

Transport for the North works to protect rail services and shape a 'Roadmap to Recovery'

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Following the nation's third national lockdown **Transport for the North** (TfN) is to reconvene the North of England Contingency Group to help tailor and protect services for essential users during lockdown amid much lower levels of demand.

In March last year TfN played a key role in convening and chairing the Contingency Group which comprises representatives from local authorities across the North, the rail sector, and representatives from Government.

Now the group is to meet again – only this time on the back of a railway that has been performing well throughout the remainder of last year and a host of lessons learned as services were adjusted and changed to meet evolving needs.

David Hoggarth, Strategic Rail Director for Transport for the North, said: “Everyone knows the message for this lockdown. Those who can stay at home should do so, but there will still be those, working within the restrictions, who need to travel and for whom rail is the only realistic option.

“We will be working closely with our local authority partners and the rail industry and Department for Transport over the coming days and weeks to protect rail services for those who need them and to ensure we still have a viable railway when the pandemic is over.”

On Tuesday (14 January), members of TfN’s [Rail North Committee](#), which includes leaders from across the North, will meet to hear an update on rail operations and also plans for rail recovery once the worst of the pandemic is behind us.

The meeting will hear that, although performance recently has been very good, it fluctuated as services were ramped back up demonstrating that the North’s rail network is still very fragile and needs investment with services tailored to maintain performance until that investment can be delivered.

The report highlights the significant levels of additional funding being provided by Government to support the continuation of rail services and sets out actions needed to ensure that the North’s railways remains sustainable and affordable in the long-term.

To help deliver what is needed members will be asked to consider a ‘Roadmap to Recovery’ which aims to ensure the region’s railways make the best possible recovery when the time is right from an unprecedented period when train travel fell to as low as 5% of normal levels.

The Sub-national Transport Body, which represents the transport interests of over 15 million people, will consider a plan to work with Government and industry on restoring confidence in rail use and introducing better ticketing to encourage people out of their cars and back onto rail.

The five-year plan for a Roadmap to Recovery that Rail North Committee members will be considering next Tuesday is based around six themes: recovery of demand and services; building confidence; improving performance; reforming fares and ticketing; encouraging sustainable growth and delivering an investment pipeline for rail.

For 2021 the focus will be on; refining the rail timetable; encouraging people back onto rail when the time is right (including targeting car drivers); rolling out flexi-season tickets for those travelling less than five days a week and piloting new ticket promotions; taking steps to better integrate rail with other modes of transport and developing a full pipeline for rail investment in the North.

David said: “There is much more in the plan over the coming years, but we see a real opportunity here to take a fresh look at how use and develop rail travel and make it work for the people of the North. On Tuesday we will be asking our members to endorse the approach which will then be shared with the Rail North Partnership as our input into rail recovery. This is just the beginning.”

Photo credit: Transport for the North