

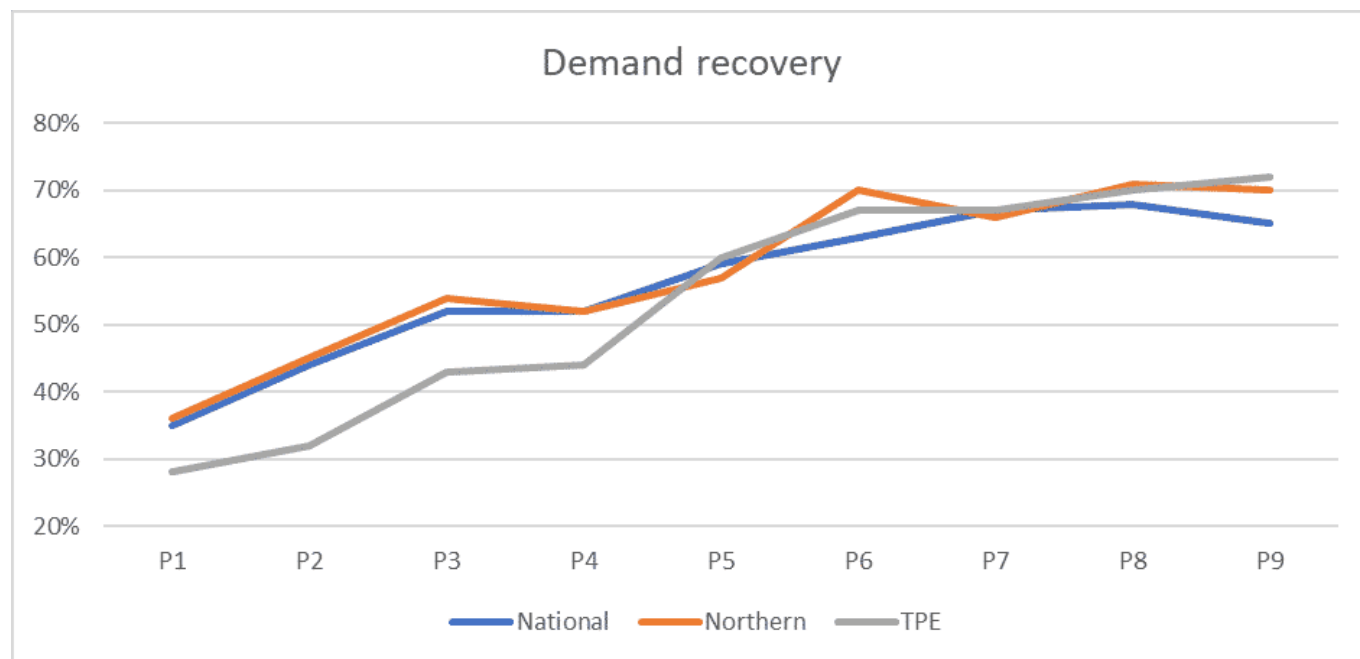
Transport for the North: North of England led return to rail in 2021

December 27, 2021



Transport for the North (TfN) has released figures that show despite infrastructure constraints and reduced levels of service, the North of England has consistently led the return to rail in the second half of 2021.

The data provided to TfN's Rail North Committee by the two main rail operators in the North of England – Northern and TransPennine Express (TPE) – confirm that the leisure sector led the charge with weekends often at pre-COVID levels of travel, or sometimes above.



Rail-use by period from 4 April 2021 to 11 December 2021

While Northern reported that, up until two weeks ago, it had been seeing revenue at 95% of pre-COVID levels and demand, for some periods, at 85% of pre-COVID levels, TPE said its leisure services had been operating at 89% of pre-COVID levels. It is the business and commuter figures that have proved more sluggish in terms of the return to rail dragging the overall averages down.

Figures released by the Department for Transport just before Christmas showed national rail use now at around 60% of pre-COVID levels for the week ending 9 December – significantly below that in the North of England.

While recent storms and the Omicron variant of COVID has since depressed demand, both operators have reported to TfN's Rail North Committee that, for months, the North has been bucking the trend with leisure travel – and this pattern had been seen well into the autumn. Even up until Tuesday 14 December, Northern reported that demand was still at 70% of pre-COVID levels.

Responding to these findings, Rail North Committee Chair, Councillor Liam Robinson, said: "These figures obtained by TfN show the North is leading the charge on the return to rail, and the Government needs to recognise that now is the time to invest.

"With a bounce-back that is around 10 per cent stronger than other parts of the country, we shouldn't now be facing the kind of resource cuts that the Government is intimating. Now is the time to support the rail sector in the North.

"We need more funding for the North of England's railway – not less. If you want to level up or tackle the climate emergency, it is only made harder if you are cutting investment in the rail network.

"There is also a real concern that this reduced December 21 timetable for the North may be seen, by the

Government, as the new baseline for timetable planning going forward. But this timetable is a compromise needed to run a railway during a pandemic. It should not be a new normal.

“We want TfN to have influence over what new timetables will look like and to be equal partners in determining what services will look like in the future. This will be a measure of if this Government is serious about devolution in the North.”

Photo credit: Northern