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

September 2026

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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.

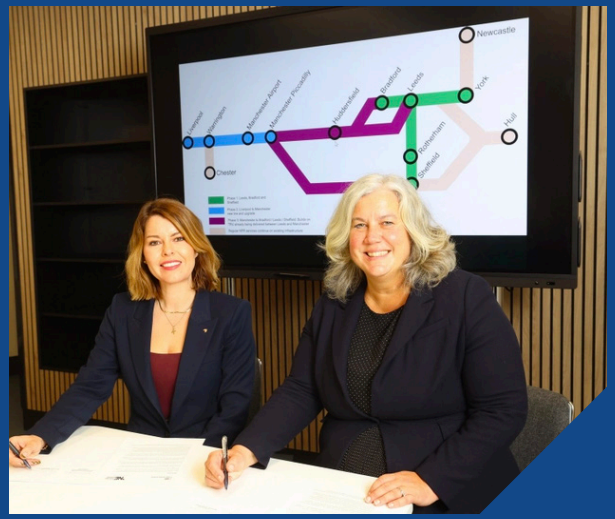
Now we need to bring the same local passion to the region's whole rail network, as well as new investment. The North East is forced to rely on ageing diesel trains built in the 1980s and early 1990s, so we need substantial investment in our trains so things don't grind to a halt in the next decade. We 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.

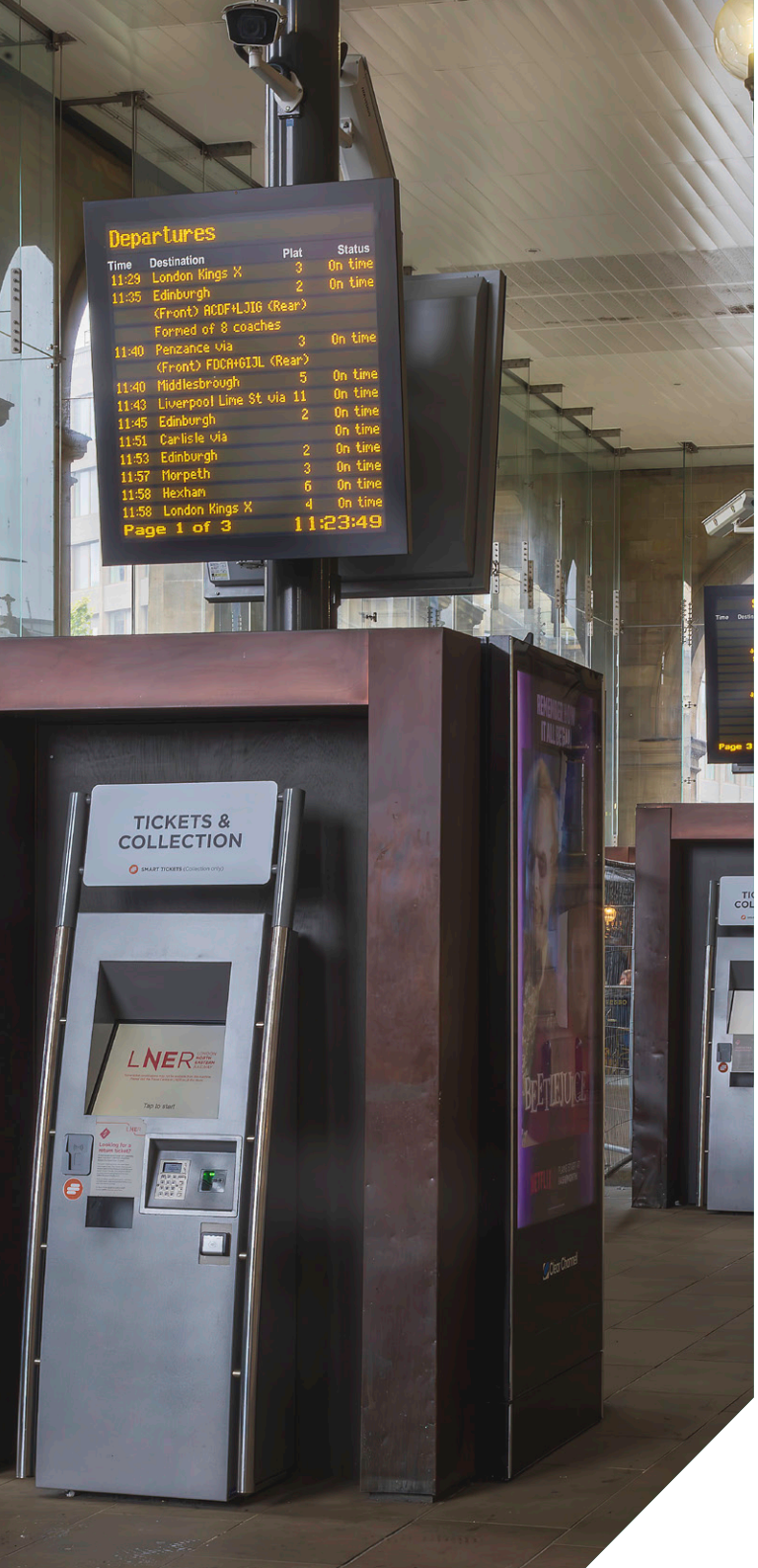
We are investing millions in the future of rail. We have started work to extend the Metro to Washington – the first new line in 30 years. Next, we want to open a new route through County Durham along the former Leamside Line – a transformative project that will build on the success of the Northumberland 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





Executive Summary

The North East Rail Vision sets out the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority's ambitious vision for transforming rail in the North East by 2040.

It articulates changes we want to see on the region's rail network to benefit local people, ensuring that rail can support our wider ambitions: inclusive economic growth, improved access to jobs, employment, leisure and healthcare, a welcoming home for trade and tourism, and the many more opportunities that rail can unlock.

This vision is ambitious, because our region deserves bold change. It is also practical, because our people deserve delivery and improvements they can see every day.

It 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."

Outcomes

This Rail Vision will help to deliver:

- Affordable, simple fares
- A fully integrated transport network, known as the 'Angel Network'
- More frequent and reliable rail services
- Modern, accessible stations
- Improved safety measures across the rail network

Delivery will transform how people, businesses and places across the North East can connect and thrive. This vision will make rail more affordable and accessible for everyday journeys, so our people can enjoy using local rail services. Rail can and should have a positive impact on people's lives, and this document will guide the region on a path to better railways for all.

By 2040, rail will play a central role in shaping a stronger, greener and more inclusive economy for the North East of England.

Purpose

The purpose of the North East Rail Vision is simple: we want to transform rail in the North East, and to ensure that it works for the people in our region.

The Railways Bill will establish a new public body, Great British Railways (GBR). GBR will be the single 'directing mind' for the railway, bringing track and train together. Rail reform presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) to shape national rail priorities, ensuring they work for the area they represent. We are publishing this document to ensure that we fully seize this opportunity to work with GBR to deliver a better railway for the people of the North East.

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. This document has been written with this aim in mind. We recognise that a strong relationship with GBR is an essential tool for achieving the improvements that will allow the North East's rail network to truly thrive. By clearly articulating our priorities for rail in the North East and the changes that we want people to experience, the North East Rail Vision will ensure that the North East MSA can make the most of this unique opportunity to shape the future direction of Britain's rail network before GBR's priorities are fully set. We will champion improvements that will be noticed and appreciated by those who live, work and travel in the North East, paving the way for a railway that truly benefits our people.

Building on the Mayor's 2025-2040 North East Local Transport Plan (LTP), the Rail Vision will inform discussions between the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority (North East MSA), Great British Railways (GBR) and other rail industry partners, to ensure that the region's needs are a central part of the ongoing work to set the future of Britain's rail network. Collaboration is key to delivering the improved rail network that the people of the North East need and deserve.





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Vision structure

The 'Where we want to be' chapter sets out our key ambitions for the rail network up to 2040.
It is structured around the following six principles:

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

People-focused – better higher-frequency services, new rolling stock, improved performance and a better experience for local people.

Opportunity-enabling – supporting the creation of new jobs, businesses and housing, and improving access to employment and education

Integrated – simple contactless fares; seamless multi-modal connections to both regional and national transport, affordable capped fares across modes to support integrated journeys.

Inclusive – improved accessibility for everyone, and enhanced safety measures (especially for women and girls).

Green – encouraging modal shift to rail for both passengers and freight.





It includes a table which describes the changes that passengers and businesses could see on the rail network if our ambitions are realised. It also explains the role of rail in the Mayor's plans for 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.

The 'How we will get there' chapter explains how our ambitions for rail will be delivered. It emphasises five enablers that are needed to ensure that these ambitions are delivered:

- Strong partnerships.
- Joined-up planning.
- Reliable funding.
- A clear phased pipeline.
- Managing risks and keeping delivery on track.

It also includes a phased roadmap for 2040, broken down into:

- **immediate priorities** (delivery to commence by 2027) – including starting to implement new safety and accessibility measures, integrating local rail into the Angel Network, adding more capacity to the Northumberland Line, developing the Leamside Line business case and establishing a formal partnership with GBR.
- **medium-term priorities** (to be delivered by 2032) – including rolling out affordable Mayor's Fares across all local rail services, increasing number of stations with 30-minute frequencies, delivering major upgrades (including to stations).
- **longer-term priorities** (to be delivered by 2040) – including delivering the Leamside programme as part of Northern Powerhouse Rail, improving long-distance connectivity, expanding capacity, opening up extensions (such as extending the Northumberland Line to Newbiggin-by-the-sea) and growing rail freight services.



The 'How will we get there' chapter itself contains a more complete list of the priorities that sit within each timeframe. The 'Case for Change' chapter describes the current status of the rail network, providing the context that has shaped our rail priorities. It describes the rail network in detail and how factors such as limited reach of rail, lack of integration with the wider transport network, safety and accessibility concerns and problems with reliability contribute to a railway that is lacking.

Finally, 'Delivering the Vision' focuses on the wider governance and partnership structures that will enable our vision to be implemented. It focuses in detail on GBR's mayoral partnership framework, exploring how the North East MSA might work with GBR (alongside other rail industry partners) to shape and improve the region's rail network in the years to come.

1. Introduction

The North East has big ambitions for rail, because we know it helps connect our communities to more opportunities and is a central part of our region's transport network.

In our 2025-2040 North East Local Transport Plan (LTP), we set out our overarching aim for transport in the North East: **to create a green, integrated transport network that works for** all, based on five key areas of focus:

- Planning journeys, informing users, and supporting customers.
- Ticketing and fares.
- Reach and resilience.
- Safety, especially of women and girls, and other improvements in service quality.
- Connections between different transport types.

To achieve this, we need a modern railway that supports fast and reliable connections to employment, leisure, education and healthcare; that is safe and accessible for all; and that delivers a seamless and straightforward travel experience to, from and through North East England, across a range of transport types, for both passengers and freight.

The North East MSA is also driven by five missions that contribute to a bold vision of change for our region: home of real opportunity, a North East we are proud to call home, home to a growing and vibrant economy for all, home of the green energy revolution, and a welcoming home to global trade. Delivering our vision for a transformed rail network in the region will be crucial to achieving all of these.

The North East Rail Vision is a bold statement of the North East MSA's ambitions for rail up to 2040. It 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."

The Angel Network is North East Mayor Kim McGuinness's approach to transforming transport by creating a single, integrated transport network for the region. It will bring together local rail, bus services, the Tyne and Wear Metro, the Shields Ferry and Park and Ride through coordinated services, integrated ticketing and consistent passenger information, so people have a better experience and can enjoy a joined-up network, rather than separate modes.

Rail will be at the heart of this integrated network. It will make sustainable travel the easiest and most attractive choice for both people and freight, expand access to opportunity, and strengthen the region's links across the wider North, to Scotland, and to the rest of the UK. By offering faster and more reliable rail services across and beyond our region, we will expand labour markets, unlock development and ensure our region is a home to real opportunity.

Crucially, this document also sets out how this vision will be actioned. Our LTP Delivery Plan builds on strong foundations, with substantial local investment delivered since the formation of the North East MSA in May 2024. The North East has a strong track record of delivering rail infrastructure to the highest standards, including the Metro Flow project and the hugely successful Northumberland Line.



Why is the North East Rail Vision being published?

The North East Rail Vision is being published at an important time for the future of transport. The North East MSA is working hard to ensure that the region is the home of real opportunity for everyone: our communities, our visitors, and our businesses. Transport, including rail, has a vital role to play.

Britain's railways are set to undergo a transformative change with the passing of the Railways Bill, which will establish a new public body: Great British Railways (GBR). GBR will be the single 'directing mind' for the rail network, bringing track and train together. It will be responsible for funding decisions for all publicly owned passenger train services, as well as managing its operations and infrastructure. It will also have a role in coordinating and supporting the rail freight industry. The evolving context of rail devolution presents a unique, once-in-a-generation opportunity for the North East MSA to shape and improve the region's rail network by working closely with GBR.

The evolving context of rail devolution presents a unique, once-in-a-generation opportunity for the North East MSA.

As this new governance structure takes shape, we need to ensure that any long-term planning by the industry aligns with our region's aspirations for rail. Decisions taken now and over the next few years will affect the entire network for decades to come. This is particularly important for the East Coast Main Line, where Network Rail has already designated the Northallerton–Newcastle section as "Congested Infrastructure". Long-term planning decisions taken through future capacity planning processes will therefore have major implications for connectivity, freight growth and economic development in the North East.

As a result of these changes, it is essential that this vision sets out clear expectations of what the rail industry should deliver and when, making recommendations as to how the rail industry can become more accountable to the region through a North East Rail Partnership Board (NERPB). It will also act as a key reference document in discussions with national and regional partners, including the Department for Transport (DfT), Network Rail, Transport for the North (TfN) and Transport Scotland to clearly articulate the North East's ambitions for rail. The vision also provides a valuable opportunity to explain the North East MSA's priorities for the region's railway up to 2040, helping people who use the North East's rail network to understand how they will benefit from the changes that we want to see.

The North East MSA is committed to working closely with the rail industry, and this vision has been developed with their support. It sets out how we plan to work together to develop strong business cases for new routes, new stations, and the ongoing renewal and modernisation of our railways for the benefit of local people. Working closely with local authorities, regional rail industry experts and other key regional stakeholders will also be crucial if we are to ensure that the North East speaks with one voice on its priorities for the future of the rail network. Collaboration is essential - the North East MSA cannot deliver this vision alone.

In the same way, the operation of the local and national rail network in the North East is clearly dependent on other parts of the region's transport network - most notably, the Tyne and Wear Metro system. For this reason, recent improvements and future plans for the Metro are included in the Rail Vision where they have or will have a bearing on the future of the wider rail network.

Many more rail schemes and initiatives will be delivered in the North East in the coming years. This will require close working with GBR to progress some of the rail improvements listed in our LTP Delivery Plan, encouraging them to help progress funding decisions within our region. That is why this vision document prepares the ground for a formal partnership with GBR.

Building a strong relationship with GBR will be crucial to delivering the Rail Vision; by working in partnership, we can create a railway that truly benefits our people, delivering changes that will be seen and felt right across the North East.



2. Where we want to be

Our vision

"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."

Our vision for rail is guided by six clear principles. By 2040, rail in the North East will be:

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

People-focused - more places with access to at least 30-minute service frequencies and late evening and early morning trains out of our major towns and cities; new rolling stock and improved performance.

Opportunity-enabling - supporting the creation of new jobs, businesses and housing through network extensions, new routes, increased capacity on local passenger and freight services, and redevelopment around stations. Improved access for people, such as to education and jobs.

Integrated - contactless Pay as You Go fares; seamless connections to the regional and national network; affordable capped fares across modes to support integrated journeys.

Inclusive - improved accessibility, including step-free access across the entire network; better signage; comfortable waiting areas; enhanced safety and security measures, particularly for women and girls.

Green - increasing mode shift to rail for passengers and freight and decarbonisation of the network.

Rail as part of an integrated 'Angel Network'

Rail has two distinct roles within the Angel Network:

- **Local rail:** fully integrated with local buses and the Metro through coordinated timetables and easy to use multi-modal ticketing.
- **National rail:** high-quality interfaces with the Angel Network at clearly defined gateways (for example Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham Stations), supported by clear passenger information and onward connections, with all mainline stations offering a proportionate Angel Network interface.

Bus reform is critical to delivering this vision, because rail can only function effectively as part of a wider integrated public transport network. In the future, under bus franchising, bus services could be planned as one network and timetables could be better coordinated where feasible at interchanges, including Metro and rail stations.

Figure 1 – The Angel Network

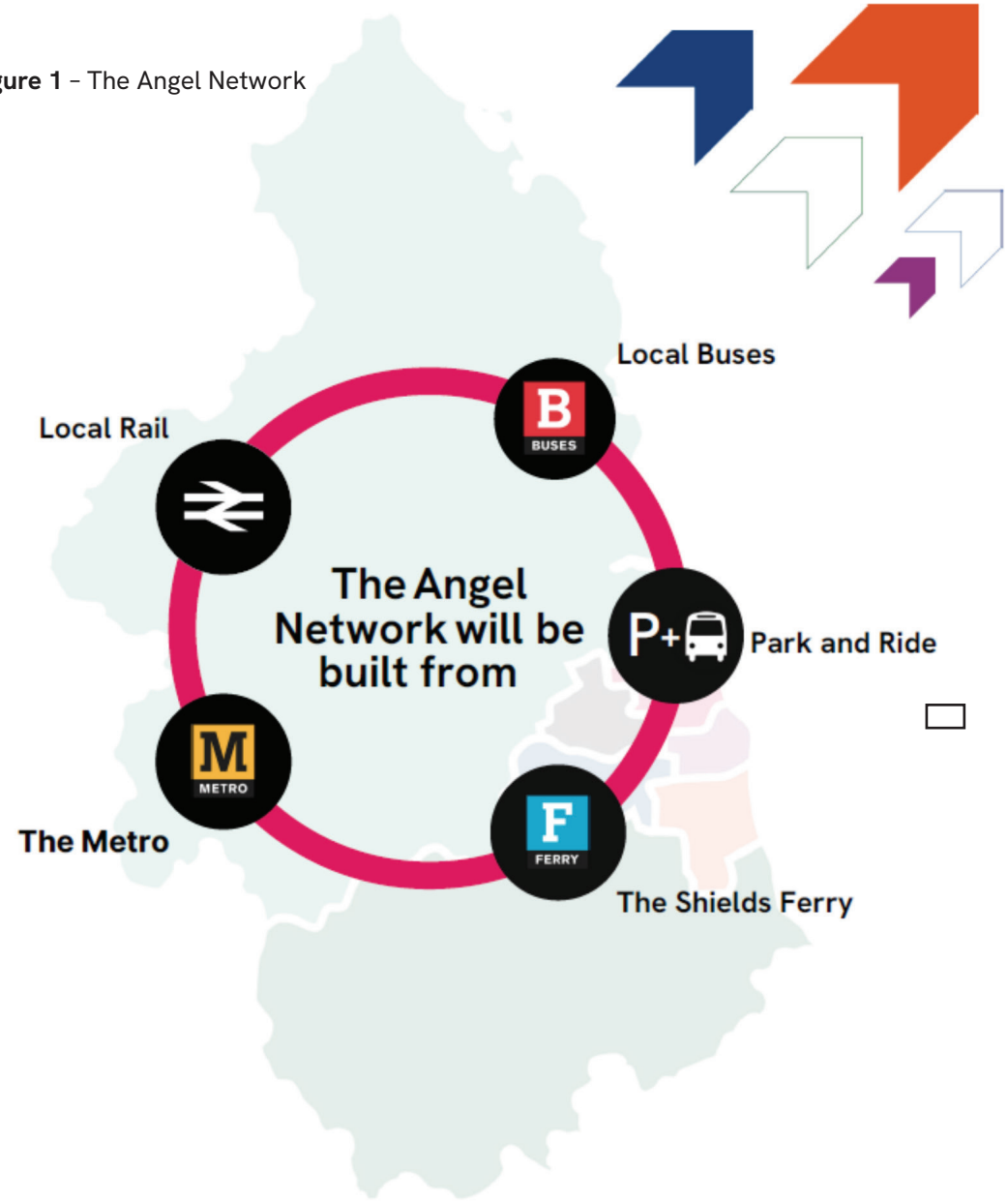


Table 1 – Our six principles and what will change by 2040

Table 1 summarises our six principles, the experience we want people and businesses to have, and the issues it addresses.

Key Priority	What people and businesses will experience	Issues this will address
Affordable 	▪ Simple and transparent fares and ticketing that provide value for money. ▪ Fair and consistent pricing, making it affordable to access employment, education and training.	▪ Cost of living pressures. ▪ Concerns about the affordability of rail travel. ▪ Perceptions that rail does not offer value for money.
People-focused 	▪ More dependable and punctual rail network, building public trust and confidence in rail travel. ▪ More frequent services, including at least half-hourly trains on key routes; better timed connections. ▪ Extending early morning and late evening services to support shift work and the night-time economy. ▪ Improving the resilience of the rail and Metro network, including more reliable signalling and system-wide performance. ▪ Cleaner, quieter and more comfortable journeys with faster and more reliable on-board WiFi connectivity, enabled by new and upgraded rolling stock. ▪ Clear and reliable real-time information. ▪ People should be able to provide feedback on their experience of the rail network, allowing for improved passenger satisfaction and continuous improvement in service quality.	▪ Infrequent services on some routes. ▪ Limited early morning, late evening and weekend services. ▪ Reliability and resilience issues including delays and cancellations. ▪ Inconsistent passenger information. ▪ Rolling stock constraints limiting capacity and quality.

Key Priority	What people and businesses will experience	Issues this will address
Opportunity-enabling 	▪ An expanded rail network that reaches more communities; supporting housing, employment and access to education for local people. ▪ Regeneration and development around train stations. ▪ Increased capacity for passenger services, improving connectivity and powering opportunities across the network. ▪ Increased capacity for freight services, allowing for efficient movement of goods which will reduce pressure on our roads. ▪ Maintaining and strengthening rail links between Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham and major UK economic centres. ▪ Better connectivity for our rural areas, supporting the visitor economy and tourism.	▪ Communities with no direct access to rail services (e.g. Washington). ▪ Poor connectivity limiting access to opportunities for our communities and creating rural connectivity gaps. ▪ Problems with capacity on key routes and at major stations. ▪ Limited freight capacity and constraints on rail freight growth. ▪ Limited long-distance connectivity from some towns and cities. ▪ Lack of rail access to key employment locations.
Integrated 	▪ Journeys that work end to end, with rail fully integrated into the wider transport network, focusing on the whole journey rather than individual legs. ▪ Simple, integrated ticketing and payment options, including Pay As You Go and capped fares, that make it easier to travel across the rail network and onward transport connections. ▪ Aligned timetables across modes, reducing waiting times between connections. ▪ Stations that function as mobility hubs with cohesive branding, better signage and coordinated timetables. ▪ Better disruption management with consistent passenger information and clear alternatives. ▪ Better integration of rail with ports and airports, supporting rail freight customers.	▪ Fragmented planning; poor interchange design and limited timetable coordination. ▪ Complex and inconsistent fares; limited multi-modal products and fare capping. ▪ Inconsistent branding/ signage. ▪ Limited local control and accountability for rail services. ▪ Lack of integration with ports and airports currently a barrier to the growth of rail freight. ▪ Barriers to opportunity.

Key Priority	What people and businesses will experience	Issues this will address
Inclusive	▪ Step-free access at rail stations and removing physical barriers right across the network. ▪ Clear signage, accessible information that is genuinely inclusive for all and textured walkways to support independent travel. ▪ Enhanced safety and security, (better lighting, CCTV, staffing and station design) particularly for women and girls. ▪ Better first and last mile connections and secure cycle storage.	▪ Lack of step-free access at many stations, accessibility information is inconsistent. ▪ Safety concerns including gaps in lighting, CCTV and staffing. ▪ Limited staffing levels at stations. ▪ Poor station and interchange environments.
Green	▪ More journeys made by rail, supporting a shift away from private car use. ▪ Higher share of freight moved by rail, reducing congestion and emissions on the road network and enabling freight to be transported more efficiently. ▪ Progress electrification and cleaner operations, reducing reliance on diesel trains and supporting sustainable transport of goods via rail. ▪ Improve resilience to extreme weather. ▪ Better air quality and healthier communities.	▪ High reliance on private car travel; limited modal shift to rail. ▪ Continued reliance on diesel trains; ageing infrastructure and climate vulnerability. ▪ Excess emissions cause air pollution and detract from regional and national sustainability ambitions. ▪ Capacity constraints limit passenger and freight growth. ▪ Limited electrification of rail infrastructure creates barriers to greener transport of freight via rail.



Outcomes

This Rail Vision will help deliver:

- A fully integrated transport network, known as the ‘Angel Network’.
- More frequent and reliable rail services.
- Affordable, simple fares.
- Modern, accessible stations across the region.
- Improved safety measures across the rail network.

Delivering this Rail Vision will transform how people, businesses and places across the North East connect and thrive. By 2040, rail will play a central role in shaping a stronger, greener and more inclusive regional economy. This vision will also make rail more affordable and accessible for everyday journeys.

This vision aims to support improvements that matter to communities and places across the North East. This could include, but is not limited to, improving rail connectivity in County Durham and beyond by delivering the Leamside Line and creating a new connection to Teeside via Stillington, extending the reach of the Northumberland Line, improving Sunderland’s connections to inter-city services, supporting the growth of our ports and logistics sector, and developing a long-term plan for Newcastle Central Station. We will also work with partners to address the impacts of recent December 2025 timetable changes on the East Coast Main Line, ensuring the network works reliably for our region.

Case Study

Improvements to the Tyne and Wear Metro

The original fleet of Tyne and Wear Metro trains is being replaced by 46 new Class 555 trains, which have been designed with inclusivity in mind. All 46 of the new trains are expected to be available for customer service by the end of 2026. There has been an ongoing programme of Metro asset renewal since 2010 for the renewal and upkeep of Metro infrastructure, including tracks, structures, and stations. A number of Metro stations are now equipped with gate lines which help make this public space more secure. Following a successful pilot at Newcastle Central Station, ‘Metro Connect’ is rolling out free Wi-Fi scheme at other underground Metro stations to improve mobile coverage and safety.

In July 2025, the government announced that the renewal of the Metro’s signalling system had secured funding, which will enable further improvements to Metro service reliability and frequencies. It is also required to support the future expansion of the network to Washington, and to facilitate access to current and future heavy rail services which integrate with the Metro.

Affordable

Rail will be an affordable and attractive option for everyday travel across the North East. People will benefit from simple, transparent and consistent fares that provide value for money and give greater confidence in the cost of travel.

Passengers will find it easier to understand the cost of their journey and choose the ticket that best meets their needs. Clear, consistent and affordable pricing will help people manage the cost of travel and make rail a realistic option for more journeys.

Working with industry partners, we will support initiatives that improve affordability and simplify fares, helping to ensure rail delivers real cost of living support for local people and remains an attractive travel choice.

People-focused

People will see the positive changes happening across our rail network. Local people will enjoy one joined-up transport network, rather than separate systems. Passengers will experience a rail network they can rely on. More frequent, better-timed services, including earlier morning and later evening trains, will support modern lifestyle patterns, shift work and the night-time economy. Improved punctuality and reliability will help rebuild trust and confidence in rail.

Travelling by rail will be more comfortable and convenient. Modern rolling stock, clear and reliable information and smoother connections between trains and with other transport modes will help to deliver an enjoyable passenger experience right across the network.

Transforming our stations will be central to delivering this vision. Rail stations will become safer and more accessible, acting as welcoming gateways to our region and communities. They will function as integrated transport hubs, supporting seamless connections across the Angel Network, while also serving as centres for regeneration and growth. To achieve this, we will collaborate with partners to unlock more ambitious, locally led improvements to stations, including exploring new partnership models and greater local influence over how our local stations are run and developed.



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Opportunity-enabling

Rail will expand access to opportunity across the North East, connecting more people to jobs, education and training. A more extensive and better-connected rail network will support new housing and employment sites, unlock development and strengthen the competitiveness of the region. Improved links within the North East and to key UK cities will enable our businesses to grow, attract more investment and access wider markets. An integrated transport network will also remove barriers to opportunity and enable us to pioneer initiatives that address critical regional issues such as child poverty.

Rail will also support the growth of the North East's rail sector and supply chain, creating more skilled jobs in infrastructure delivery, operations and advanced manufacturing, while strengthening the region's position in national and international markets. Increased capacity and better integration with our ports and logistics hubs will support additional growth in rail freight and boost global trade. Progressing electrification and ensuring that rail freight forms part of the MSA's wider plans for housing, opportunities and economic growth in the region (including delivery of the Leamside Line) will also help to ensure that rail freight customers are encouraged and supported to invest in the North East.

Integrated

Rail will be a core part of the Angel Network, enabling seamless journeys across different modes of transport. Passengers will benefit from contactless Pay As You Go, fare capping and integrated ticketing products that make travel more straightforward and support integrated journeys.

Timetables, ticketing and information will be coordinated across local rail, bus, Metro and other services, ensuring journeys work better from start to finish. Stations will function as integrated transport hubs, supporting smooth connections and making it easier to move across the region.

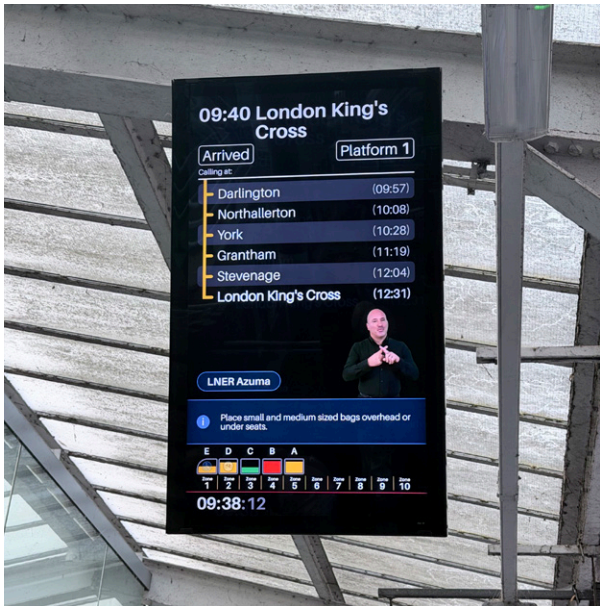
Inclusive

This vision will create a railway that works for everyone. A step-change in accessibility will remove barriers to travel, ensuring stations are easier to use. Improvements to safety, including better lighting, staffing and design, will help ensure that all passengers, particularly women and girls, feel safe and confident using the network.

Green

Rail will play a key role in delivering a better environment across the North East, helping to reduce road congestion, improve air quality and support more sustainable travel choices.

Investment in cleaner infrastructure and trains, alongside increased rail freight, will improve local air quality and support a more sustainable movement of goods and people. A more resilient rail network will be better equipped to respond to the impacts of climate change. Progressing electrification and other infrastructural improvements will also help to ensure that goods can be transported by rail in a greener and more energy-efficient way and make the region more attractive to potential freight customers.





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Table 2 - Example customer journey if we deliver our Rail Vision

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, Table 2 describes some of the changes people might notice, from the moment they start planning their journey until their arrival at their destination.

Our promise to local people – rail as part of the 'Angel Network'

1 Trust before you travel

- One simple, transparent and affordable set of fares across local transport, including local rail.
- A reliable rail network with clear, enforceable performance standards.
- 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). Clear, consistent information on routes, fares and connections.

2 Getting to your station

- Safe, accessible and convenient access to stations by walking, wheeling and cycling.
- Secure park and ride and cycle storage facilities at rail stations.
- Well-designed links between rail, bus, Metro and other transport types.

3 Waiting at the station

- A clear and consistent network identity you can trust.
- Accurate timetables and real-time service information.
- Safe, well-lit and accessible stations.
- Visible customer support at key stations and interchanges.
- Stations designed as integrated transport hubs, enabling seamless onward travel.

4 On your journey

- Frequent, reliable and more punctual rail services, including early morning and late evening.
- Clean, modern and comfortable trains with enough seats.
- Simple, affordable integrated smart ticketing (including contactless and fare capping) across modes.
- Clear and consistent onboard information, including information about onward connections and any disruptions.
- Better-timed services to reduce interchange times and missed connections.

5 Getting to where you need to be

- Rail services that connect people to jobs, education, services and opportunities locally and nationally.
- Strong and reliable connections between the North East and other major UK cities.
- Coordinated timetables enabling smooth transfers to local transport and rural connections.
- Stations that are accessible and welcoming gateways to the places where people live and work. A network that supports sustainable travel, reduces car dependency and strengthens communities.



3. How we will get there

The implementation of our ambitious vision for rail will require a sustained and committed effort from national and local partners to work with us and change the way we plan for, develop and deliver rail infrastructure and services.

Our vision for rail has a strong strategic fit with national rail reform and the objectives of Great British Railways. However, the window to influence their emerging programme is limited.

We need to move at pace to secure funding (both capital and revenue) and deliver investments in infrastructure and services that are essential to supporting us in achieving the North East MSA's five missions.

To help us to get there, we need to agree with industry a phased, deliverable programme, supported by clear funding, strong partnerships and practical delivery plans.

Building from our achievements to date

Since the establishment of the North East MSA (formerly the North East Combined Authority) in 2024, we have worked continuously to make the case for and secured significant investment in our transport network. Key successes to date include:

Infrastructure and passenger improvements:

- Opening of six new stations on the Northumberland Line with around 1.8 million journeys by the start of August 2026.
- The Northumberland Line has also enabled extended late night and Sunday services on parts of our network, enabling people to access jobs and supporting the hospitality and retail sectors.
- Increased half hourly services on the Durham Coast Line between Newcastle and Sunderland, with links to Teesside.
- Successfully delivered the Metro Flow project, transforming an under used freight line to accommodate five Metro trains per hour while retaining full freight operations.
- Introduction of new gatelines at Metro stations across our region, a vital first step to ensuring an integrated pay-as-you-go (PAYG) network and improving safety.
- In December 2026, a new Metro timetable will be introduced that will see 6-minute frequencies on the core section of the network and 10-minute frequencies at all other stations during weekday daytime – a clear benefit of the new Metro fleet and other recent improvements.
- New southern entrance at Sunderland Station.
- Introducing Pop Pay As You Go (PAYG) on the Northumberland Line, a first-of-a-kind solution for the region that provides integrated ticketing with the Metro and regional bus services.
- Extending the 'Mayor's Fares' price cap onto Metro and Northumberland Line.

Funding for recently delivered schemes and future developments:

- Securing £1.85 billion in funding from central government for a range of transport schemes, including the Metro extension to Washington, enabling us to develop a strong business case for the project and get underway with the complex planning needed for major rail infrastructure projects.
- Securing government commitment to fund the approx. £400m renewal of Metro's signalling system – future-proofing a key part of the integrated transport network within our region.
- Securing £362 million investment in 46 new state-of-the-art Metro trains and the new Gosforth Metro Depot.

Other ongoing work:

- Commitment from the Secretary of State for Transport to work with us on the Leamside Line business case, as part of wider Northern Powerhouse Rail commitments.
- Work with adjacent authorities, government, the rail industry and Transport for the North to grow capacity on the East Coast Mainline and to improve connectivity between the North East and Tees Valley.
- Ongoing strategic work to identify and assess potential rail extensions and new stations, supporting future priorities and investment decisions.

Taken together, these achievements have enabled us to start to deliver improved rail services within our region. But more must be done if we are to unlock our economic potential and support our people and places to thrive.

Case Study
The Northumberland Line



Northumberland County Council has worked with the Department for Transport (DfT), Network Rail and Northern trains since 2018 to reintroduce passenger rail services between Ashington and Newcastle.

The Northumberland Line, which reopened in December 2024, has a place-based delivery model, with step-free, modern, and accessible stations at the heart of communities supporting new housing development, economic growth, accessibility, social mobility, and integration of transport modes.

Integrated ticketing with the Tyne and Wear Metro through Pop Pay As You Go (PAYG) enables passengers to make seamless transitions between Northumberland Line and Metro. The Mayor's Fares price cap on the Northumberland Line and the Metro also makes these services more affordable. The Northumberland Line services have expanded to include a late-night train leaving Newcastle on Mondays to Saturdays, and direct services to the Metrocentre on Sundays.

Around 1.7 million journeys had been made on the route by the start of July 2026, exceeding original forecasts for patronage. As a result, additional carriages are required at peak times.

The Northumberland Line demonstrates what we can achieve as a region if we are given the opportunity. Usage has far exceeded initial targets, and the line has improved regional connectivity, supporting the economy in Northumberland and the wider North East.



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How we will achieve our vision

Our Vision Statement is clear about what we want the North East's rail network to look like:

> "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."

Achieving this depends on five enablers:

1 Strong Partnerships

The North East MSA aims to deliver an integrated transport network, but levers remain with central government, Network Rail, GBR and train operators. By establishing a strong, collaborative rail partnership with GBR for long-term network development, we can achieve our vision for rail to deliver better services for all local people.

We have already laid the foundations for a strong partnership by forming the North East Rail Partnership Board (NERPB). Chaired by the Mayor, it brings together key regional and national rail stakeholders to align ambitions and priorities. We are already working together on early mutual engagement on strategies and long-term plans; this will evolve into a formal partnership to align investment and service ambitions when GBR is established.

We will continue to work closely with local authorities to ensure that their needs and aspirations are reflected in the North East MSA's conversations with GBR and the wider rail industry. In particular, we are keen to ensure that the MSA's formal partnership with GBR can enable smooth and productive cooperation between local authorities and those responsible for operating and managing the rail network – for example, by facilitating vital maintenance and renewal of transport infrastructure, both where it is part of the rail network and where it interfaces with rail infrastructure.

We will also work with local communities to ensure that residents and passengers have a say in the future of our region's rail network. Community Rail Partnerships (CRPs) are the key mechanism by which more local community involvement in rail is encouraged. There are two CRPs within our area: the Bishop Line CRP (which covers the line from Bishop Auckland to Darlington) and the Tyne Valley CRP (which covers the line from Newcastle to Carlisle). Both these partnerships have been proactive in promoting their respective lines and increasing ridership. CRP members have a wealth of knowledge, strong community ties and can act as the eyes and ears of the rail network.

As rail lines and services are not constrained by administrative boundaries, the North East MSA

will also work with neighbouring areas to improve rail for all. Working with Tees Valley Combined Authority and York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority, we will create a unified 'Eastern Vision' for the wider rail network, beyond the geographical boundaries of the North East MSA, that strengthens connectivity, supports economic growth, and delivers affordable, reliable, inclusive, and sustainable transport across North East, North Yorkshire, and Tees Valley. This will need to include support for the regional rail sector and its supply chain. Furthermore, strong, collaborative partnerships will be developed with other devolved authorities across the country. This will help ensure that proposed North East MSA rail investment aligns with network developments elsewhere, and provides reliable, holistic benefits for passengers.

2 Joined-up planning

Rail investment will be coordinated with our wider plans for housing, jobs, and economic growth, identified in the Mayor's Local Growth Plan, emerging Spatial Development Strategy, as well as our plans for regional growth zones, including the North East AI Growth Zone. This will ensure new and improved rail services will support new development, businesses, better access to employment, and stronger local economies.

3 Reliable funding

The North East MSA has access to multi-year financial settlements for transport, which is devolved to our region from central government, allowing us to plan our transport investments to deliver our aspirations listed in the LTP. These funding pots give us more flexibility and power locally to deliver investments which best fit the needs of our region and residents and are prioritised as part of our LTP delivery plan.

Existing funding could be used in a number of different ways. Examples include: improving safety and accessibility at stations, making fares more affordable, delivering integrated ticketing across modes, and supporting feasibility studies for network extensions.

However, the level of infrastructure improvements needed to deliver our vision for rail would far exceed the funding we currently have available. Therefore, we will work with DfT and GBR to secure long-term investment for our major projects, such as Leamside Line and the Metro extension to Washington, as well as additional national funds to support the integrated network we require. We also need to work with partners to secure funding for maintenance to ensure that key regional rail infrastructure can continue to function effectively – for example, ensuring the future resilience of the High Level Bridge, which connects Newcastle and Gateshead and facilitates access to Newcastle station via rail, road and active travel.

4 A clear phased pipeline

We will develop a pipeline of rail improvements. This pipeline includes a mix of smaller 'quick wins' and larger, long-term projects. This will allow our region to move quickly when funding becomes available and ensure that investment is focused on the schemes with the greatest impact for local people.

The North East MSA has undertaken strategic rail development work to understand where future enhancements could best support regional priorities and deliver the greatest benefit for local people. In March 2026, £2.5 million was allocated to a dedicated Rail Development Fund to accelerate rail related scheme development across the North East. This funding will help local authority partners to develop a proposed pipeline of potential rail schemes - for example, a new station at Ferryhill (and restoring passenger services on the Stillington Line), the reopening of the Bensham Curve and related interventions to enable services to Team Valley, and a Northumberland Line extension to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea (including a new station at Sleekburn). This pipeline may also include medium term priorities, so that the region is well-positioned to secure future investment opportunities as they arise.

We know that the changes we would like to see cannot happen all at once, so improvements will be managed in stages. Early actions will focus on service changes and smaller upgrades

that can be delivered quickly, delivering impact for passengers as soon as possible. Larger infrastructure projects will follow, building towards long-term transformation of transport in North East England. The roadmap to 2040 section that follows provides further detail on what is included within each of the LTP delivery plan periods.

5 Managing risks and keeping delivery on track

Delivering major change and our vision for rail comes with significant risks, such as available funding, planning approvals, and delivery challenges. We will work closely with GBR and the wider industry to proactively manage risks. Embedding strong programme management from the outset and engaging with partners at an early stage will help us all to keep projects on time and within budget.

Achieving our vision will deliver increased passenger demand, improved reliability, quicker journey times, and lower carbon emissions. It will give residents much better access to employment, education, healthcare and other essential services, greatly improving quality of life and widening opportunities right across the region.

For GBR, this vision provides a clear, deliverable plan to support a high-performing and financially sustainable rail network that drives inclusive growth in the North East.



Roadmap to 2040

In this section, we set out a phased roadmap that aligns with our LTP delivery plan periods. This identifies what will be delivered, by when, and how schemes will progress from development to implementation.

Early priorities focus on building a strong, prioritised pipeline and delivering quick wins, with later phases unlocking larger-scale infrastructure and service transformation.

Immediate priorities (delivery to commence by 2027)

- Extend The Mayor's Fares and Pop smart ticketing on rail.
- Complete an accessibility review of public transport and deliver the first phase of targeted station enhancements focused on improving accessibility.
- Complete a study on the safety of women and girls when travelling in the region, and deliver interventions to improve safety at stations (especially for women and girls).
- Complete North East Railway Station Devolution Study to identify the route forward for local control of stations.
- Establish a strong, collaborative rail partnership with Great British Railways.
- Ensure local rail is part of the Angel Network with integrated information, ticketing, timetables, stations and branding.
- Add more capacity on the Northumberland Line.
- Develop the detailed business case for delivering the Leamside Line in partnership with GBR and DfT and define investment corridor approach to place-based growth.
- Define a target timetable of the service patterns the North East wants to see on our rail network and identify infrastructure requirements to enable it.
- Establish the Rail Development Fund to enable the acceleration of scheme development across the region.

Key priorities by 2032

- Roll out the Mayor's Fares across all local rail services, enabling affordable travel for local people.
- Introduce Pop smart ticketing on local rail services, ensuring seamless interchange with Metro and bus.
- Increase the number of stations with a frequency of at least 30 minutes (for example, the Bishop Line, Cramlington and Chester-le-Street).
- Fully deliver the programme of improvements to enhance the safety of women and girls and improve accessibility.
- Recover regional losses suffered as a result of the December 2025 rail industry East Coast Main Line timetable change.
- Work with partners including GBR to co-plan and fund radical improvements which are needed at some of our regional rail stations, including for addressing accessibility barriers, improving the retail offer for passengers, providing a community function and supporting regeneration.
- Introduce later and earlier rail services in and out of city centres and increased local service frequency at more locations (for example, the Bishop Line, ECML local stations).
- Improve punctuality and reliability of rail network through resilience, operational performance, and improved timetables.
- Upgrade Sunderland Station, including by opening up the northern entrance to the Riverside development.
- Bring Metro to Washington and start building Leamside South.
- Secure long-term use of Durham Coast Line northern section for 6 Metro services per hour.
- Implement a new, modern Metro signalling system.
- Introduce longer and modern electric and battery-powered trains on local rail services.



Key priorities by 2040

- Bring Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR) trains to the North East by delivering the Leamside Line in full, releasing the capacity needed on the East Coast Mainline to ensure NPR services reach Newcastle, via Darlington and Durham.
- Expand the local rail network to new locations (such as the Northumberland Line extension to Newbiggin-by-the-Sea) and open new stations on existing lines (such as Ferryhill as part of a Tees-Tyne link enabled by Leamside and Stillington), building on strategic work already undertaken to identify and assess potential network extensions.
- Secure additional long-distance connections, including at Sunderland, which needs more inter-city rail services.
- Introduce modern 3-4 car rolling stock on local rail services.
- Develop and progress a long-term plan to improve Newcastle Central Station.
- Upgrade Metrocentre station.
- Expand ECML capacity and grow rail freight services.
- Secure reliable funding for the long-term maintenance of essential rail infrastructure.
- Support growth of our airport and seaports with increased integration with rail, both for passenger and freight services.
- Support and grow the North East's rail sector jobs and supply chain.

Additional priorities

Beyond the priorities listed in the roadmap, a wider range of potential rail and Metro expansion and new station proposals have been identified through previous studies, partner activity, and local representations. These include proposals for additional or reopened stations, extensions to existing rail corridors, and broader network enhancements across the North East MSA area. While these are not currently included as part of the Mayor's Local Transport Plan Delivery Plan and have not been subject to detailed appraisal, the North East MSA will continue to work with GBR, local partners and interest groups to explore these opportunities further. The Mayor will continue to support local communities and partners in their ambitions to improve rail services, including supporting the development of business cases for proposals such as the Weardale Railway extension. This will ensure that proposals which have a strong business case can also be considered part of our plans to deliver our vision for rail.

Case Study

Key priority – The Leamside Line

The Leamside Line is a disused 21-mile railway running from Pelaw in Gateshead to Ferryhill in County Durham, where it connects to the East Coast Main Line (ECML). Delivering a new line on this former route would provide new rail freight opportunities and help to create more passenger service capacity on the ECML. But this is more than just a transport scheme - it is a once-in-a-generation chance to create a rail-led regional investment corridor, supporting place-based growth and mixed-use regeneration, with more people connected to rail to access jobs, education, training, and other services. Delivering the Leamside Line in full would mean first extending the Tyne and Wear Metro to Washington, and then opening the new line between Pelaw and Ferryhill. The whole scheme must be delivered so that the North East can make the most of the transformative opportunities it would create, both for our rail network and our economy at large.

As the North East's largest growth opportunity, the Leamside Line would deliver significant benefits for communities, businesses and the wider regional and national economy. It would connect people and places to opportunity, drive inclusive growth, enable new homes and jobs, and enhance the resilience of critical national infrastructure. Delivering the Leamside Line would give around 100,000 people direct access to rail services for the first time in decades.

New stations and improved connectivity would significantly enhance access to jobs, education and training, reduce transport-related social exclusion, and widen labour markets for both residents and businesses. The corridor also offers wider opportunities for regeneration and placemaking, including bringing rail services back to Ferryhill and enabling a new rail link between the North East and Tees Valley via Stillington.

The Leamside Line also plays a critical role within the national rail network as part of the Government's plans for Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR). It is crucial that NPR services reach Newcastle, via Darlington and Durham, providing an alternative route for slower-moving freight trains and local stopping services. A major barrier to the growth of rail freight services in our region is the limited amount of flexibility for additional freight traffic on the existing network. The Leamside Line would unlock more flexibility. Shifting some freight services onto the new line could also help release essential capacity on the ECML, enabling more reliable, faster and more frequent long-distance passenger rail services. Delivering the Leamside Line in full would therefore strengthen national transport resilience and support balanced economic growth not just in the North East, but across the country.



4. The case for change

What does the North East's rail network currently look like?

The North East's rail network connects many of our most densely populated and productive areas, while also facilitating long-distance connectivity to other key economic centres in the UK.

This is most evident at Newcastle station, where most local and regional rail services originate or terminate, and where most of the long-distance rail travel to and from the region is concentrated. Rail provides the viable alternative to the car for journeys between Durham and Newcastle city centre, while locations such as MetroCentre demonstrate both high rail mode shares and significant passenger volumes. These levels of density and activity could not be sustained without rail connectivity.

However, the network's geographical reach is limited outside of the urban areas – also known as the 'urban core'. Due to historic rationalisation and long-term underinvestment in infrastructure, significant population centres within the area of the Leamside Line corridor, alongside Consett and Stanley, have not been served by passenger rail since the mid-20th century. Some major employment areas, such as Team Valley, also lack direct access to the rail network despite their close proximity to it.

Figure 3 below shows where people live and the current rail network, highlighting areas where communities do not have direct access to rail services.

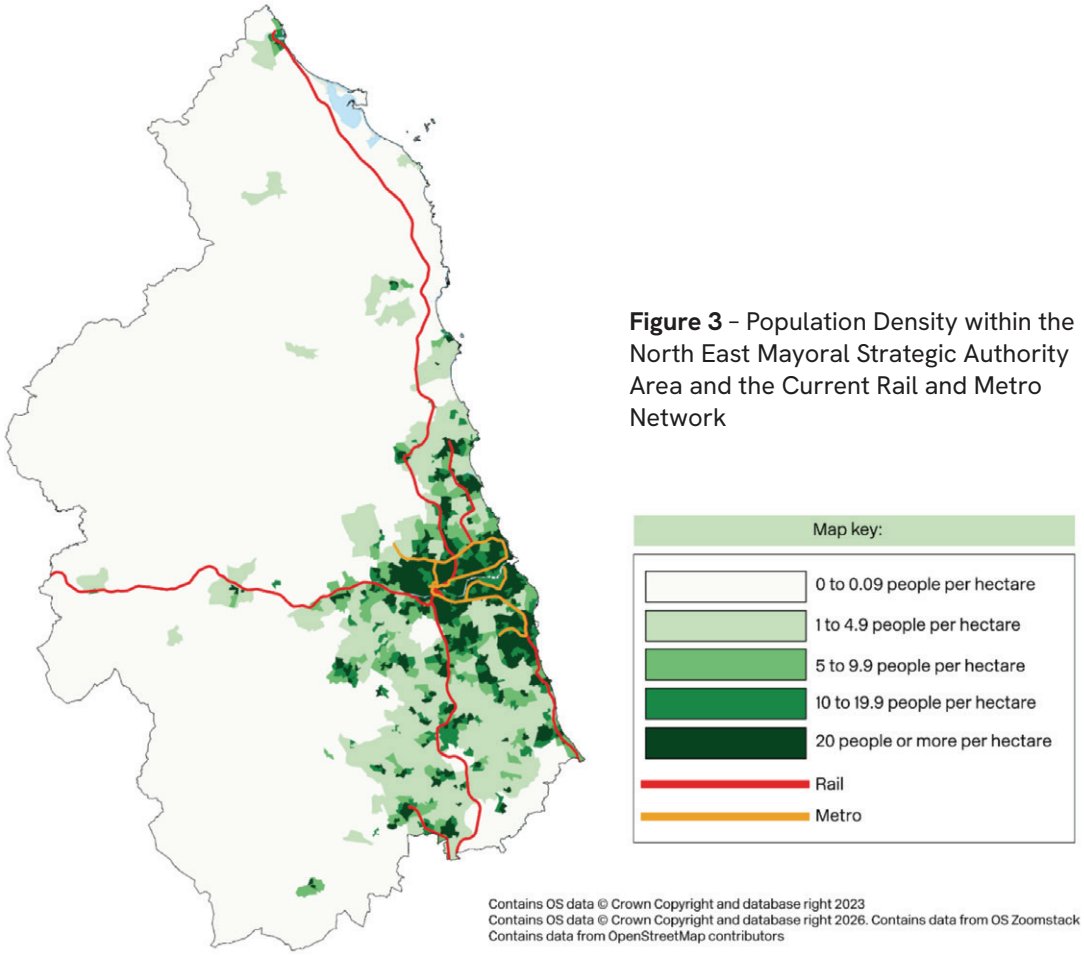


Figure 3 – Population Density within the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority Area and the Current Rail and Metro Network



Local rail connectivity is therefore concentrated on a small number of strategic corridors:

- **The Northumberland Line** provides half-hourly services between Ashington in South East Northumberland and Newcastle, with the hourly Sunday services extending to MetroCentre. There is a Metro and bus interchange station at Northumberland Park.
- **The Tyne Valley Line** links Newcastle with Carlisle, with three trains per hour calling at Hexham, Prudhoe and Metrocentre, and hourly services at less densely populated locations.
- **The Bishop Line** provides hourly connections at all stations; between Bishop Auckland and Saltburn in Tees Valley via Darlington.
- **The Durham Coast Line** connects Newcastle with Heworth, Sunderland, Seaham, Horden, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough. There are half-hourly services between Newcastle and Sunderland, and hourly services elsewhere. Between Newcastle and Sunderland infrastructure is shared with the Metro, with interchange opportunities available for passengers at both Heworth and Sunderland. Grand Central services use part of the Line to connect Sunderland to London six times a day.

The North East also sits at the centre of the East Coast Main Line, the strategic rail route connecting London and Edinburgh.

- **ECML North of Newcastle**, the route supports hourly local services between Morpeth and Newcastle, with peak extensions to Chathill and other smaller stations, alongside intercity services between Edinburgh and Newcastle that serve Berwick-upon-Tweed, Alnmouth and Morpeth.
- **ECML South of Newcastle**, the route provides the North East's principal long-distance connectivity to London, York, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. Durham currently benefits from three intercity services per hour, while Chester-le-Street receives an hourly service.

Rail freight

The region currently functions more as a through-corridor for strategic freight movements than as a major origin or destination market. There are no intermodal rail freight services operating to or from the region, although several bulk and conventional freight flows remain important. Key freight services include biomass traffic from the Port of Tyne to Drax power station in North Yorkshire and Lynemouth power station, petroleum flows from Lindsey Oil Refinery on the Humber to Jarrow, steel scrap traffic from Sunderland to Cardiff, and bauxite flows from the Port of Tyne to Fort William in the Scottish Highlands.

What is the case for change?

North East Mayor, Kim McGuinness, has a clear vision – for the North East to be the home of real opportunity, a place where everyone thrives. From supporting the green energy revolution to welcoming global trade, ensuring a growing and vibrant economy for all and making the North East a place that people are proud to call home, the North East MSA is on a mission to turn this vision into a reality.

The Mayor wants to change the way transport works for local people: delivering a world-class integrated transport network - the Angel Network – to provide more accessible, affordable and enjoyable public transport for all.

Rail already plays an important role in ensuring that local people, businesses and visitors in our region have access to the opportunities that they need to flourish. **Between April 2024 and March 2025, 7.8m journeys within the North East, and 11.3m journeys to or from the region, were made by rail, surpassing pre-pandemic figures.**[1] The number of journeys made on the Northumberland Line, which reopened in December 2024, also exceeded expectations, having reached around 1.8 million journeys by the start of early August 2026. **But much needs to change to realise our vision: a railway that powers opportunity in the North East as part of the Angel Network and integrated with national services. Delivering safe, reliable, accessible and affordable travel that works for everyone.**

Despite its many strengths, the railway in our region is not currently fit for purpose. Without a rail network designed in the region, for the region, rail is unable to play a full part in the North East MSA's wider plans for housing and employment growth, business growth and regeneration.

Capacity issues on rail lines throughout the North East hold back expansion and create regrettable trade-offs between competing services. These constraints are clear to see on the East Coast Main Line south of Newcastle. Network Rail has formally designated the section between Northallerton and Newcastle as "Congested Infrastructure", highlighting the challenge of balancing local, regional, freight and long-distance demands without the additional investment needed.

Ambitions to expand the role of rail freight in our local economy are extremely challenging. There is limited capacity for new freight services, and existing freight paths have to compete with demand for more passenger services.

Rail is also key to ensuring that North East England can benefit from plans to expand tourism. But without a more wide-reaching and well-integrated rail network, there is a risk that rural areas in particular will be prevented from benefitting fully from a growing visitor economy.



journeys within the North East between April 2024 and March 2025



journeys to or from the region, were made by rail between April 2024 and March 2025



journeys on the Northumberland Line between December 2024 and early August 2026

[1] Regional rail usage, April 2024 to March 2025

As outlined earlier, the North East MSA is working towards the creation of the 'Angel Network', which will bring together local rail, local bus services, the Tyne and Wear Metro, the Shields Ferry and Park and Ride. At present, minimal integration of timetabling and fares prevents rail from connecting seamlessly with other types of transport as part of a joined-up network. This is an issue for many reasons, not least because poor integration and connectivity issues often make car travel the most convenient option. **In 2024, 60% of all trips in the North East were made by car, either as a driver or a passenger**. Private vehicles clearly have an important part to play in our region's transport network, but a lack of alternatives has led to an overreliance on car travel, which contributes to road congestion, pollution and negative impacts on the health of local people.

The perceived lack of affordability of rail travel is also a major concern for our region. Complex and inconsistent fares can contribute to the sense that taking the train does not represent good value for money compared with other modes, making rail seem like a less attractive or accessible option for some people. At a time of rising cost of living pressures, which are particularly acute for many in the North East, addressing this issue is key to ensuring that the rail network truly works for all.

Safety and accessibility issues are also a major barrier for local people, which must be removed to ensure that the North East's rail network genuinely works for everyone. More needs to be done to address safety concerns, especially those of women and girls. Certain basic safety features are missing from many stations. For example, 12 heavy rail stations in the North East have no or partial CCTV, and lighting is sometimes restricted, creating dark and secluded spots at stations. **The North East MSA's 2026 Transport Safety of Women and Girls Study highlighted significant safety concerns, with 87% of respondents reporting that they had felt unsafe or uncomfortable while travelling in the North East**.[2] Measures to address accessibility barriers are also unevenly distributed and not always adequate. **At least 15 of the 38 heavy rail stations in the region do not have full step-free access**.[3] Inconsistent accessibility standards across the network can cause inconvenience, confusion and feelings of exclusion – for example, people with lived experience of travelling with a hearing impairment have shared how fragmented access to essential on-board information can disrupt onward travel and lead to situations where they are reliant upon others to help them navigate to the next stage of their journey.

The rail network is also less reliable than it should be. Cancellations, delays, and disjointed services cause frustration for residents and undermine trust in rail as a convenient and reliable way to travel. Our region is disproportionately impacted by the poor performance record of the East Coast Main Line, where late-running long-distance trains have a severe knock-on impact on numerous other services, and capacity limitations on the track affect resilience. Sadly, local rail services also have a poor performance record, despite official station level performance data showing that rail reliability at stations across the North East has improved from late 2025 (including since the introduction of the December 2025 timetable).[4]



[2] North East MSA Transport Safety of Women and Girls Study

[3] Data taken from Department for Transport (DfT) Station Accessibility Audit

[4] Performance at stations | ORR Data Portal



As climate change intensifies, our network will also be increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather and other forms of climate-related risk. **In January 2025, the record-breaking Storm Eowyn brought high winds that caused widespread rail disruption across the North East.** Without adequate forward-planning, the increased frequency of weather-related incidents such as these will mean more delays and a less reliable rail network overall.

Washington, for example, is one of the largest towns in England without a dedicated heavy or light rail service.

Ongoing issues with reliability are particularly concerning for the North East, where many communities already have to deal with infrequent, and some have no direct rail links at all. Washington, for example, is one of the largest towns in England without a dedicated heavy or light rail service. In addition, much of County Durham and Northumberland do not have access to train services. **Notably, around 100,000 people living in County Durham's 'Leamside corridor' – the communities along the former Leamside rail route - lack direct rail links.** Even cities such as Sunderland and large towns like Chester-le-Street (population 24,000) and Cramlington (population 29,000) have to contend with comparatively infrequent services for settlements of their size. **Some parts of our local rail network are strikingly underutilised – for example, at every station on the Bishop Line, passengers only have access to an hourly rail service.** Regional rail flow is disproportionately centred on journeys between Newcastle and London, with the local rail network underutilised and underserved by comparison. This means that for too many of our residents, rail plays little or no role in the journeys they make from day to day.

Finally, many of the rail challenges faced by the North East have arisen out of a railway network that has too often been run at arms' length from the communities it serves. At present, regional authorities are unable to influence and make decisions about rail at a local level. The establishment of GBR provides a unique opportunity to address this long-standing issue, and we should seize the opportunity to influence its thinking before priorities for our region are fully set.

Case Study

What needs to change to deliver our Vision – The East Coast Main Line (ECML)

The ECML facilitates almost all the North East's external rail connectivity, linking the region with London and the South East, Scotland, Yorkshire, the North West, and the East and West Midlands. There are few overtaking locations for intercity services on the 44-mile section of track between Northallerton and Newcastle, meaning only six passenger trains per hour can run to and from the North East on this section. Network Rail has formally designated the ECML between Northallerton and Newcastle as "Congested Infrastructure." This reflects the limited ability of the route to accommodate additional freight and passenger growth and offers a clear statement that infrastructure south of Newcastle is a constraint on the North East's future connectivity.

Currently on the Newcastle – Edinburgh corridor, there are few places where fast, long-distance services can overtake slow-moving freight trains, causing unreliable journey times and delays when a train breaks down or there is disruption on the line. There is also a long-standing tension between the role of the ECML as a long-distance railway line for fast trains and its function as part of the local rail network. While pragmatism and compromise will always be necessary, it is important that the North East has a meaningful say in how this tension is managed.

The decision to cut HS2 has required the ECML to accommodate a much higher number of long-distance services than had been anticipated. Without major upgrades to the line in the North East and elsewhere, it will be unable to meet these demands. This will not only constrain our ambitions for passenger services in the North East, but will also have an impact on our plans to grow the rail freight sector in our region and to boost tourism from within Britain and beyond.

In particular, delivering the Leamside Line in full would enhance capacity on the ECML, creating an additional path for local passenger and freight services and making room for a potential increase in long-distance passenger services on the ECML itself. This is especially important at a time when there are no feasible funded plans to resolve the problem of congestion between Northallerton and Newcastle and highlights why investment is needed to upgrade the ECML and deliver the Leamside Line in full.

Together, these challenges demonstrate that the rail network in the North East is failing to meet local, regional, and national needs, ultimately holding back our communities from accessing opportunities and curtailing economic growth.

Tackling these challenges will ensure that our rail network functions as effectively as possible for local people. The case for change is clear – rail needs to improve for our local people, our businesses, and our future.



5. Delivering the Vision

To deliver this vision, we need to work closely with community and passenger groups, all local authorities in our region, our neighbours, central government and, most importantly, the rail industry.

By forging strong partnerships, we can use our complementary strengths to align national strategy with local priorities, ensuring decisions are made closer to North East communities and outcomes prioritise our people and ensure continued freight growth.

Rail operates as an integrated national and regional network, and we recognise that local ambitions often need to be balanced with wider considerations, such as long-distance connectivity, freight, performance and overall capacity. We are supportive of Open Access where it clearly improves journey opportunities, choice and value for passengers in the North East, while complementing the wider network, making efficient use of capacity, and reflecting the Government's approach to balancing passenger benefits with network performance and value for taxpayers.

Another example of the trade-offs involved in operating a constrained network is at Sunderland Station, where the needs of freight, the Metro and heavy rail must be carefully balanced. Delivery of this vision will require partnership working with GBR and other partners to navigate 'trade-offs' constructively, balancing the types and frequencies of services to ensure that local, regional and national requirements are met.

Our ask of industry is for local decision-makers to be involved in these active discussions alongside national bodies, recognising the value of local insight in this ongoing discussion about how we improve rail travel locally.

Government has set out the framework for how a future Great British Railways (GBR) will work with Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSA). This Mayoral Partnership framework emphasises the importance of alignment of railway planning with MSA Growth Plans, Local Transport Plans, and local investment.



The success of our Mayoral Partnership framework depends on five key factors:

Agreeing shared strategic objectives – aligned with our Spatial Development Strategy (SDS), Local Growth Plan and Local Transport Plan.

Passenger-centred outcomes – ensuring passengers are at the heart of every decision we make.

Phased funding – securing an agreed pipeline of improvements that deliver our vision.

Effective engagement – from project inception to post completion to ensure schemes meet local and national needs. This will ensure risks are identified early and mitigated.

Accountability – building trust through transparent, honest and clear choices on priorities.

Working together can unlock outcomes that would not otherwise be possible - for example, through better alignment and co-investment.

Our approach to date has focused on strengthening collaboration between GBR, DfT and operators by establishing an effective partnership. Our vision for rail builds on the collaborative work of the North East Rail Partnership Board (NERPB), which brings together key regional and national rail-focused stakeholders to align ambitions and priorities for rail. The NERPB will seek to develop a formal partnership with GBR, and this vision document will be used to convey what our regional priorities are and how we intend to work with GBR to deliver this vision.

Our experience and achievements in rail demonstrate our proven ability to work collaboratively with the rail industry to deliver much needed modern rail infrastructure, showing that we are willing and able to use our devolved funding to provide vital co-investment.

We recognise that expanding the rail network, and the infrastructure required to deliver it, is complex and costly. But the success of the Northumberland Line - which has delivered new stations, reduced journey times, and reconnected our communities- shows what can be done when local leadership is matched with national support.

Building on this, we are keen to explore deeper levels of Mayoral Partnership, including greater collaboration on accessibility, station facilities and capacity, local commissioning of services and, potentially, devolution of rail stations. In practical terms, this may include co-planning and funding station improvements to address accessibility issues, improving the retail offer for passengers, enabling regeneration at stations and on the land adjacent, identifying investment priorities, and optimising timetables so they work better for local people.



The aim of adopting an enhanced partnership model between GBR and the North East MSA would be to work in partnership to:

- specify local rail services to be delivered by GBR.
- identify opportunities to expand the rail network, aligned to local growth opportunities.
- develop multimodal ticketing products which incorporate rail.
- share responsibility for some rail stations with joint decision-making over investment, development and passenger facilities and adjacent land.
- improve accessibility and safety for all – and particularly for women and girls.

We believe that adopting an enhanced partnership agreement with GBR would better recognise the role of stations as hubs for economic development and transport integration, while ensuring that operational requirements continue to be managed at a national level.

Together we can ensure this marks a genuine shift toward rail services that work far better for the people and businesses of the North East as a key part of the Mayor's plans for an integrated public transport network that works for everyone.

Conclusion

Building on the LTP, this Rail Vision has set out how our local railways play such an integral role in supporting the delivery of a green, integrated transport network that works for all.

Our vision is clear:

> "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."

Successful delivery of this Rail Vision will allow us to deliver the aims of the region's Local Growth Plan. Improving the frequency and connectivity of local rail services across the region, ensuring that rail is well-integrated with other transport modes, making rail safer and more reliable, and enhancing the network's reach and resilience are all crucial to ensure the railway plays its part in wider regional ambitions for housing, jobs and local growth.

The North East is already off to a strong start. We have delivered a range of rail improvements for local people, such as the Northumberland Line, the Metro Flow project and a range of ticketing and fare initiatives, including our affordable Mayor's Fares.

However, we know that much more still needs to be done to fully realise our regional ambitions for rail. The creation of GBR offers a unique chance to improve everyday passenger experiences, boost reliability, and simplify the sector by integrating track and train. It is also a chance for us to determine the future of rail freight in our region, supporting this important growth area of the national economy and ensuring that it plays a role in our plans for regional development. Effective long-term planning must reflect regional goals. Crucially, decisions made now will shape the network for decades to come.

By working together, we can ensure that investment is aligned to regional principles, that long-term planning reflects the needs of our communities.

Our vision for rail is ambitious, and we cannot deliver it alone. Success will require a strong and collaborative partnership between the North East MSA, GBR, DfT, Network Rail, Transport Scotland, train operators and local partners. This vision has been shaped by strong collaboration with local authorities, regional rail industry representatives and other expert stakeholders within our region, and it is vital that the MSA continues to work proactively with partners across the North East to make sure that the region can speak with one voice about its ambitions for the future of the rail network. By working together, we can ensure that investment is aligned to regional principles, that long-term planning reflects the needs of our communities, and that rail improvements contribute directly to wider economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Building on achievements to date, this Rail Vision provides a clear and deliverable pathway to 2040, setting out what we expect the rail industry to deliver through partnership with the Mayoral Strategic Authority.



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