

Transport for the North  
**TfN Response to the Williams  
Review**  
Additional TfN Input

Draft Issue | 2 September 2019

Draft

This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client.

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Job number 267777-00

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# 1 Introduction

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This paper presents an opportunity for Transport for the North (TfN) to further input into the Williams Rail Review following initial discussions with the review team. A set of topics have been agreed around which TfN are well placed to provide additional context to reiterate and amplify the position that was submitted through the official call for evidence process, and to offer the review team additional support.

As one of the Sub-National Transport Bodies (SNTB) at the forefront of the devolution agenda, TfN is uniquely placed to provide the Williams Rail Review with insight and evidence around some of the more challenging aspects of restructuring the rail industry in a way that puts customers first and enhances value for money.

TfN have previously submitted substantial responses to the initial ‘four questions’ posed by the review team, along with the wider call for evidence, and are pleased to learn that some of the key points raised have been considered through the review process and in the development of recommendations. This paper presents the outcomes of some additional thinking and discussions including:

- A meeting with representatives of the Williams Rail Review team in Manchester on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019; and
- A meeting with Keith Williams on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

The five key topics that have been agreed with the review team and which will be covered in this paper are:

1. Understanding how devolution in the North would work under the Williams Review proposals;
2. A phased approach;
3. Roles, responsibilities and key interfaces;
4. Geographical challenges; and
5. Stations.

The following chapters will each cover one of these topic areas with a summary of the TfN position and ‘ask’ of the review, and a list of the evidence sources that have been called upon to support these assertions.

## 2 Topic Area 1: Devolution Under the Proposals

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### 2.1 The TfN Position and Offer to the Review

The fundamental outcome required from the Williams Review is a pathway to devolution that allows the North to take responsibility for the region's railways from central Government. Regional decision-making and accountability will achieve improved railway services and outcomes for passengers, freight and communities. The responsibilities for a controlling mind will include setting policy, decision making, specification, oversight of operations, funding and investment in both passenger services, freight, and links to communities and other modes. Depending on the outcome of the Williams Review, this role could be fulfilled directly by TfN, or by a more integrated and accountable rail body with regional representation and collaboration at the highest level. Either way, as a body of pooled sovereignty amongst its members, TfN will have a key role to play in the future of rail in the North.

Any alternative scenario will not solve the fundamental issues that exist under the current model (as summarised in the recently published Blake Jones Review) including accountability and joined up delivery of optimum solutions and solving challenges with customers at the heart. Nor will it meet the objectives that the North has crystallised through TfN's Strategic Transport Plan and Long-Term Rail Strategy, along with those which were consulted upon by the Williams Review team.

The strategic case for devolution is well developed and clear. TfN have summarised it in previous submissions to the Williams Review, demonstrating the 'need for intervention' and the negative implications to customers and the taxpayer of the current trajectory.

There is a wealth of evidence (some of which is listed in Section 2.2) demonstrating that devolution will allow the North to generate economic growth and enhance quality of life through better understanding local needs and priorities to optimise the targeting of specification and enhancements of passenger and freight rail services. Regional accountability will better incentivise the alignment of outcomes to needs.

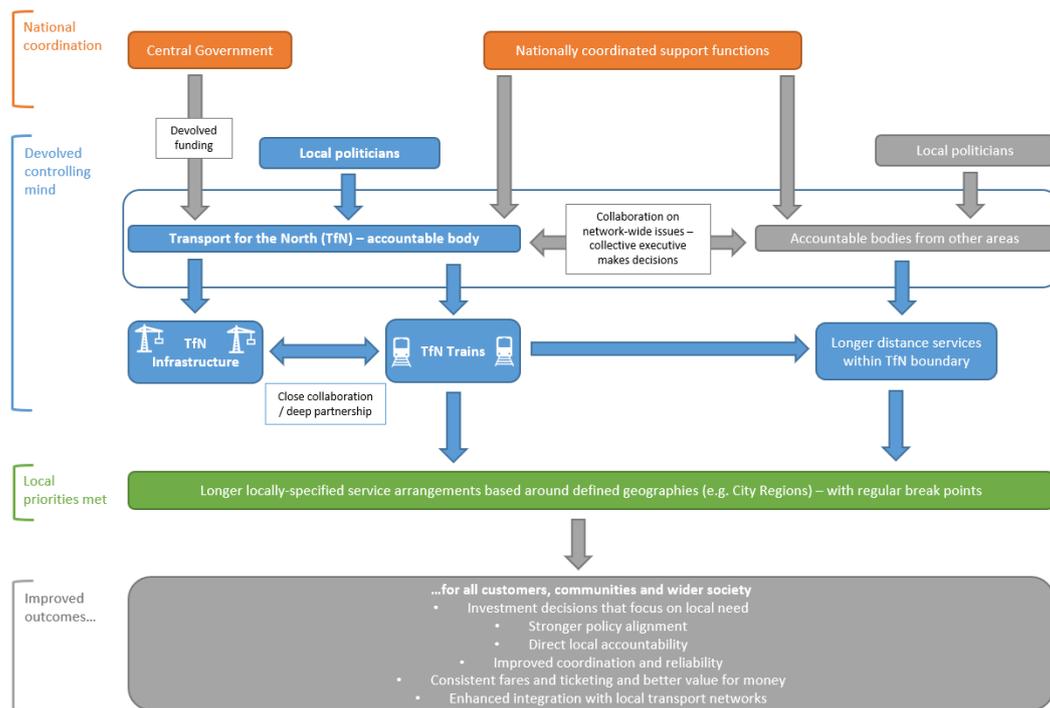
Devolution success stories include those of the London Overground, Scotrail, Merseyrail and Tyne & Wear Metro networks. Each of these have their own unique characteristics that will be challenging to replicate in areas without contained networks, but have delivered patronage growth, an increase in customer satisfaction and in some cases significant economic regeneration. Notwithstanding funding being a major factor, it is possible for devolved organisations to prioritise and get to the heart of the right solutions to local needs, including where they interact with national initiatives, more effectively than centralised bodies.

It is also essential to consider the importance of freight services to the North, not just in terms of the economic benefits, but also the benefits to local communities of removing freight from the congested road network. In the North there are a number of freight terminals and flows that form part of the nationally critical

freight network. Key priorities for the North include improved connectivity between Immingham and Liverpool ports, and supporting the development of intermodal traffic.

TfN have submitted a vision for the structure of the railway following the Williams Review (Figure 1 below includes some adjustments following a subsequent collaborative workshop). Delivering it successfully and overcoming challenges can be achieved through a phased approach.

Figure 1: TfN proposition



Although all devolution ambitions will not be met immediately, it is critical that the Review establishes the right foundations for devolution and commits to a clear end point. The idea of a phased approach is covered in Section 3 below. In the short term this means deepening and widening TfN’s current partnership arrangement.

The proposed structure shows a key role for nationally coordinated support functions and it is understood that the Williams Review is likely to recommend some form of national rail body to fulfil this role (although the exact scope, scale and accountability of this body are currently unknown). TfN accepts that national coordination and conflict resolution will be essential in the interim period before the desired level of devolution is achieved, and there will remain a need for a collaborative relationship with an accountable national systems operator in the longer term. It is essential that any national body achieves greater alignment with local objectives for passengers, freight and communities and greater accountability than under the current arrangement. To this end TfN, and other

devolved bodies, are well placed to support an accountable national rail body and can bring great value in helping to shape the future rail industry.

TfN stand ready to work with the review team over the coming months to facilitate and drive getting the devolution the North and its railways need. To develop the solutions and case further TfN offer to:

- Carry out scenario testing over the coming months for different levels of devolution and different pathways to achieving it;
- Continue to investigate the required organisational change to take on more powers, and work with City Region and Local Authority partners across the North to shape the level of devolution below TfN;
- Continue to work with the Williams Review team to make the strategic case; and
- Demonstrate key cost and benefit impacts at a high level to support the economic case, albeit acknowledging that making the economic case for further devolution is challenging due to the complexities of the rail industry and capturing benefits.

## 2.2 Evidence Summary

- Department for Transport, 2012, *Rail Decentralisation – Devolving decision-making on passenger rail services in England*
- Department for Transport, 2012, *The Brown Review of the Rail Franchising Programme*
- Rail North, 2013, *Rail Devolution for the North of England*
- London Assembly, 2015, *Devolving rail services to London*
- Greengauge 21, 2015, *Steeping Stones to a rebalanced Britain*
- DfT, 2016, *The Future Shape and financing of Network Rail, “The Shaw Report”*
- National Assembly for Wales – Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee, 2017, *On the right track? The Rail Franchise and South Wales Metro*
- Urban Transport Group, 2017, *Rail Devolution Works*
- Campaign for Better Transport, 2017, *Going Local – Lessons for rail policy from London Overground and Merseyrail*
- Transport for the North, 2018, *Long Term Rail Strategy – Revised Draft*
- Blake and Jones, 2019, *Blake Jones Review: Joint Review of the Rail North Partnership*
- Transport for the North, 2019, *Strategic Transport Plan*
- Transport for the North, 2019, *Submissions to the Williams Review Call for Evidence*

## 3 Topic Area 2: A Phased Approach

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### 3.1 The TfN Position and Offer to the Review

Depending on the proposal developed by TfN and the conclusion of the Williams Review, it is likely that TfN and its partners would experience a significant shift in their remit and organisational scale. To help adapt to these changes there may be some value in pursuing a phased approach.

Indeed, due to the size and scale of some of the bodies who will be asked to implement the outcome of the review, along with the need for legislation for any fundamental structural changes, a phased implementation over several years is probably the most likely outcome.

This phasing could take several forms, with the most obvious choices being between a phasing by geography versus phasing by functional responsibility. A phasing by geography could see a more rapid pace in the areas of the North where the structure and institutions are already in place to support a potentially expanded role for TfN. The most obvious initial focus would be the City Regions around Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool Sheffield and Newcastle. There are however some disadvantages to this approach:

- It would naturally favour a strengthening in the role of the established transport authorities in these regions, which could create barriers to moving towards pan-northern devolved structures in the future; and
- Related to the above point, it raises questions regarding the treatment of the residual areas (many of which contain substantial urban areas) – whether these would remain unchanged or transfer to some form of TfN oversight.

The suitability of this approach will inevitably depend on the end point defined by the Williams Review and any subsequent legislation. This kind of approach has been successfully deployed by Transport for London (TfL) who have gradually subsumed additional sections of the network into their Overground franchise.

Although successful, the appetite and political conditions for this approach were very different here. Within TfN's boundary, Merseyrail and the Tyne and Wear Metro have also been delivered in a phased manner with rolling extension programmes. If a phasing by geography does occur, it cannot lead to a 'two-speed' North. However, TfN would be supportive of certain areas trialling proposals (such as TfGM and its station devolution agenda), and indeed will commit to providing an oversight group to monitor activities, provide support where needed and share best practice across the region.

A stronger and more practical approach would be for TfN to expand its remit to take on more responsibilities over time. It is accepted that the initial recommendation of the Williams Review, although likely a big step in the right direction, cannot deliver the desired level of devolution immediately. Therefore, it is crucial that the recommendations lay the correct foundations in the form of an intermediate phase, allowing TfN the freedom to create a successful environment for devolution. In the short to medium term this could include greater control for TfN over, for example, ticketing and franchising, while also creating the

conditions for TfN to either become, or strongly influence, the controlling mind for rail in the North. This must include more collaborative working (and representation within) national bodies to promote TfN’s aims and objectives. TfN in turn will work more closely with City Regions and other Local Authorities to ensure all interests are fairly represented.

More complex or resource-intensive changes to deliver the kind of devolution that is expected by partners across the North can then be left to a later stage, giving all parties the required time to deliver the necessary structural reforms.

Beyond TfN, other examples of a phased approach towards greater devolution include Transport for Wales who have introduced the Transport for Wales Rail brand to run the rail franchise and are now looking at agreeing a method for devolving infrastructure responsibilities. Also, Transport Scotland have delivered significant investment, innovation and patronage growth by bringing together Regional Transport Partnerships (and their respective strategies) while being accountable to Scottish Ministers.

Although the implementation of a phased approach has clear advantages in terms of allowing a degree of adaption to changes, the approach is not without risk. For example, if this is a very long implementation period then the whole context / driver for change could have moved on, leaving a sub-optimal or incomplete outcome.

Table 1: Summary by phase

Phase	TfN Ambition and Expectation
Phase 1	Current TfN partnership arrangement
Phase 2	A deeper and wider partnership between TfN and national rail bodies following the recommendations of the Williams Review ensuring a successful environment is created for further devolution
Phase 3	Further devolution of funding and decision-making to TfN (or a more integrated and accountable rail body) as the controlling mind in the North, and a collaborative relationship with an accountable national systems operator

### 3.2 Evidence Summary

- Scottish Government/Regional Transport Partnership / CoSLA Working Group, 2015, *Develop and Deliver – Maximising the role of RTPs in furthering improvements to transport in Scotland*
- Urban Transport Group, 2017, *Rail Devolution Works*
- Campaign for Better Transport, 2017, *Going Local – Lessons for rail policy from London Overground and Merseyrail*

## 4 Topic Area 3: Roles, Responsibilities and Key Interfaces

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Within the current railway system there are already many interfaces, ranging from contractual, to consultative and informal. A number of recent reviews have identified this multitude of interfaces as a key challenge in the ability to hold the industry to account.

Within the North these interfaces can broadly be categorised across three levels:

- Local (passenger and freight services within Combined Authority areas or equivalent);
- Regional (passenger and freight services contained within the TfN area); and
- National (passenger and freight long distance, inter-regional services that cross the North, but may only stop in selected locations).

Within this there are currently several core stakeholders for TfN:

- Rail North Partnership – co-contract management of Northern and TPE;
- Department for Transport – Policy, funding (via Treasury), franchise procurement, contract management;
- Network Rail Regions and Routes – ownership and management of the railway system assets, through maintenance, renewals, operations. Delivery agent for major strategic enhancements;
- Network Rail System Operator – ownership of the timetable production process, long term planning and maintaining the Enhancement Pipeline;
- Local Politicians – accountable to the electorate;
- Metro Mayors and Combined Authorities – responsibilities for skills, housing and transport; and
- Local Authorities – Planning authorities, local transport requirements.

Each of these bodies has different objectives and focuses, which means that managing the interfaces is inherently challenging.

### 4.1 The TfN Position and Offer to the Review

The TfN position is that we need to manage these interfaces and make sure that decisions, particularly around difficult trade-offs and when things go wrong, are made at the right level. Operational and practical decisions need to be made by qualified professionals within the industry and many of these need to be made quickly and without political intervention. For more challenging decisions, this professional oversight needs to have the ability to explain the technical detail around trade-offs to politicians in simple terms to enable quicker and more decisive decisions to be made.

TfN is clear in its role as a specifier of policy and future services for the benefit of the region and has already set out its Long-Term Rail Strategy and investment priorities. This extends to setting out the required performance levels of the railways of the North and holding the operator of services to account.

TfN acknowledge that there is a big challenge aligning incentives across the whole of the rail industry. However, there needs to be better incentives to make sure that passengers are put at the centre of decision making. Blended scorecards where organisations have the opportunity to set out what is important to their customers and hold each other to account on these issues could be an effective way of embedding mutual co-operation into these interfaces.

### **Department for Transport**

In the recent Northern and TPE franchise competitions, TfN have collaboratively worked with the DfT in order to consult, specify, contract and manage the contracts. This has given the North a much stronger role in the procurement of the level and type of train service that it wants.

Going forward TfN wants to be the procurement body for future train service contracts, further increasing the accountability and control over rail services in the region.

With the current Rail North Partnership there is a challenge as the local politicians are accountable for the passenger outcomes that they have jointly specified, but the DfT hold the financial accountability. A better share of these responsibilities is key to improving and enhancing the partnership working within the Rail North Partnership.

### **Network Rail Regions and Routes**

One defined point of contact within Network Rail – under the proposals currently being implemented by Network Rail the TfN geography will be covered by two regions and two routes.

While in principle devolution of Network Rail is supported, the current proposals increase the number of interfaces for TfN. This could end up making it even more challenging to hold Network Rail to account, particularly where services, proposed enhancements, or changes to ownership of certain assets cross a number of internal Network Rail boundaries. TfN clearly sees the risk that no one will be accountable to the North in this structure, and that it could consume considerable resources.

The North's proposal to counter this is to separate the two Northern routes from the current regions, in order to form a Northern Region/Route with one directly accountable individual for TfN members to hold to account. This would remove a number of interfaces, which should reduce complexity and improve decision making, and the North's influence. This is covered further in the next topic area.

TfN would also seek to become an integral part of Network Rail, with representation influencing when and where maintenance and renewals activity is undertaken. It is a real challenge for the members to have visibility of these processes, and the opportunity to influence these decisions, as they are often made

a number of years earlier. This particularly affects aspirations where earlier or later services are desired and for bank holidays or national holidays where currently engineering work is focused.

### **Influencing the System Operator**

The System Operator is currently part of Network Rail and seeks to allocate capacity in a fair and unbiased way that maximises the use of available capacity on the rail network. Given the nature of the long-distance train services, there will always be a requirement to co-ordinate this at some level.

Within the existing structure TfN need to be an integral part of these decisions, making sure that future trade-offs are discussed and understood, rather than simply being imposed upon the North.

Should the Williams Review propose some sort of national body with oversight for the railways, TfN should have representation at the highest level in order to make sure that the North's objectives are understood and supported.

### **Metro Mayors and Combined Authorities, Local Authority groupings**

The priorities for these bodies is primarily focused around a journey to work area, connecting people to work, leisure, health and education facilities, although they do also have an interest in external connectivity to key locations. TfN is keen that these areas have control over their important rail services, and how these integrate in to the wider public transport offering.

This can create interface challenges however where journey to work areas overlap or are reliant on long-distance or regional services. In this environment where these services are contained within the TfN area, the TfN organisation would act as broker and seek to fully understand the potential trade-offs and make those decisions where the decision-making remit crosses over boundaries. Where these services originate or continue beyond the TfN region, there will be a need for wider consultation with the industry.

### **Example – later trains at the weekend**

Currently engineering access occurs in short windows on week nights, and slightly longer windows at weekends. This is driven by commuting patterns and has not changed in many years. TfN may decide that they want to see additional later trains on a Friday and Saturday to support the night time economy. In this instance a trade-off could be made whereby longer engineering windows are provided to the maintainer earlier in the week, to facilitate later night trains on Fridays and Saturdays. In the current structure this would have to be widely consulted by the DfT and met with broad agreement from the majority of respondents. However, a TfN led consultation with key stakeholders could be much more effective, and this could be a trade-off that TfN choose to make.

Table 2: Summary by phase

Phase	TfN Ambition and Expectation
Phase 1	TfN continue to co-specify and co-manage the TPE and Northern Franchises
Phase 2	The creation of a Network Rail Northern Route/ Region and TfN representation within the System Operator
Phase 3	TfN becomes contracting authority for future train service contracts and should a national co-ordinating body be established it requires high level TfN representation

## 4.2 Evidence Summary

- DfT, 2016, *The Future Shape and financing of Network Rail, “The Shaw Report”*
- Campaign for Better Transport, 2017, *Ensuring a Sustainable Rail Industry*
- Campaign for Better Transport, 2017, *Going Local – Lessons for rail policy from London Overground and Merseyrail*
- Office of Rail and Road, 2019, *Holding Network Rail to Account*

## 5 Topic Area 4: Geographical Challenges

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### 5.1 The TfN Position and Offer to the Review

The North of England is an administratively and politically complex region. Transport responsibilities are distributed between Local Authorities with various degrees of power and influence. Sitting within the TfN administrative boundary there are five Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs): Transport for Greater Manchester, Merseytravel, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (SYPTEx), Nexus and West Yorkshire Metro. Two of them (Merseytravel and Nexus) are responsible for the operation of railway services on their contained networks. There are also key places on the railway map of the region without their own PTE (for example Middlesbrough, Darlington, Hull, Preston, York, Stoke, Carlisle). There are also several routes of local importance with unique characteristics and needs, some of which are in remote areas (e.g. the Cumbrian Coast Line and Settle to Carlisle).

Many railway services are serving multiple (e.g. local, regional and national) overlapping markets. The limited capacity of the network results in the need to manage conflicts and trade-offs and it is critical that these decisions are made at the right level and with full accountability. TfN is uniquely positioned to understand these complicated overlapping markets in the North of England, working with local promoters (e.g. City Regions and Local Authorities) to make evidence-led decisions that deliver on objectives and improve outcomes for passengers and freight users.

One of TfN's recommendations to the Williams Review, and an area in which TfN is looking to explore further, is that an emphasis should be placed on Travel to Work (TtW) boundaries when specifying rail services. There are numerous examples across the North where key rail stations are located within the catchments of two large cities (e.g. Warrington between Liverpool and Manchester) where passenger outcomes could be compromised by competing City Region priorities. TfN, as the controlling mind in the North, would work closely with all interested parties to identify the trade-offs to be made and prioritise services accordingly.

At the national level, there are similar issues with administrative and political boundaries not tessellating with the rail network and how it is currently apportioned by the industry. This historical divide propagates a London-centric approach and results in the North being split between two Routes down the Pennines, as well as local anomalies. For instance, Todmorden is managed by the LNW Route, despite being in Yorkshire, while LNE manages the Tyne Valley Line which reaches as far as two miles east of Carlisle on the west coast.

The Shaw Report (2016) recommended a deeper devolution of Network Rail and advocated the creation of a route for the North. It envisaged that this Route would be well aligned with Northern and TransPennine franchises. This in turn would enable a more holistic operational focus on regional services and create a greater incentive to improve performance on cross-Pennine routes. However, the

proposals were rejected in favour of the existing arrangement at the time and any plans for a ‘Northern Route’ were shelved.

In February 2019, following an extensive review, Network Rail announced that it would be making further changes to how it operates. The proposed model is intended to bring track and train closer together, prioritising the needs of passengers and ensuring a stronger focus on performance. In June 2019 the first phase was implemented with the creation of five regions and the devolution of some parts of ‘Infrastructure Projects’ and the ‘System Operator’. While the Wales and Scotland regions broadly align with the boundaries of politically devolved bodies, the North of England continues to be split between two different Regions and will be part of three different Routes.

Figure 2: Proposed regional division of Network Rail (indicative / subject to consultation)



Regions and Routes have differing challenges and needs, with varying practices, performance levels and degrees of efficiency. The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) is tasked with ensuring consistency between Regions and Routes by encouraging them to excel and share best practice. It is essential that these differences do not suppress future railway connectivity in the North.

Fundamentally, TfN want a rational railway industry to deal with, and at the highest level of Network Rail (and any other bodies with national coordinating functions proposed by the Williams Review) this means a single, accountable point of contact. Although this may be possible under the existing structure, there

is a risk that multiple interfaces remain to the detriment of efficient collaborative working. For this reason, TfN are advocating for the reconsideration of the ‘Northern Route’ proposals that were previously rejected. It is accepted that this brings its own challenges – for example cities like Leeds have a large amount of north-south traffic passing through and terminating that would have an additional boundary to cross – but overall TfN believe that the benefits for the North will outweigh these issues. TfN is committed to working collaboratively with the Williams Review team in the short term, and going forward the wider rail industry, to make the case for a ‘Northern Region / Route’.

Given a national structure that works for the North, and with greater local accountability and financial autonomy for Network Rail’s devolved structures, TfN will be much better placed to provide the required coordination of cross-boundary services, and to adjudicate on the prioritisation of rail investment across the region, regardless of existing Regional and Route affiliations. This would include investment in local schemes, avoiding a situation where neighbouring authorities compete for funding, as well as the promotion and delivery of infrastructure of pan-Northern significance such as Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) or the Skipton to Colne link. TfN’s recent ‘Northern Budget Ask’ begins to articulate the pipeline of future investment that is required across the North, demonstrating joined-up ambition and planning and that TfN is ready to ensure the finite pot of rail investment money is better spent across the North.

Table 3: Summary by phase

Phase	TfN Expectation
Phase 1	Working within current geographical limitations (i.e. the North split between two routes and multiple political/railway boundaries)
Phase 2	A focus on TtW boundaries when specifying services and the required structural change to enable TfN to work closely with the two existing Routes to deliver benefits for passengers, while also lobbying towards the creation of a ‘Northern Route’
Phase 3	A single geographic region for the North with TfN as the railway authority and a single person accountable for rail infrastructure and train services

## 5.2 Evidence Summary

- DfT, 2016, *The Future Shape and financing of Network Rail, “The Shaw Report”*
- Transport for the North, 2019, *‘We need a Northern budget’*

## 6 Topic Area 5: Stations

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### 6.1 The TfN Position and Offer to the Review

As a subset of the wider devolution question, the Williams Review presents a unique opportunity to review the ownership, management, role and condition of all stations. As presented in TfN's Long Term Rail Strategy (LTRS), 'there are almost 600 stations in the North, a diverse range of major city centre hubs, suburban commuter interchanges and rural halts, each serving as a gateway to their communities'. It goes on to identify a key strategic gap that 'station facilities are inconsistent, in some cases overcrowded, and can fall short of passenger expectations and often do not reflect their potential to positively contribute to the communities and economies they serve'.

TfN has plans to develop and implement a set of minimum standards across all stations on the network and it is felt that greater local control of stations will help to facilitate this through the prioritisation of investment and the market knowledge to maximise revenue opportunities where they exist. Looking again at the LTRS it states that 'options are under investigation for greater devolved powers across the North... with the management and operation of stations at a local level'. Community Rail Partnerships are already engaging in their local stations where they have been established, and these should be encouraged and supported.

Some of the benefits that could be achieved through a more dynamic and locally-focussed station ownership model include supporting economic growth through greater alignment with planning and regeneration policy, delivering housing growth and encouraging modal shift to rail through the provision of high quality facilities and enhanced integration with the local transport network.

However, there are also several challenges and barriers to overcome in implementing a new ownership model. At the forefront of this is the complex baseline situation. Stations are all inherently different and are currently owned and managed by a range of different bodies that vary enormously within geographies and even routes. This has resulted in a significant variation in the standards being delivered and the incentives to improve them. In terms of delivering enhancements there is a lack of coordination between the various bodies responsible for stations and a lack of incentives to invest and take a long-term integrated view. There are also questions around the appetite for local ownership, the availability of the right skills to deliver it and also the ability of local ownership to guarantee investment in stations.

There are some willing volunteers across the North, and TfGM and Merseytravel currently at different stages of actively pursuing devolution of rail stations which TfN are supportive of. TfN's expectation is that the Williams Review will provide a national framework whereby further localisation of station ownership and management is both encouraged and incentivised. Given that they are the gateways between the rail network and the communities it serves, it appears logical to target stations as an area to push devolution further and more quickly than the other more complex areas of infrastructure delivery. This could, for example, include the devolution of station funding. Given the role that stations play in local communities it is recommended that this funding be devolved at the

appropriate local level on a case-by-case basis, with TfN's role being the formation of an oversight group to support local business case submissions, share best practice and roll successful schemes out across the North.

There will not be a one-size-fits-all solution for devolving station ownership and management and TfN will help City Regions and Local Authorities to develop their own ideas and work at their own pace. Models could include PTE (or other authority) ownership and management, or the procurement of separate private sector station contracts allowing operators to focus less on the day-to-day running of the railway that serves their station, and more on delivering TfN's minimum standards at the stations, driving footfall and integrating with land-use planning and the local transport network.

An alternative, potentially interim option, is the introduction of an alliance arrangement such as the one being implemented in the West Midlands. The West Midlands Station Alliance (WMSA) approach 'works within the rail industry's existing station ownership and contractual structures with partners working together to identify and secure funding to enable an agreed programme of station enhancements to be developed and delivered'. It is considered a means of removing the existing barriers to investment and achieving a large proportion of the objectives around stations that are shared by TfN and other bodies across the UK without the need for major structural and contractual reform. As well as being an interim solution across the region, this could also be used in the longer term to optimise investment in stations in areas which do not have their own ambitions for station devolution.

Table 4: Summary by phase

Phase	TfN Ambition and Expectation
Phase 1	LTRS is released with bold ambitions around minimum standards for stations and a clear signpost to increased localisation of station ownership and management. TfN work with Williams Review team to ensure the recommendations include the provision of a framework for increased localisation of station ownership and management
Phase 2	TfN investigates the potential for a West Midlands style alliance and introduce an 'oversight group' to support local business case submissions, share best practice and roll successful schemes out
Phase 3	Several successful station devolution schemes are implemented within specific geographies, with TfN also supporting stations in other areas to drive up standards through a station alliance

## 6.2 Evidence Summary

- Steer Davies Gleave, 2011, *The Value of Station Investment*
- Transport for the North, 2018, *Long Term Rail Strategy – Revised Draft*
- West Midlands Rail Executive, 2019, *Strategy (WMSA)*  
<http://www.westmidlandsrail.com/strategy/>

## 7 Summary

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In summary, each of these five topic areas provide opportunities for TfN to help shape the outputs and recommendations of the Williams Review. The sections below reiterate some of the key messages from each.

### 7.1 Devolution Under the Proposals

- The fundamental outcome required from the Williams Review is a pathway to devolution that allows the North to take responsibility for the region's railways from central Government. Regional decision-making and accountability will achieve improved railway services and outcomes for passengers, freight and communities. The responsibilities for a controlling mind will include setting policy, decision making, specification, oversight of operations, funding and investment. Depending on the outcome of the Williams Review, this role could be fulfilled directly by TfN, or by a more integrated and accountable rail body with regional representation and collaboration at the highest level. Any alternative scenario will not solve the fundamental issues around accountability and joined up delivery of optimum solutions for customers that exist under the current model. Without devolution the North's objectives - to generate economic growth and enhance quality of life through prioritising specification and enhancements of passenger and freight rail services - will not be met;
- TfN have submitted a vision for the structure of the railway following the Williams Review. Delivering it successfully and overcoming challenges can be achieved through a phased approach; and
- TfN stand ready to work with the review team over the coming months to facilitate and drive getting the devolution the North and its railways need.

### 7.2 A Phased Approach

- The Williams Review may be a big step towards the desired level of devolution but there will be further steps to make – therefore a phased approach is key;
- The intermediate phase towards the kind of devolution that TfN and partners require is a deeper and wider partnership agreement between TfN and national rail bodies that can be delivered through the Williams Review proposals; and
- This phase should take the form of a progression of functional responsibilities (i.e. around ticketing and franchising) while also creating the right conditions for enhanced devolution and a 'Northern Region / Route'.

### 7.3 Roles, Responsibilities and Key Interfaces

- It is vital that decisions are made at the right level – not just political decisions, but operational and practical decisions that need to be made quickly;

- Members cannot currently understand who makes decisions which has led to discontent with the current partnership with TfN and Northern leaders having political oversight, while the DfT has budget control;
- Timescales are a key concern with decisions made far in advance by the rail industry with little ability to respond to changing circumstances;
- There is a requirement for influence within national bodies and a mechanism to respond to circumstances; and
- Decisions around trade-offs and conflicts need to be made by TfN-led consultation with key stakeholders rather than them being imposed on the North from a central body.

## 7.4 Geographical Challenges

- The functional railway geography of the UK does not always align well with political and administrative boundaries – in the North this results in overlapping rail markets that do not deliver optimum outcomes for locations close to boundaries, and a region that is split in two by Network Rail's London-centric north-south Regions and Routes;
- To address the issue of overlapping markets, TfN is committed to using travel to work data to better inform service specifications – this could also form part of the Williams Review recommendations for the rest of the country;
- TfN want a rational railway industry to deal with, and at the highest level of Network Rail (and any other bodies with national coordinating functions proposed by the Williams Review) this means a single, accountable point of contact; and
- The simplest way of achieving this is the reconsideration of the 'Northern Route' proposals that were previously rejected and TfN will work collaboratively with the Williams Review team in the short term, and going forward the wider rail industry, to make the case for such a Region / Route.

## 7.5 Stations

- As a subset of the wider devolution question, the Williams Review presents a unique opportunity to review the ownership, management, role and condition of all stations;
- In order to deliver on TfN's proposed minimum standards, an oversight group will be set up to support local station devolution business case submissions, share best practice and roll successful schemes out across the North - TfN suggest that the Williams Review create the conditions for this approach to be feasible; and
- In the interim, and for those areas not pursuing their own station devolution proposals, TfN is suggesting an alliance arrangement to help improve standards across the network.