCCI, said “London is heading towards megacity status with 10 million people by 2030 and while we seek the right infrastructure here, it is important that the rest of the country continues to grow as well. At present travelling between the great northern cities is a tortuous, time consuming experience. That is not good for Britain plc. These cities have a collective population of 9 million, similar to London’s current total”. McKee also suggested that expertise accumulated during construction of Crossrail 1 (particularly tunnelling) could be harnessed for the cross-Pennine rail project. “We are clear” he said, “we want Crossrail 2. But for the sake of the UK as a whole we need a Crossrail for the north both (projects) could be given the green light to proceed together”.

The Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce responded positively to LCCI’s canvassing for Crossrail North by expressing its reciprocal support for Crossrail 2 describing it as an “infrastructure scheme of critical national importance”. *(Refreshing to come across opinions that take us away from the simplistic notion of a North-South divide. –Ed)*

## Hornden Station



On 31<sup>st</sup> July came the announcement that £4.4 million had been secured from the New Stations Fund to go towards funding the proposed new station at **Hornden**. Since then the team at Durham County Council (DCC) have been progressing the project through the GRIP stages. The latest Development Services Agreement, to take the project beyond GRIP Stage 4, should be signed by Network Rail and DCC on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017. There are still a few outstanding land assembly issues and some habitat/ecology regulation issues to be resolved before the final design can be completed. DCC hope to be in a position to submit a planning application in the middle of 2018.



DCC have kindly shared some computer-generated images of their current design for the station. The Train operators are being very supportive. Regional bodies, RailNorth and Transport for the North (TfN), continue to offer positive and useful help.

## HS2

Powers to build the second leg of HS2, known as Phase 2a and running from Fradley in Staffordshire to a junction on the WCML just south of Crewe, were granted in the Queen’s speech in June. The first major construction contracts for the main Phase 1 leg from London to Birmingham were awarded late July.

Phase 2b route, from Staffordshire to Yorkshire, was initially confirmed on 18 July. Welcoming the news Nigel Foster of TfN said: “HS2 phase 2b will help mobilise the economy of the North. We will identify before the end of 2017 a set of proposals for how Northern Powerhouse Rail could connect with the HS2 network”. However *TransportXtra* (18<sup>th</sup> July) carried an ominous report concerning one Andrew Gilligan, a former adviser to Boris Johnson. Writing in the *Sunday Times* Gilligan forecast a huge ballooning in HS2 costs. Gilligan apparently based his views on a report commissioned by the Rail Delivery Group. The *Canary* web-site has since dubbed HS2 “the most expensive railway in the world”.

Meantime Metro boss Toby Hughes has called for HS2 to be extended direct to the North East. At present there are no plans for this, though time savings achieved on the London to Yorkshire section of HS2 will help reduce overall London-Newcastle schedules.

Final fitting out of the Doncaster and Birmingham campuses of the **National College for High Speed Rail** were completed in September just in time for the first cohort of students to arrive at the end of the month. The furnishings for both campuses were supplied and fitted by Durham based furniture manufacturer Geoffrey Syrett. (*Proof that HS2 is already helping the NE economy! –Ed*)

Five companies competing to build the 60 state-of-the-art **trains for HS2** have been named: Bombardier, Alston, Hitachi, Talgo and Siemens. The contract for the winning bid should be awarded in 2019 with delivery required for start-up of services in 2026.

## Electrification

Just before Parliament rose for its summer recess in July, the Minister of State for Transport, Chris Grayling, told the House of Commons that he was cutting back the rail electrification programme. Details have been well rehearsed in the railway press. The

Great Western scheme will now stop short of both Bristol Temple Meads and Swansea. The Midland Main Line electrification will finish at Kettering, not Sheffield, and Oxenholme to Windermere is cancelled. As for the cross-Pennine Manchester to York route via Huddersfield there is only continued uncertainty. Addressing an Autumn Forum at Manchester on 22 September (see p13) the Minister said he was waiting to hear from *Transport for the North (TfN)* before deciding.

In his Commons statement Chris Grayling pinpointed high costs and visual intrusion (by the OHLE) as reasons for his rethink, and he emphasised that thanks to emerging technology, there were ‘better ways’ of doing things including using bi-mode trains.

There was a quick adverse response. Greater Manchester’s Mayor, Andy Burnham, organised an emergency transport ‘summit’ held in Leeds on 23<sup>rd</sup> August to which the Minister was not invited.

Attended by political and business leaders from across the North of England (plus Nina Smith, Chair of Yorkshire *Railfuture* Branch), the meeting agreed a statement calling on the Government to:

- honour commitments already given to deliver improvements to rail services across the North including full electrification, track and signalling improvements on key commuter routes:
- prioritise its manifesto commitment to deliver new west-east rail infrastructure reaching across the North and work with TfN to set out a clear timetable for its delivery:
- set about a fairer distribution of transport funding (revenue and capital) across all regions of the country.

Nina Smith told *Railfuture* colleagues that she had noted the importance business reps attached to the need for fast rail connectivity between the North’s cities. By the end of the ‘summit’ Nina said she came away feeling some degree of optimism that things might change for the better. “It depends on how much power our London-centric government is prepared to relinquish to the North” she wrote “and whether the government is prepared to put in the level of investment that the railway system in the North needs to correct historic in-balance”.

Chris Grayling’s decision to curtail the rail electrification programme has clearly caused both anger and despair. The *Yorkshire Post* editorial of 20<sup>th</sup> July pulled no punches: “The Government’s cancellation of the planned upgrade (and electrification) of the Midland Main Line represents nothing less than a half billion-pound broken promise to this county (of Yorkshire) and its long-suffering rail travellers”.

The *Independent* on Line (1st August) quoted Andy McDonald, Shadow Minister of Transport as saying that “the Northern Powerhouse was dead if Pennine rail electrification was cancelled”.

The Business North organisation, which organised the Autumn Forum in Manchester along with the Think Tank IPPR (North), was launched by the CBI in 2016 to drive forward the Northern Powerhouse concept. The Forum, majored on transport and education/skills development. Keynote speaker on transport was none other than Chris Grayling himself.

Your Editor, Tony Walker, had been invited to attend. Given the furore the Minister had caused in the weeks before Tony felt it right he should hear him out “live”.

In a 35-minute address to a mainly business and Local Authority audience, albeit with some third sector reps present such as myself and Nina Smith of Yorkshire Branch, Grayling stressed that Northerners should be grateful for the many transport developments happening in their area.

Said he had come to dispel “all the rubbish” media reports of “recent days” - he accused IPPR of misleading the public when it claimed transport investment in the south was much greater than in the north. “The fact is” said the Minister “the transport spend per person in the North West is greater than in the South East”. (*Yes – he did actually say this - Ed*).

There then followed a catalogue of various transport things happening up North. The list included motorway and trunk road upgrades, (“really progressing well”), the *Northern* and TPE new train build plus lots more services on the way. “Real improvements for real people” was how the Minister put it. The new Ordsall Chord in Manchester would open soon and Metro Link was expanding. Liverpool Lime Street station was being radically improved and DfT were “working on” new trains for Newcastle and for Virgin East Coast.

As for the Manchester to Leeds cross-Pennine route the minister declared that “electrification was not the key issue” and “It’s about what is best for the passenger”. He assured the audience that modernisation of the route would proceed, but instead of outdated traction power forms (*electricity? Ed*) he wanted to opt for the latest technology. This transpired to be bi-mode trains and a digital approach to signalling. “I want the trans-Pennine route to become the UK’s first digitally operated main line” he said. Incidentally, he dismissed electrification of the Midland Main Line(MML)north of Kettering on grounds of cost: he claimed that “electrifying the MML would cost £1bn more than not electrifying for speeding up by just one minute”.

Asked from the audience whether cross-Pennine electrification was definitely off the agenda, the Minister’s answer seemed to be that we might end up with a partially electrified line. As for HS3, well, he was waiting for advice from TfN. He suggested that ‘Northern Powerhouse Rail’ was more likely to be a network of lines rather than just one.

Other questions touched on devolution, Bradford Interchange, and the financing of new railways.

The Minister's speech can be read in full at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-invests-in-northern-digital-railway-plans-to-improve-trans-pennine-journeys>

*(Ed- Was I reassured by his address? Answer not really! I was left with the impression that Chris Grayling is not a great fan of railways. For me, the crucial bits of rail's DNA are its need for long term strategic planning, certainty, consistency and stability. Sadly, a number of Chris Grayling's recent decisions, in my view, fly in the face of all this).*

## Transport for the North

TRANSPORT FOR THE  
NORTH

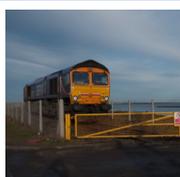
Transport for the North (TfN), created some four years ago, was intended to have responsibility for strategic transport planning across the North of England. Rail, road, air, sea would all fall within its remit. Advocates for TfN said it would have many similarities to both Transport for London (TfL) and Transport for Scotland (TfS). The big hope was that it would bring to the North planning and outcomes designed "locally" instead of being dreamed up at DfT in London. The policies and the actual infrastructure delivered would be better tailored to northern need. It's first major strategic plan was due to be published before the end of 2017.

As this Bulletin was being "put to bed" we learnt that legislation designed to transform TfN into the first ever statutory sub-national transport body with legal powers and duties were laid in Parliament on 17 November. (*Insider News*). Putting TfN on a statutory footing means that its recommendations must be formally considered by the Government.

John Cridland, Chairman of TfN, welcomed the move. "TfN gaining statutory status is an important step towards transforming the North of England and giving it the voice and powers it needs to move forward" he said. Cridland emphasised that the Secretary of State of the day will "take into account the North's priorities when making transport infrastructure investment." (*Let's hope so – Ed*)

**Comment by Editor:** *I decided to include the information about TfN and the Business North Forum in Manchester to remind Branch members that the 'politics' of rail play a crucial part in what is or is not eventually delivered to passengers and freight customers at the proverbial "coal face".*

## Freight



Phillipa Edmunds, the Freight on Rail Manager for Campaign for Better Transport, argues that the public wants **freight transfer from road to rail**. She wants the Government to follow Transport for Scotland’s lead in funding rail freight upgrades on economic and environmental grounds. Phillipa says that customer demand for more consumer and construction rail freight services is constrained by lack of space on the network pointing out that every freight path that comes free at Felixstowe Port in Suffolk is immediately snapped up.

**NIC criticised** for under-valuing the socio-economic importance of existing rail freight services and their potential to further reduce congestion, road crashes and pollution. *(TransportXtra 27<sup>th</sup> October)*

A new **Tarmac rail depot**, contained within Freightliner’s existing Garston (Liverpool) complex, has opened recently. The operation will mean up to 300,000 tonnes of aggregates a year coming through for onward supply to Tarmac customers. Around 10,000 truck journeys per annum will be removed from the roads.



A special half day meeting of the NE Freight Partnership at the National Museum of the Royal Navy, Hartlepool on 4<sup>th</sup> September, majored on **the role of the NE ports in dealing with freight**. Our Railfuture Branch is affiliated to the Partnership as is NECTAR. Peter Walker and your

Editor were present. We were bombarded with a wealth of information about the past, present and future of the North East’s seven ports: Berwick, Blyth, Port of Tyne, Sunderland, Seaham, Teesport and Hartlepool. Here are just a few ‘snippets’ from the meeting:

- The demise of coal and steel has impacted enormously with 30% of Teesport’s business lost at a stroke when the steel works closed: (previously 1 million tonnes of steel per annum handled at Teesport has reduced to 200,000 tonnes)
- Overall freight tonnage through UK ports is falling, related especially to loss of coal: the growing sectors are containers, automotive, accompanied lorries, offshore wind, and agricultural exports to Africa
- 32 million tonnes of freight passed through the NE ports in 2016.
- Challenges facing road freight included congestion, emissions, skills shortage, overnight parking and regional and city distribution. For rail freight average speeds, length limits, weight issues, gauge clearance, headways, network access and utilisation of freight paths were among issues to contend with.

This proved to be a highly educative event: it was well devised and the quality of the eight keynote inputs generally good. Space does not permit any further details: members

wanting to read the formal meeting notes should go to the NE Freight Partnership Web Site at: [http://northeastfreightpartnership.info/reports\\_meetings/minutes](http://northeastfreightpartnership.info/reports_meetings/minutes)

## The wider world of transport



Robin Hickman of University College, London, in a report for Greenpeace in Germany, says “private car ownership should be banned in cities as part of a revolution in transport

planning: all cities should target at least 70-80% of trips to be by public transport, walking and cycling, with the remainder by low emission vehicles”.

According to the *Guardian* **3.7 million British workers spent at least two hours on their daily commute in 2015**, a 32% increase from 2010. A report from researchers at the University of the West of England found increased commuting led to more stress and depression.

DfT have approved a **2km extension to the Midland Metro** linking Birmingham City Centre with Edgbaston and Westerside. The DfT will grant £59.8m towards the total cost of £149m. Completion due by March 2021. For aesthetic reasons, there will be some gaps in the “overhead” which means that special batteries will be fitted to the trams enabling them to proceed through the unwired sections.

Meanwhile in Greater Manchester, **Metrolink patronage is up 11% in the year** to September 2017 compared with the same period 2015-16. Metrolink now registering over 40m journeys a year. (*TransportXtra 13<sup>th</sup> October*).

**Arriva has secured a £484 contract in Sweden** to run the Pagatagon train services until 2026 on the back of a competitive tender. It had already operated in Sweden’s southernmost county since 2007 and was contracted to 2018 before the latest bid success. (*Insider News 30<sup>th</sup> June*).

It is reported that **Virgin West Coast have a driver shortage** that led to some trains on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July being cancelled. Apparently insufficient volunteers were available to cover rest day workings. (*Guardian 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2017*)

The **number of rail passenger journeys in GB** fell by 2.7% to 416 million in the first quarter of 2017-18. According to the ORR there was a 4.5% drop in London & SE sector, offset by increases in long distance (1.5%) and regional sectors (1.8%). Virgin East Coast was down, however, by 1.8% and *Northern* by 1.6%. TPE was static.

Several of the **Class 385 EMU’s for ScotRail** now being assembled at the Hitachi plant, Aycliffe, were presented at a media briefing on 12th October. Seventy of the class have been ordered with an option for additional units if the current ScotRail franchise is extended. The *Northern Echo* (13<sup>th</sup> October) said Hitachi were hopeful of more orders

from other TOC's and if these materialised likely that the company would recruit additional staff.

## **Air Quality**

A study in **Barcelona** reveals air pollution in the city rises by 48% on public transport strike days.

Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee (Scotland's four largest cities) are poised to introduce **new Low Emission Zones** from 2018 onwards. (*TransportXtra 15<sup>th</sup> September 2017*)

**Sales of new diesel and petrol cars** will be prohibited in UK from 2040 in an attempt by the Government to improve air quality by reducing roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations. But the legal campaigners "Client Earth" said it "was too little too late" pointing out that Local Authorities were not even required to have any plans written up until December 2018. Motoring groups claimed the Government's proposals were "harsh and unfair". (*TransportXtra 27 July 2017*).

## **Genuine high speed!**

Newcastle to Manchester in twenty minutes! That's the prospect held out by promoters of the revolutionary "Hyperloop" project. Passengers and cargo would be loaded into a pod that accelerates gradually via electric propulsion through a low-pressure tube. The pod quickly lifts above the track using magnetic levitation and glides at airline speeds for long distances due to the ultra-low aerodynamic drag. HS2 - eat your heart out!

## **And finally.....**

**The Branch AGM will be on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March at Newcastle Art Centre, Westgate Road beginning at 2pm. Guest speaker is Ian Coe, Principal Transport Planner at the NE Combined Authority (NECA).**

**More details later. Meantime please note the event in your diary.**

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Our websites: [www.railfuture.org.uk](http://www.railfuture.org.uk), [www.railfuturescotland.org.uk](http://www.railfuturescotland.org.uk), [www.railfuturewales.org.uk](http://www.railfuturewales.org.uk) and [www.railwatch.org.uk](http://www.railwatch.org.uk). Follow us on Twitter @Railfuture @Railwatch

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