

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
WEST YORKSHIRE COMBINED AUTHORITY
HELD ON TUESDAY, 25 JUNE 2019 AT COMMITTEE ROOM A,
WELLINGTON HOUSE, 40-50 WELLINGTON STREET, LEEDS**

Present:

Councillor Susan Hinchcliffe (Chair)	Bradford Council
Councillor Tim Swift MBE (Vice-Chair)	Calderdale Council
Councillor Judith Blake CBE	Leeds City Council
Councillor John Pennington	Bradford Council

In attendance:

Councillor Kim Groves	Leeds City Council
Councillor Peter Harrand	Leeds City Council
Richard George	SNC-Lavalin
Ben Still	West Yorkshire Combined Authority

1. Combined Authority Member Briefing with Richard George

Richard George (RG) was introduced to the meeting and welcomed the fact that the meeting was held in public. He outlined his role as an honest broker to identify the problems effecting rail in the North of England, particularly in relation to the disruption caused by the May 2018 timetable changes. RG outlined some of the preliminary findings of his report which included:

Capacity

- RG discussed the way in which capacity issues can affect the resilience and efficiency of the system.
- Capacity issues at particular pinchpoints which had a disproportionate impact on the network. The pinchpoints identified were; Leeds station, central Manchester, Leeds Neville Hill Depot, and East Coast Mainline north of York.
- Richard George described the rail network as at capacity, with little scope for appropriate contingency planning in times of disruption.
- It was noted that technology had been introduced to monitor the number of passengers left behind at stations due to short formed trains.
- A realistic approach to capacity issues could have helped to counteract the problems around the May 2018 timetable It was noted that

franchising forced optimism into the rail industry and a frank discussion about the deliverability of franchise commitments was necessary.

System Leadership

- RG identified a lack of appropriate organisational checks and balances as significant issues for the rail industry.
- RG emphasised the need for parties to operate in a more collaborative way and for the needs of the system as a whole to override the commercial needs of any single organisation.
- Members were informed that Network Rail now have processes in place to catch timetable issues before they arise
- RG referenced the Programme Management Office (PMO) that safeguards and scrutinises future timetable changes. Members suggested meeting with Paul McMahon from the PMO team to gain a greater insight into this process.
- The structure of decision making in the rail industry was discussed and RG suggested that the distinction between rail industry decisions and political decisions had been blurred. Planners make decisions which should have input from politicians and the wider public.
- Cllr Blake raised concerns regarding a lack accountability in decision making and a lack of checks and balances and the potential for devolved decision making on rail to benefit the region.

Infrastructure

- It was noted that the North of England had been used to running a cost effective rail service which struggled to cope with increasing demand on what has increasingly become a busy commuter network.
- Richard George discussed the 'grit in the system'; the smaller inefficiencies that clog up the rail network that need to be addressed.

Local Knowledge / Skills

- RG identified a trend in which the rail industry had become centralised and staff less specialist.
- While it was recognised that this centralising trend made the network more efficient; it had also brought about a collective loss local knowledge.
- RG suggested that a training regime could be introduced whereby staff in the centralised offices focus on a station or area in particular for a period of a year before rotating, to ensure some more specialised knowledge could be retained.