



Liverpool City Region All Party Parliamentary Group

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Alison McGovern MP
Lord Alton of Liverpool, Lord Heseltine
and Marie Rimmer MP
Conor McGinn MP
Lord Hunt of Wirral
Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram

Addressing Current Rail Service Issues in Liverpool City Region

Friday 4th January 2-3pm, Room GB25, Ground Floor, 1 Mann Island, Liverpool

Draft Minutes

1. Welcome and introductions

Alison McGovern MP, chair of the LCR APPG, welcomed all attendees and said by way of context that the APPG's purpose is to take a strategic look ahead as well as scrutinise, and support as required, the Mayor's plans. However, if existing services are exceedingly poor and there is a very high level of public dissatisfaction, then the Group must also look at 'here and now' issues.

Steve Rotheram, Metro Mayor and Associate Vice Chair, said he has been a vocal critic of the train timetable chaos and short form trains. Things may be slightly better now but if not enough carriages that is the same for the person who cannot get on as a cancelled train. The ultimate sanction is to remove the franchise – the compensation offered has simply not been enough – as some people have lost jobs, missed weddings, etc...

Rosie Cooper MP, remarked that she was at the end of her tether having given Northern Rail a chance. The final straw was someone whose last train home at night was cancelled and then only offered £3 compensation. She had stood up in Parliament and said enough was enough.

Louise Ellman MP added that she was clear that there has been a monumental failure by Network Rail and DfT with unreliable trains, an ongoing industrial dispute and now rail fare increases. Cllr Liam Robinson also commented that the weekend services are a real problem – cancellations on Sunday as well as strikes on Saturday – and this is adversely affecting the economy.

2. Introductory statements

David Brown, Chief Executive, Northern Rail, began his remarks by saying that the railways are a very fragmented system – with different operators for track, signalling and trains. He had been on the other side of the table – with Cllr Robinson – when discussing the original franchise and had helped make the case for more investment and better travel.

He said the deal agreed will deliver new trains and increased usage with less subsidy from government. But to deliver did depend electrification and new stations, however the timetable for completion of these has drifted for three years. The fact these assumptions were actually not in place meant that they had to rewrite timetable in 16 weeks – when usually takes a year.

Anna Jane-Hunter, Northern Director, Network Rail, began by saying that she had a long involvement in the rail industry and had re-joined Network Rail in August in this new role which aims to bring together North West and North Eastern, including Yorkshire, parts of the network.

Network Rail do want to fix the problems and are genuinely sorry for the very real issues passengers have faced. She added that she too lived in Liverpool and have experienced the problems of short form trains and cancelled or delayed services.

3. Questions and comments

Rosie Cooper MP asked why Northern Rail had not stayed on the same timetable and David Brown replied that he had asked to do that but the ‘the system’ insisted it go ahead as the north was just one part of a bigger jig saw puzzle. Ms Cooper then asked why all the changes were not deferred and Steve Rotheram intervened to say that Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling MP, has claimed he was blindsided by operators however DfT were warned.

David Brown added that Steve Glaister’s review concluded that no-one took responsibility. Regards the specific problems Northern have faced it was only three days before the new timetable was introduced that problems came to light. One issue is that it provides much reduced resilience as turnaround times are too short so one small delay gets exacerbated.

He said the December timetable has improved things slightly and that Northern will be bringing in new trains in the first half of this year. He is disinclined to overpromise – but should get gradually better over next 6 months although the ambitions in the original franchise were very ambitious and without infrastructure investment not all of it will be delivered in 2019. For example, the proposed two new platforms at both Oxford Road and at Piccadilly will not be delivered by December 2019.

Alison McGovern MP said that we can take it as read that DfT at fault for electrification failure. Anna Jane Hunter said there were unforeseen ground conditions delayed electrification and the collapse of Carillion, the main contractor, did not help. Subsequently it has been acknowledged that there is too much ‘optimism bias’ – we are implementing learning and now not rushing to use electrification lines.

Louise Ellman MP said the monumental failure by Network Rail and DfT cannot be talked away. What is happening now? What is the role of TfN – it is an an integrated transport body and in its very early days but is there a case for it to do more? Something has gone very wrong.

David Brown said that Northern Rail is working to deliver improvements in timetable punctuality – currently just above 80% – and it will improve further. Alison McGovern MP said that there should be another meeting in 8 to 10 weeks as needs to get above 90%. Steve Rotheram added that he didn’t accept that accept 90% is good enough – that wouldn’t be the target in any other industry. Anna Jane-Hunter added that we won’t be at 90% in 10 weeks’ time.

Anna Jane-Hunter said that regards Transport for the North, Network rail are now presenting on the 'gaps' in the system to TfN by December 2019 - and involving them in helping deliver solutions. Network rail is moving into a partnership relationship rather than TfN just being recipients. TfN is definitely part of the collective mindset now.

Rosie Cooper MP asked if this timetable fiasco could happen again? what would be done differently? David Brown said he would ask for evidence that delivery would happen and he would not accept the word of the system operator – a section of Network Rail – if said will all be fine.

Alison McGovern MP asked if anyone lost their job or had their status or pay reduced at Network Rail because they gave a green light to the timetable. Anna Jane-Hunter said that is not the culture of Network Rail and no one had been sacked or disciplined in that way although the programme Board had been disbanded now.

Rosie Cooper MP said she had as an MP effectively 74,000 shareholders and she was not convinced that Northern rail or Network Rail understood how angry and upset they are. David Brown said that was not the case. We do see it. Rosie Cooper MP added that the frustration is that there is no-one to hold to account as no one person or organisation has accepted responsibility.

Louise Ellman MP raised the issue of the Saturday strikes and current efforts for it to be resolved. David Brown said TfN and DfT have now said there will be new funding for a second person on the train so the question now is about what training does that person have if the driver is shutting doors. Northern Rail is offering an independent ACAS arbitrarily agreed decision on that. Steve Rotheram said that both parties need to sit round the table. Anna Jane-Hunter added that disputes are exhausting for all concerned.

Cllr Liam Robinson raised the issue of cancelled Sunday trains. David Brown explained that for employees on the west side of Northern's area Sunday is not part of usual working week. Northern Rail has a good relationship with ASLEF and it is now trying to agree new terms and conditions that make fair across the system. Steve Rotheram said that for five Sundays there had been no train from Liverpool to Manchester airport. If that had happened in London to Heathrow there would be a statement in the House of Commons! David Brown said Northern is trying to get better balance of where services that can be provided should be directed to.

4. Concluding comments

Cllr Liam Robinson said that Richard George was brought in as a trouble shooter. The north is considered something of a quiet network but actually very busy but still run as quiet network. All bolts need tightening. All the debacles have been due to DfT: solution will be full devolution to TfN

Steve Rotheram said Parliamentarians need to hold the system to account. The system was approved by Network rail's Programme Board which advised the DfT. Alison McGovern MP said there should be another meeting in Liverpool in 10 weeks. With someone in attendance who can explain the engineering improvements that are still needed

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