North East Mayoral Strategic Authority

Kim McGuinness
North East
Mayor





North East Rail Vision

Our plan for the region's rail network up to 2040

Summary Document

September 2026

Mayor's foreword

I want our railways to work for local people in North East England: it's a simple vision.

While trains transport tens of thousands of passengers around the region every day too often they are late, cancelled, expensive, old, infrequent and inconvenient. It has been a problem for far too long and we need to see radical change.

North East people deserve more and as we deliver on our plans and vision for rail, things will improve for everyone. Our region was the birthplace of the railways – we gave that to the world and today we should have a world-class network and service we can be proud of.

Devolution is our chance to transform how the rail system is run and to make it more affordable. I have been clear I want to see more powers given to regions so the needs for local people are at the heart of every decision. Devolution of rail powers such as control over local stations will allow us to take quicker action, delivering improvements everyone can see when they travel.

Getting a train should be affordable, accessible and safe, with a good choice of routes, frequent services and simple fares. Smart, integrated tickets should make travel easy and guarantee you get the cheapest price available – other parts of the country have this already so it's time the North East does too.

And we know how to get things done - on our region's Metro system, we are demonstrating what can be achieved when a railway is run by and for local people. We have a brand-new Metro fleet which is improving journeys through more reliable and frequent services. We also have a wide range of cheaper Mayor's Fares including a £1 ticket for young people 21 and under, and a Kids Go Free promise all year round. Every station has step-free access, digital CCTV and contactless ticket machines. Metro trains are frequent right through the evening and weekend, and we will soon increase the daytime frequency even further.

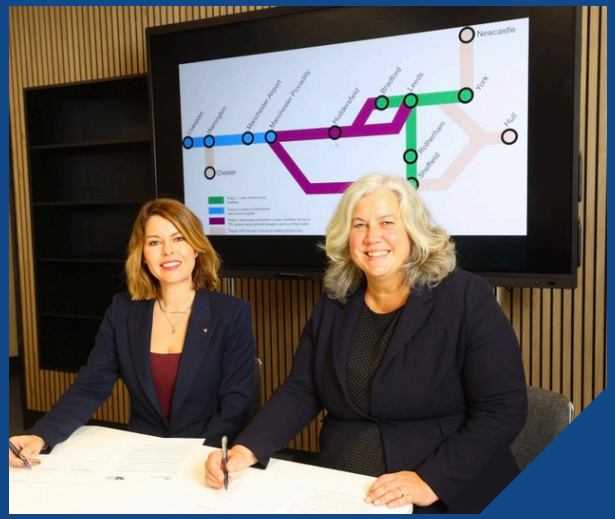
Now we need to bring the same local passion to the region's whole rail network, as well as new investment. The North East is forced to rely on ageing diesel trains built in the 1980s and early 1990s, so we need substantial investment in our trains so things don't grind to a halt in the next decade. We need to take smart and sustainable decisions now about our long-term rail needs, and we need to make our stations - including Sunderland, Berwick, Durham and Newcastle - attractive gateways to the region, and every station accessible to all.

We are investing millions in the future of rail. We have started work to extend the Metro to Washington – the first new line in 30 years. Next, we want to open a new route through County Durham along the former Leamside Line – a transformative project that will build on the success of the Northumberland Line to deliver a level of change that we haven't seen in decades.

The hugely successful Northumberland Line project shows our region can work with Government and other partners to deliver major infrastructure which truly works for our people – with millions of journeys already made by passengers using the new line. The appetite for change is real in the North East and I want to deliver more of these impactful services for our communities.

To transform rail, we need bold actions delivered by working closely with Government, industry and Great British Railways. At the heart of this, I am pushing for more devolved powers, so the key decisions about our railways are taken here in the North East, underpinned by our vision to create the Angel Network, a world class integrated public transport network that works for everyone.

Kim McGuinness
North East Mayor



The railway plays an essential part in the North East's transport network, creating unmissable opportunities right across our region.

People travel by train to access work and education, visit family and friends, see new places, and do the things they enjoy with the people they care about. If we want the North East to thrive, then we need a railway that works well and that everyone in the region feels able to use.

That's why the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (or North East MSA) has developed the North East Rail Vision. The main aim of this Rail Vision is to improve the rail network for everyone in the North East, delivering changes that people can see and feel in their everyday lives. North East Mayor Kim McGuinness has big plans for transport in our region: she wants to create a green, integrated transport network that works for all. Our Rail Vision explains how rail will play a part in these plans.

The vision is guided by a clear Vision Statement:

> "A railway that truly benefits our people - powering opportunity across the North East as part of the Angel Network and seamlessly connected to national services. Delivering safe, reliable, accessible and affordable travel that works for everyone."



Though the full Rail Vision document also concentrates on infrastructure and decision-making, this summary focuses on the experience of people using the railway. That includes current passengers, as well as people who might like to use the rail network, but who currently feel excluded from it.

The railway already plays an important role in helping residents and visitors in the North East to access the opportunities that they need to flourish. Passenger numbers in the region are now higher than they were before the pandemic, proof that rail is a form of transport that people in our region are keen to use. Improvements at stations (like Sunderland) and more frequent services on some local rail lines (like the Durham Coast Line) are important early steps in our plan to make rail better for people across the region.



The reopening of the Northumberland Line in December 2024 has been a significant success, with around 1.7 million journeys made by the start of July 2026. The line has connected people in south-east Northumberland with jobs, education and leisure opportunities. It has also allowed us to pioneer new passenger-friendly improvements, introducing The Mayor's Fares price cap on the line, along with Pop pay-as-you-go fares that are integrated with bus and Metro. This paves the way for similar initiatives across the North East, and strengthens our determination to expand the reach of rail in other parts of our region – for example, by bringing the Metro to Washington and delivering the Leamside Line in County Durham.

But we also know that rail in the North East doesn't work as well as it should. Inconvenient cancellations and frustrating delays are still far too common, and it's not always easy to know what to do when things go wrong. Complicated ticketing arrangements and inconsistent pricing mean that rail sometimes seems unaffordable and inaccessible, and a lack of clear, consistent information can make train travel more confusing than it needs to be. Making connections – whether to another train, the Metro, the bus, or another form of transport – isn't always a smooth and stress-free experience. Accessibility and safety measures are lacking in places. Many stations on rail lines across our region are not served as frequently as they deserve, and some areas in the North East don't even have direct access to rail. This means that, for too many of us, travelling by train isn't an option a lot of the time, even if we would like it to be.

The railways in Britain are changing. The UK Government is currently in the process of establishing Great British Railways: a new, publicly owned organisation that will be responsible for operating most passenger rail services, as well as managing and maintaining the infrastructure of the railway. By bringing track and train together, GBR will be able to introduce wide-ranging improvements that will make train travel in Britain simpler and more enjoyable for all passengers. This is a truly historic transformation of rail in Britain. We are determined to use it as an opportunity to improve the North East's railway, making sure that it works better for everyone.

We want to transform the railway in our region so that it delivers on six key priorities:



Affordable – ensuring rail is an accessible and attractive option for people and businesses by delivering value for money, simple fares and ticketing.



People-focused – ensuring that passenger services are frequent and reliable, with new trains and consistent performance so that train travel is convenient and comfortable.



Opportunity-enabling – improving people's access to jobs, education and other opportunities, and supporting the creation of new jobs, businesses and housing that will enable our communities to thrive.



Integrated – contactless pay-as-you-go fares and capped daily and weekly fares, which apply across bus, the Tyne and Wear Metro, the Shields Ferry and Park and Ride as part of a single, integrated 'Angel Network'.



Inclusive – improving safety and accessibility measures across the rail network, so that everyone feels able to travel on the rail network safely and comfortably.



Green – empowering more people in our region to travel more sustainably by train, by making rail safe, reliable, accessible and affordable.

These six priorities sit at the heart of our vision. Addressing them would transform rail in the North East and help to ensure that it works as well as possible for people in our region.

Talking about the railways can be complicated, but for most passengers, it's easy to tell what doesn't work about our current rail network – and how things could be better. We want our Rail Vision to pave the way for improvements that ordinary people in our region can see and feel.

To bring this to life, the table (right) describes some of the changes people might notice, from the moment they start planning their journey until their arrival at their destination. A fuller version is available in the main vision document.



1 Trust before you travel	▪ Simple, clear and affordable fares. ▪ Reliable train services with consistently good performance. ▪ A single, integrated platform for journey planning, ticketing and real-time information, building on the recently launched Travel North East website, but with additional features (for example, accessibility information for stations).
2 Getting to your station	▪ Safe, accessible and convenient access to stations. ▪ Secure park-and-ride and cycle storage facilities at stations. ▪ Well-designed links between rail and other transport types.
3 Waiting at the station	▪ Accurate timetables and real-time service information. ▪ Safe, well-lit and accessible station environments. ▪ Visible customer support at key stations and interchanges.
4 On your journey	▪ Frequent and reliable services that run on time. ▪ Clean, modern and comfortable trains. ▪ Clear and consistent on-board information. ▪ Simple, affordable integrated smart ticketing (including contactless and fare capping).
5 Getting to where you need to be	▪ Rail services that connect people to jobs, education, services and other opportunities. ▪ Reliable connections between the North East and major UK cities. ▪ Stations supporting growth, regeneration and access to employment and housing.

In order to deliver these changes, we need to be clear about what exactly we want to do, and when. Our Rail Vision roadmap helps passengers to understand the key milestones we want to reach by 2027, 2032 and 2040. Below is a snapshot of some of our passenger-focused aspirations; a fuller list is available in the main vision document.

Starting in 2027, we want to:

- make local rail part of the 'Angel Network', an integrated local transport network bringing together local rail, bus, the Tyne and Wear Metro, the Shields Ferry and Park and Ride.
- extend The Mayor's Fares and the Pop card to more rail services, so that travelling by rail is more affordable, and changing trains or connecting to other forms of transport feels more seamless.
- start delivering accessibility measures and safety improvements (especially for women and girls), so that everyone in the North East feels the rail network is designed for them.

By 2032, we want to:

- ensure more frequent services in more parts of the region, including earlier and later services, so that rail caters for all people, whether they're travelling for an early shift, a night on the town, or anything in between.
- start improving stations, turning them into places that are welcoming to visitors and that residents are proud of.
- improve the punctuality and reliability of rail services, so that people feel confident putting their trust in the North East's rail network.
- bring the Metro to Washington, one of the largest towns in England without a direct rail link, making travel easier for communities served by the line and creating new jobs and opportunities.

By 2040, we want to:

- fully deliver the Leamside Line, a 21-mile railway line running from Pelaw in Gateshead to Ferryhill in County Durham, transforming travel for communities on the line and creating jobs and opportunities for around 100,000 residents in our region.
- extend existing lines to increase capacity on the local rail network, allowing for more local and long-distance passenger services that give passengers in our region more options for where and when to travel.
- better integrate rail with our airport and seaports, making it easier for people to travel not just within Britain, but abroad as well.
- deliver more long-distance inter-city services, new trains on local services, and new local stations on existing lines throughout the region, helping to make rail part of everyday life for as many people in the North East as we can.







The North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness, wants the North East to be the home of real opportunity, a place where everyone thrives. Rail can help to make this ambition a reality.

But to do this, the region's rail network needs to change to fulfil our Vision Statement:

> "A railway that truly benefits our people - powering opportunity across the North East as part of the Angel Network and seamlessly connected to national services. Delivering safe, reliable, accessible and affordable travel that works for everyone."

The North East deserves a rail network that local people can rely on. Our Rail Vision has been developed to deliver precisely that.

North East Mayoral Strategic Authority

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