



North East Rail and Metro Summary

Autumn 2022

The North East Rail and Metro Strategy covers the geography of the two combined authorities in the North East and incorporates the Tyne and Wear Metro in conjunction with local, regional and national rail connectivity. It was produced on behalf of the North East Joint Transport Committee and was jointly authored by Transport North East and Nexus with input from key stakeholders. This short summary highlights the key aspect of the strategy.

The North East Rail and Metro Strategy builds on the North East Transport Plan published in 2021. The overriding aim is to improve the existing passenger and freight offer, and build upon this to extend the reach of both Metro and rail so, even more residents, businesses and visitors can enjoy the benefits of rail travel. Modal shift is woven throughout the strategy, as the key driver for our rail and Metro systems, (both passenger and freight), to significantly contribute to the objectives of the Transport Plan.

Using our Transport Plan objectives as a guide, this document outlines the specific passenger and freight rail improvements the region needs, as well as setting out how and when we plan to deliver them.

The North East Rail and Metro Strategy key objectives are:

Overcome inequality and grow our economy.

Metro Operations, Maintenance and Renewals.

Carbon-neutral transport.

Integration.

Healthier North East.

Appealing, sustainable transport choices.

Safe, secure network.

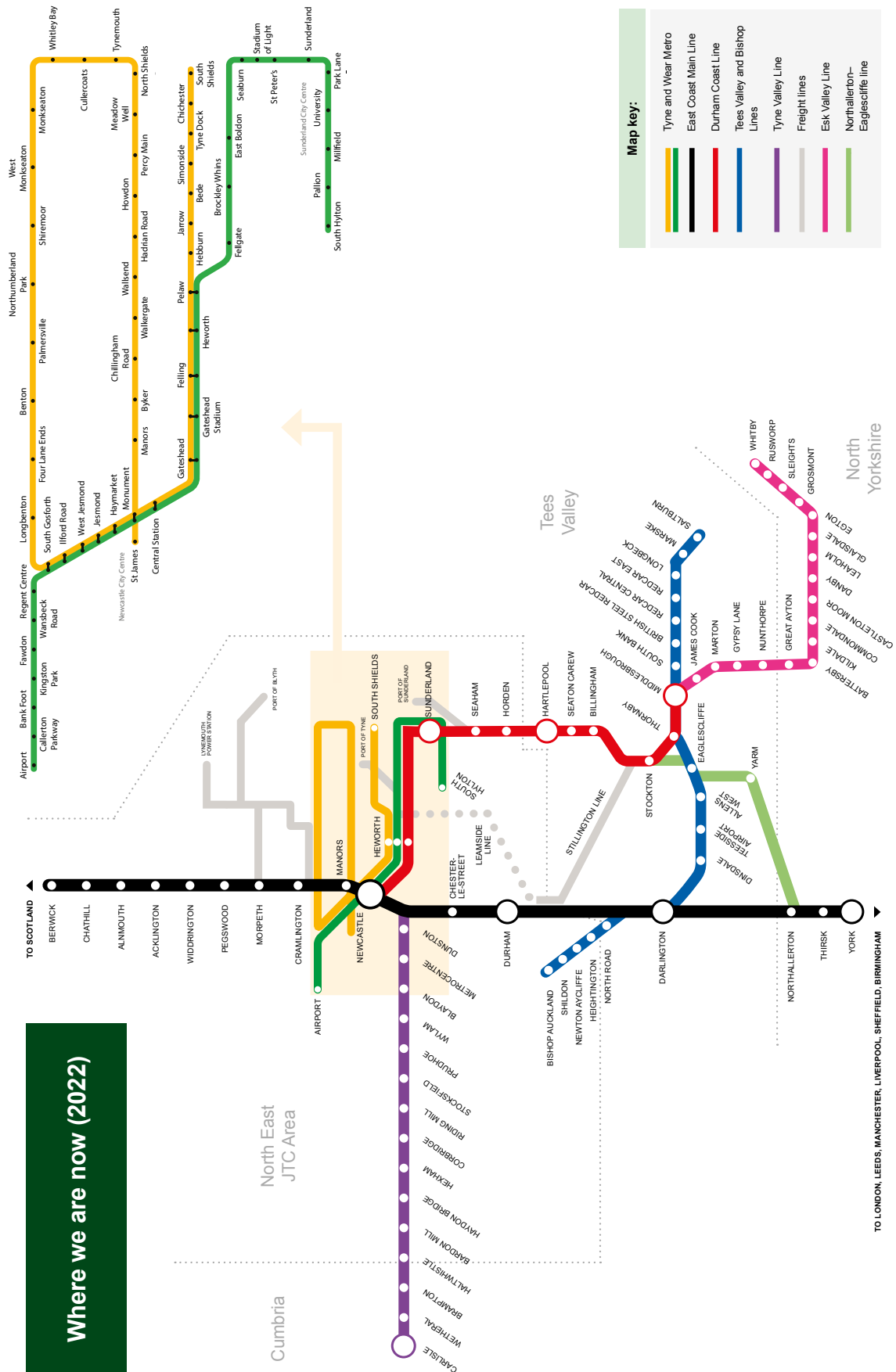
For more information please see our full strategy [here](#). Rail and Metro will need to play a leading role in enabling us to achieve these by 2035. Despite the impacts of the pandemic on the region and its rail and Metro network, our strategy makes the case that we need solutions to recover and grow the network. We aim to restore faith in our rail and Metro networks, improving services further, encourage new and returning passengers, and to expand the regional reach of the network.

Transformation of the network, and the benefits to our region which will flow cannot be achieved without increased levels of investment and new ways of working. This strategy must therefore be underpinned by:

- Investment in the East Coast Main Line (ECML) to support resilience and capacity in this crucial link between our region and other major UK economies;
- Availability of funding to our region to develop and deliver the schemes in this strategy, including system expansion, such as the Leamside Line;
- Security of future capital and revenue funding for our Metro system to maintain the successful contribution of this crucial asset to our region's economy;
- Ways of working which enable formalised collaboration and partnership with Great British Railways to bring service specification and decision making closer to our region.

Our strategy is a strong foundation to build future business cases for investment for new routes, new stations and continued renewal and modernisation of our railways. Central to the North East Rail and Metro Strategy is to seek further devolved powers to achieve long-term funding streams so we have the freedom and flexibility to plan ahead and deliver a more seamless, co-ordinated and integrated transport system across the North East. For local rail, this means getting new regional powers to specify and manage services on a common footing and integrated with Metro. We believe this will enable us to improve services and grow their usage.

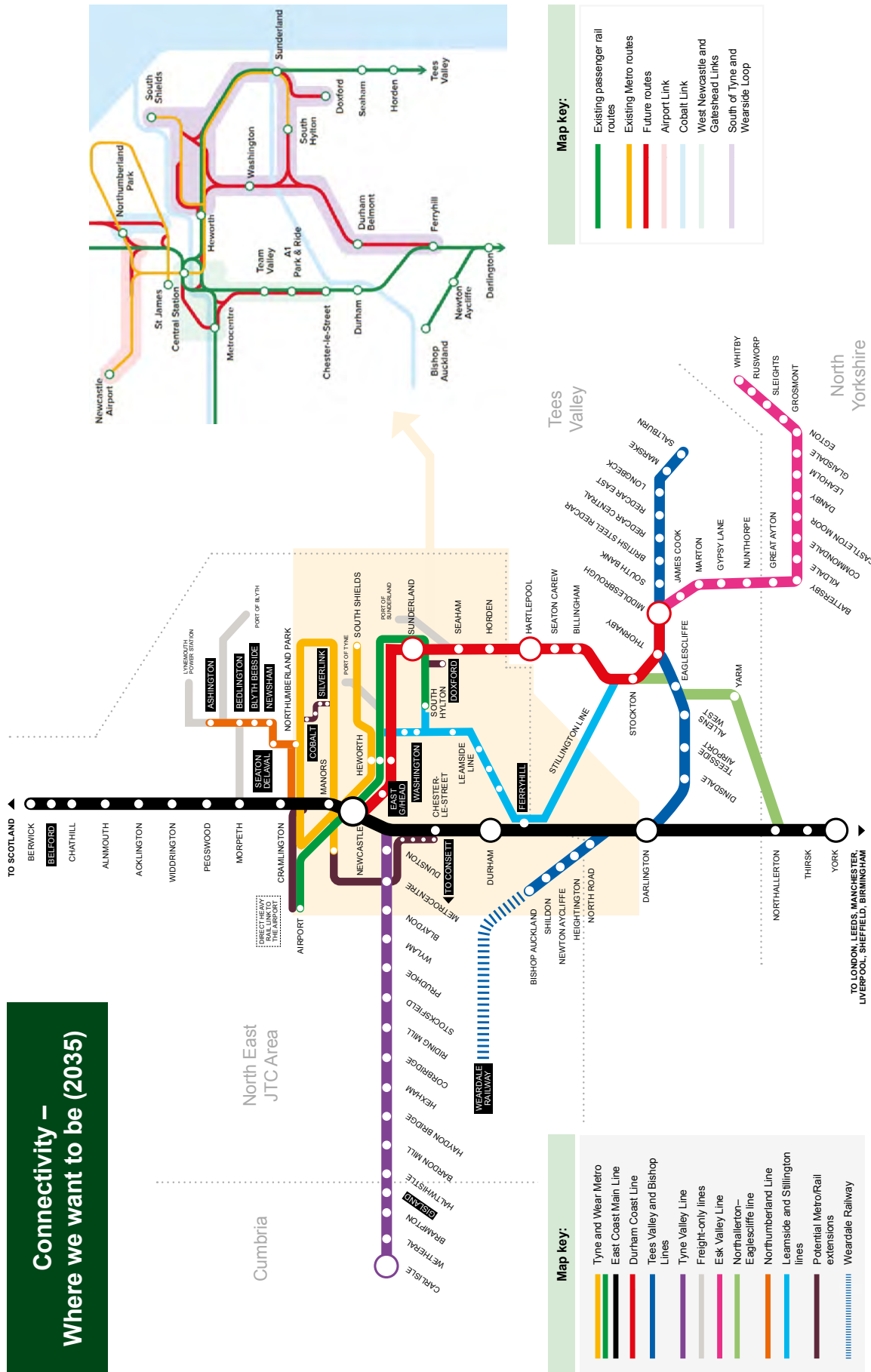
Where we are now (2022)



Map key:

	Tyne and Wear Metro
	East Coast Main Line
	Durham Coast Line
	Tees Valley and Bishop Lines
	Tyne Valley Line
	Freight lines
	Esk Valley Line
	Northallerton-Eaglescliffe line

Connectivity – Where we want to be (2035)



Overcoming inequality and growing our economy

Where are we now?

The North East benefits from previous visionary investment in creating the Tyne and Wear Metro system using historic rail lines. Each journey on our rail and Metro network provides £8.50 of economic benefit to the region. However, there are areas not served by Metro or local rail such as Washington, which is one of the largest towns in England with no dedicated heavy or light rail services, this hinders opportunities for residents and businesses.

The East Coast Main Line (ECML) is the main rail artery that connects the region to the rest of the UK, however due to limited capacity and poor reliability there are often connectivity conflicts and delays as highlighted by the recent timetable recast consultations.

There have been asset renewals on the Metro and improvement works such as the station at Horden (opened 2021) and the Northumberland Line where construction is in progress reintroduce passenger services. We need to continue to invest in renewals and upgrades to ensure we continue to provide a service the region can be proud of.

The current rail freight market is subdued having undergone structural change due to changes in heavy industry and the decline of coal. However, there was a general uplift in freight use across the UK during the pandemic which may provide opportunities for future sustained growth.

Where do we want to be?

There is a need to improve and expand our existing Metro and local rail service to both connect more people to places and improve customer experience. We want to create a unified, integrated public transport network where there is a seamless travel between modes, including active travel.

Through enhanced services and extensions in the network, we can bring more economic growth and other societal benefits to the North East. Building on the experiences of the Northumberland Line, one of the corridors being developed would reconnect Washington and the communities along the route of the mothballed Leamside Line.

We want to enable freight to travel more sustainably by rail and to develop additional freight routing options throughout the region. We also wish to explore the potential for a freight transfer interchange.

We will work with the government to ensure the region maximises the benefits from the investment set out in the Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) for the ECML, particularly south of Newcastle.



How do we get there?

We are developing business cases to extend the network, such as the 'South of Tyne and Wearside Loop' Metro extension and others to better connect people and places. Transport North East, Nexus, North East Councils and the rail industry are already working together, progressing schemes for delivery such as redeveloping Sunderland Station. We will continue to work with Department for Transport and other stakeholders on the potential for reopening the Leamside Line.

In terms of the ECML, we need additional capacity on the line for both freight and passenger trains (the IRP interventions go a long way to achieve this). Beyond the ECML we will work with the freight sector to ascertain what enabling infrastructure is required to grow sustainable freight within and through the North East, including opportunities to transfer goods from road to rail.

Metro Operation, Renewals and Maintenance

Where are we now?

The North East is in a unique position having its own light rail network (Metro) on which to build an integrated public transport system to benefit our communities and businesses. There are two sides to the story here, there is what the Metro brings to the North East (each journey generates at least £8.50 to the local economy) and the operational needs to keep to improving Metro and to enable expansion into more communities.

Metro plays a key role in supporting the region's economy through enabling multi modal journeys. The system was specifically designed and built to complement and enhance the region's bus network and has performed well for over 40 years but, increasingly it needs investment to keep it operating to the standards modern passengers expect.

Nexus continues to prove it can deliver major changes to improve the quality, reliability, and attractiveness of the Metro with funding.



Where do we want to be?

We want to continue to deliver a frequent, reliable safe and secure Metro service for passengers. To do this will require investment in new technology and infrastructure such as re-signalling, tracks, stations, passenger facilities including lifts and other key structures, such as strengthening work on bridges. The sustained and continual investment through an Asset Renewal Program (ARP) is key to that. We want to see long-term funding available to maintain this approach and to avoid inefficient 'patch and mend' methods. Nexus have secured government funding for their new fleet of Metros which will help combat the challenges relating to the reliability of the current fleet due to their age which was having an impact on passenger satisfaction.

Overall, the Metro's priorities are to secure long-term revenue and capital funding to ensure the future operation of the existing Metro network. Creating a solid and stable platform for improvements to grow patronage, improve satisfaction and create modal shift whilst supporting wider economic recovery and development of the North East. The Metro Flow is an example of this which will bring more capacity (est. 24000 additional spaces per day across the system).

We want to improve customer service and the customer experience and increase the modal share of overall journeys.

How do we get there?

The security of both capital grant and revenue grant funding streams to Nexus, either devolved or direct from central government, is crucial if Metro is to continue to deliver the benefits to our region and avoid the consequences of a less effective Metro system. Building on these funding sources, Nexus will continue to bid for relevant national and local funding sources and work in partnership with both public and private stakeholders, including Great British Railways to progress the projects set out in our implementation plan in chapter 15 of the full NERMS document.

We aim to attract returning passengers and welcome new users with the modern fleet, customer journey mapping, improved digital communications and personalising experience through data analytics and real time information. Nexus will continue to review business cases to move to a seven day timetable to better support the leisure market, alongside the roll out of the new, £362 million, fleet and Metro Flow. The resilience of the Metro is being improved through resignalling works which will bring greater reliability, reduce the risk of obsolescence, entail less maintenance and improve the condition monitoring of the equipment.

Nexus want to continue to advance modal shift by supporting business inward investment and Metro line extensions, connecting more people to more places.

Carbon Neutral rail and Metro for the North East

Where are we now?

The North East has a mix of urban and rural areas, some of which are served by local rail and Metro services however many areas have limited or no access to the rail network. There are high proportions of car use which cause congestion on road corridors into the centres of Durham, Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland, leading to poor air quality and higher risks of road traffic accidents. Some local authorities have plans in place to reduce the impacts of carbon-based transport, aligned to the Government Transport Decarbonisation Plan.

Metro is one of the greenest modes of transport through Tyne and Wear and the new, even more energy efficient, Metro fleet will be fully in service by 2024. Local rail provides connections outside of the Metro lines, however there are no set plans to replace the current diesel fleet with a greener alternative or to electrify the lines across the network.

For longer distance journeys the area benefits from the East Coast Main line being electrified and recent investment in new trains e.g. The Azuma and Nova fleet, being more energy efficient in comparison to older stock.

As of 2021, none of the region's rail freight were hauled by electric locomotives due to a need for electrified sections, particularly on local routes and last mile connections.



Where do we want to be?

We want to reduce congestion on roads in the North East and extend rail and Metro lines to enable modal shift to better connect people to places.

We will continue to investigate options to reduce road congestion and opportunities to move freight on to rail.

We aim to develop more local rail and Metro Park & Ride options, improve existing sites and include where appropriate in our future rail extensions plans.

We welcome the Government's Net Zero Strategy to switch to carbon neutral alternatives by 2050, and aim to work with partners and stakeholders to develop robust plans for the transfer of local rail from diesel traction to battery or hydrogen trains in the North East.

How do we get there?

We will keep progressing the business cases for local rail and Metro expansion and garner political, business and community support to secure the necessary funds to deliver schemes, such as the Leamside Line and South of Tyne and Wearside Loop. We will continue to develop our plans to connect people to places to encourage a modal shift.

Our stations and depots play a role in achieving environmental objectives by investing in solar panels, water efficiency, recycling stations and electric vehicle charging points.

We will work with partners and Government to implement and achieve a Net Zero target for public transport in the North East, seek new non diesel trains, consider public transport interchanges and opportunities for active travel and cycle storage.

Integration

Where are we now?

Rail, Metro and bus services in the region lack coordination which is due in part to the various modes being governed by separate, often remote organisations. This leads to timetables that do not connect, which can mean longer or unsuitable wait times that add to overall journey times for passengers. Fares and ticketing are seen as complex and confusing with numerous competing options especially when using multiple modes of public transport.

Some of our local rail and Metro stations face issues with accessibility and some users face issues when travelling to/from these stations. Passengers who have physical impediments can be restricted in the use of the services on offer. Problems at some stations include lack of facilities for accessibility such as lifts or platform heights. There is limited cycle parking at some stations and space is also at a premium on trains, this can act as a barrier to active travel integration.

A lack of a freight interchange facility means longer distance freight by rail cannot currently transfer to last mile delivery by road, restricting opportunities to transfer more goods by rail.

Where do we want to be?

We want integration between local rail, Metro, bus to provide one coherent public transport network covering the whole of the North East including at key interchange stations. We want to have a greater say locally in how our services are specified and managed to match the local flexibility we have with the Metro. On bus we are progressing an Enhanced Partnership with the bus operators and we wish to form a strong partnership with Great British Railways to jointly procure and administer the next passenger services contract for the North East region.

We want to have more modern and improved information systems including real time information to help people get the best from public transport. We want a network which is accessible for all and wish to expand the network to enable more people to benefit from our services.

We want integration of ticketing which will make the travel choices easier for people using digital ticketing across the network with local rail, Metro and bus services under an integrated system.

How do we get there?

Better integration of public transport modes will only happen if we gain more local influence over the various component modes. We have local discretion over Metro, are formulating an Enhanced Partnership on bus and wish to work with GBR to form a strong partnership on rail. Through the strong partnership and a self-contained North East passenger services contract we can bring all the components together to form a complete public transport system that works in an integrated way.

We will seek funding to improve accessibility for all, both on the stations and on their approaches. We will continue to work to enhance the Park & Ride offering in the North East as well as finding ways we can modernise stations such as by adding in electrical car charging points and more cycle storage.

We aim to work with partners for integrated ticketing options to offer a seamless approach to buying tickets for public transport with the hope for one simple single ticket across modes. Work is already underway to integrate fares and ticketing between the Metro with the new Northumberland Line.

Rail and Metro for a Healthier North East

Where are we now?

Health and wellbeing remains a challenge within the North East, despite an uptake in walking and cycling during lockdowns in 2020. As a result, Nexus and local authorities are continuing to focus on identifying and delivering sustainable transport links to and from Metro stations, as well as key bus corridors, through designated safer routes. Rail and Metro are the most efficient and greenest motorised modes of transport, so are important in improving air quality. The ageing society within the region also increases the importance for rail and Metro in improving wellbeing; changes must be made in order to allow this age group to receive more social contact than currently.

Where do we want to be?

We want to make rail and Metro a sustainable alternative to car use, this would reduce congestion and improve air quality. We want to encourage a modal shift to public transport, which could result in increased public health benefits from improved exercise levels. Many people already take advantage of the walking and cycle routes to stations, through the 'Healthy Streets' programme, we hope to continue to develop these links to existing and future stations. For people cycling to stations we want to provide more cycle storage and work with train operating companies to allow for more cycle spaces in carriages.

We will promote the modal shift of freight transport from road to rail which will reduce congestion and improve air quality. Along with rail freight we want to increase passenger services and expand the rail and Metro network allowing opportunities to work with partners to promote modal shift and social inclusion whilst aiming to reduce loneliness and related mental health issues.

How do we get there?

The North East Transport Plan outlines the importance of ensuring the network caters for all addressing potential accessibility issues, these matters will continue to be highlighted when making station improvements and developing the network.

Rail and Metro offers a solution to enable independence within an ageing society by connecting people to places such as hospitals, it also allows people to access education, work opportunities and outdoor and leisure destinations.

We will achieve a healthier North East by rail and Metro working with local authorities to promote a shift to using public transport more. We will work with them and other partners to explore improving routes to stations and how we can make it more convenient for everyone to access rail and Metro stations. We will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure storage and carriage of cycles is available wherever possible. Nexus, Northern and other rail providers are exploring options for spaces on trains and Metro.

In line with the forthcoming Transport North East Active Travel Strategy, we will seek to integrate rail and Metro with other forms of public transport to promote greater levels of walking and cycling across the region.

Appealing, Sustainable Transport Choices

Where are we now?

In 2021 we consulted on the North East Transport Plan. The public consultation responses helped to shape the North East Rail and Metro Strategy.

- People want to feel connected, particularly those in rural areas. Currently rail and Metro only provide a small percentage of journeys across the North East. They would like to see more done to encourage greater active travel and to feel safe using public transport.
- Sustainability and protecting the environment are important to local people.
- Our residents wanted to feel public transport gives value for money. Many felt fares are expensive and travelling by car is perceived to be cheaper. Value for money was ranked of highest importance for Metro passengers in a 2019 survey, with only around 60% of passengers satisfied by the price of their journey. Travel Discount Cards are available to those claiming Jobseekers Allowance or Universal Credit for certain periods of time, as well as those in Full Time Education.
- People want the services they use to be punctual and reliable. In terms of the customer experience, Customer Satisfaction surveys highlight that Northern Rail users are the second-least satisfied nationally. Customer satisfaction on the Metro in 2019 was at its highest for seven years. Many Metro passengers feel that value for money, security surrounding stations, and facilities for purchasing tickets are very important.

Where do we want to be?

Customer experience

We want passengers to experience excellent customer service across the network. We aim to improve punctuality and reliability across rail and Metro, exceeding the current standards.

We want to provide improved value for money and reduce the impact of transport poverty. This includes the flexibility to set fares that better reflect the local economy.

- We want people to experience excellent customer service, regardless of mode and operator.
- The strategy will work to ensure that journeys are easy to plan and integrate with other forms of public transport.

How do we get there?

We will seek to improve rail and Metro stations by making safe and secure routes to welcoming stations, as well as providing clean, comfortable, and reliable trains. This will improve the customer experience. In addition we will strive for integration with other public transport and active travel modes, allowing enhanced connections and modal shifts.

To improve punctuality and reliability on the network, we will seek opportunities to update signalling systems and line speed improvements as well as bringing in new trains on the networks. We want to make tickets easier to purchase and understand, by using applications providing information and contactless payments we aim to make the ticketing process as easy as possible.

Safe and secure network

Where are we now?

Perceptions of safety on rail in the North East are overall positive, with 85% of rail passenger being very or fairly satisfied with their personal safety. Feeling safe whilst travelling is important and we understand that a negative perception of safety and security can affect the travel choices of individuals and the times of day they choose to travel.

A 2019 Nexus survey of perceptions of safety on Metro found that 68% of respondents have felt worried about their personal safety while on board the Metro, 21% while waiting for the Metro and 11% when walking to/from stations and stops.

Since 2017, there has been a new focus on security on the Metro, with a dedicated Security Manager appointed and Metro's new fleet will be able to live stream on CCTV.

For increased security Northern Rail are introducing person identifying camera onboard which can be used for prosecution if needed. By continuing investments in CCTV and staffing we can hopefully minimise incidents happening in the stations or on the tracks.

In terms of cleaning, Metro trains are being treated with a new anti-microbial sanitiser throughout the passenger areas which protects surfaces for up to 30 days. Similarly on the Northern network a team of over 600 cleaners cover the cleaning of all carriages and key stations every day, with extra focus on cleaning touchpoints like handrails and armrests.

There is work necessary to reduce the risk of sexual assault and harassment on the network. The Hate Crime Charter is in place for bus and Metro operators as well as members of the public to report incidents. This service offers free and confidential support.

Where do we want to be?

We want people to feel confident using public transport for it to be a sustainable mode of choice to do this we must continue to improve safety and security of our local rail and Metro. One of the ways to do this is increase the amount of CCTV and staff presence to deter possible acts of vandalism or assault. We want to see improved modal interchange, lighting and CCTV along popular walking routes, together with support from local authorities and the police service to ensure people feel safe on their journeys to the stations. We will continue to seek funding to raise the standard for passenger's environment on trains, at stations and along station approaches.

How do we get there?

This strategy, in conjunction with the Nexus safety and security strategy, will support processes and interventions to improve personal safety and security for users of our local rail and Metro networks across the region. Nexus has developed specific recommendations which are grouped by: People, Technology, Consultation/Liaison and Connectivity (for more information please see the full Metro Operations, Maintenance and Renewals chapter on the Strategy).

Passengers must feel safe when using our networks. We need robust systems in place to deter those who create safety and security concerns for passengers this will encourage higher patronage on rail and Metro services. Nexus have already shown commitment to this by increasing security presence on Metro services.

Conclusion

The Metro, local rail and its connection to the rest of the UK need to see continuous investment and development to benefit North East residents and support a multi modal transport system. By 2035, we will achieve significant improvements in the contribution of rail and Metro towards achieving the key Transport Plan objectives.

We aim through greater devolution of powers and funding we will improve the existing passenger experience, extend the reach of both local rail and Metro, seek freight improvements, and deliver passenger growth as part of an integrated North East public transport system. We believe these improvements can be brought about by these 4 foundations:

- Investment in the East Coast Main Line (ECML) to support resilience and capacity on this crucial link between our region and other major UK economies;
- Availability of funding to our region to develop and deliver the schemes in this strategy, including system expansion, such as the Leamside Line;
- Security of future capital and revenue funding for our Metro system to maintain the successful contribution of this crucial asset to our region's economy;
- Ways of working which enable formalised collaboration and partnership with Great British Railways to bring service specification and decision making closer to our region.

Metro and rail users in the North East will see development of the lines and planning for future expansion. Metro users will see a more consistent service from the improvements of Metro flow. Investment in the East Coast Main Line will benefit the North East by providing capacity and a reliable service. Furthermore, users will see enhancements in integration between modes of transport and more improvements to customer services and safety and security.

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