

North East Combined Authority

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

22 March 2016

Meeting held: Newcastle City Library, Charles Avison Building, 33 New Bridge Street West, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8AX

Present:

Councillor: Wright (Chair)

Councillors: Crute, Dillon, Eagle, Flux, Glendon, Graham, A Lower, Maxwell, Pidcock and Snowdon

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

The Chair commented on the tragic events in Brussels and offered condolences on behalf of the committee. The Chair also paid tribute to the personnel of emergency services.

42 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Armstrong, M Meling and S Pearson.

43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Eagle stated that he had been granted dispensation by the Governance Committee to participate in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's discussions and decision-making in relation to Nexus.

44 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2016

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 February 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

(a) Forward Plan & Work Programme

(Minute 40 refers)

Members noted that there was a regional group that looked at the role of public transport employees in assisting other agencies to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation. There was training available on this subject and a request had been made if the training could be extended to the staff of Metro.

45 UPDATE ON METRO PERFORMANCE

Submitted: A report of the Monitoring Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided an update on the operational performance of Metro.

Members welcomed M Tarry and R Fairy of Network Rail, who welcomed the opportunity to engage with the committee and apologised for the incidents with the Metro system in December and January, acknowledging their understanding of the inconvenience caused to passengers.

Members made comments and asked questions of M Tarry and R Fairy, particularly with regard to the disruptions to the Metro services in December and January. During this process, the following was noted:

- Members queried the adequacy of investment into the Metro infrastructure by Network Rail. In response, it was noted that the provision was considered adequate and there had been an additional £2.4 million of investment by Network Rail into the enhancement of the existing system.
- Members pointed out that one of the key issues with the failure of the Metro system was poor communication with customers. Members queried how Network Rail communicated with customers. In response it was confirmed that the approach set out in section 6.7 of the Network Rail submission appended to the report remained unchanged. Network Rail was committed to work to address the issue.
- Members queried the position with the availability of staff and equipment that were necessary for dealing with incidents on the Metro system. In response, it was noted that due to the nature of the incident in December it had taken a specialist team and specialist equipment to resolve the issue.

Members queried the Network Rail awareness, organisation, ability and knowledge in relation to the Tyne and Wear Metro system. Members also queried the lack of investment in the infrastructure, including equipment. In response, Network Rail offered apologies for the specific incident in December and explained the particulars of the system and the sourcing of the equipment. Members also noted how Network Rail was working jointly with Nexus to resolve the December incident. Members also noted information on the future planning and commitments for the periods leading up to 2019 and beyond, as set out in the report and then outlined verbally in more detail by R Fairy.

- Members noted that a draft consultation document on the East Coast Main Line routes would be published later this year. Members also noted that Network Rail worked closely with the Department for Transport, Transport for North and other partners and stakeholders on future planning.

- It was noted that the possibility of reopening the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne railway was being considered and would be subject to discussions in due course.
- Members also noted the current position and aspirations in relation to High Speed Rail 2 but commented on the lack of progress.
- Members commented on the difficulty for the public to understand issues with the Metro services, including the ownership of the responsibility for specific faults, without good communication being in place. Members also commented on their role to voice concerns of residents and gave examples of the difficulties that passengers had faced as a result of disruptions to the Metro services. Members also commented on the unfortunate way the incidents had been handled and the unfair blaming of Nexus by the media for the failures that had not been their fault. In response, Network Rail representatives offered apologies.
- Members commented that they hoped that lessons had been learned and asked for assurances. In response, the representatives of Network Rail referred to the good performance of Network Rail, particularly in the current year, and explained that Network Rail would continue to analyse the system to ensure it worked effectively. The representatives also offered to attend a future meeting if required by the committee.
- Members also commented on the importance of the Thematic Lead for Transport attending a meeting of the committee. In response, it was noted that the Thematic Lead had been invited to the meeting but due to the diary commitments could not attend on this occasion and was represented by Councillor J Harrison, the Chair of the Transport North East (Tyne and Wear) Sub-Committee. Members welcomed Councillor J Harrison to the meeting.
- Members commented on the complexity of transport matters and suggested that consideration should be given to providing training for members.

RESOLVED – That:

- I. The report be noted;
- II. Representatives of Network Rail be invited to a future meeting; and
- III. The Thematic Lead for Transport be invited to a future meeting.

46 **TRANSPORT THEMATIC LEAD**

Submitted: A report of the Thematic Lead for Transport (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided information on major transport developments and announcements since 17 November 2015. Members welcomed Councillor J Harrison, the Chair of the Transport North East (Tyne and Wear) Sub-

Committee, who introduced the report on behalf of the Thematic Lead for Transport and provided updates, including in relation to the following developments:

- Transitional arrangements for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund
- Air Passenger Duty
- High Speed Rail
- Transport for the North
- Highway improvements
- Northern Transport Strategy 2016
- Trans-Pennine Express franchise
- Driverless cars
- Transport Manifesto for the North East

During the ensuing discussion, it was noted that:

- Discussions with Rail North included capacity issues on Durham Coast Line and East Coast Main Line as well as possibilities in relation to the Ashington, Blyth and Tyne railway.
- Members noted information on the new Northern Connect services on the East Coast Main Line and the role of journey times in decisions on the number and locations of stops.
- A Member commented on the importance of a new station in east Durham.
- A Member spoke about the importance of smarter planning to ensure an effective flow of traffic. A Member also spoke about the importance of being realistic when planning routes to ensure that measures and interventions did not cause traffic congestion. A Member asked that more consideration should be given to motorists. A Member also commented on the importance of local authorities working together and having a joint approach to planning in relation to roads and transport. In response, it was noted that it was important to continue to work to address these issues as part of one transport policy, and whilst the Authority needed to continue to work to invest into the strategic routes, it was also necessary to continue to work on the modal shift.
- In response to a Member's comments on the performance of DB Regio Tyne and Wear who operated Metro on behalf of Nexus, it was noted that the Authority was committed to continuing to work to drive improvements.
- It was confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have a role in discussions about the future concessions for operating Metro.
- A Member commented on the relatively low levels of responses to the consultation on the Transport Manifesto for the North East and suggested that more publicity was needed, including adverts on public transport and leaflets in community centres. The Chair commented on the importance of good communication with the public and ensuring that the public had access to the consultation document via a variety of methods. In response, it was noted that these suggestions were helpful. It was also noted that, in addition

to the on-line consultation, there had been a number of events held for the public and the closing date had been extended.

- Members noted the composition and role of Transport for the North, a new statutory entity for the wider region. It was noted that the Authority would have a voice on strategic issues on transport.
- Members discussed the issue of pressures on the Authority's ability to support concessionary travel which was a statutory requirement. It was noted that this matter was being monitored on a continuing basis. It was also noted that Nexus had been requested to set up a review and identify and suggest priorities in relation to the non-statutory element of concessionary travel that was currently provided by the Authority.
- A Member commented on the diversity of the region and the importance of provision of a range of transport solutions to address the different needs of the region.
- It was noted that the Pop card was only available on some bus services but Nexus were working on a wider rolling out of the smart card.
- The Chair commented on the different levels of investment in transport in the South and in the North.

RESOLVED – That:

- I. The report be noted;
- II. Representatives of Nexus be invited to a future meeting;
- III. The Authority explores all opportunities to raise the profile of its public consultations on transport; and
- IV. A document setting out priorities and the action plan for delivery in relation to the Transport Manifesto for the North East be provided to a future meeting.

47 FORWARD PLAN & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Submitted: A report of the Monitoring Officer (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided an opportunity to consider items on the Forward Plan and review the updated Annual Work Programme for the current municipal year.

RESOLVED – That:

- I. the report be noted; and

- II. in the light of the current municipal year coming to an end and potential changes in the membership of the committee, an update be brought to the next meeting.

At this point the meeting became inquorate.

48 DEVOLUTION UPDATE

Submitted: A report of the Head of Paid Service (previously circulated and copy attached to Official Minutes).

Members considered the report which provided information on the current position in relation to the devolution proposals for the region. The report was introduced by the Monitoring Officer. Members also welcomed Councillor S Henig, the Chair of the Leadership Board, who provided an overview of the position to date.

Members asked questions. During this session, the following was noted:

- Members noted the number of events held and the type of stakeholders involved, including local authorities, trade unions and voluntary groups, as part of the consultation process on devolution. Members also noted the position with regard to the consultation process at Durham County Council. A Member commented on the low level of responses from Northumberland.
- Whilst it was confirmed that a constituent local authority had recently expressed a view to not be part of the agreement, it was noted that no decisions had been made at this point in time.
- Members noted that there had been an unfair criticism of the proposals by the media.
- Members also noted the successful example of Manchester.
- Members noted that more engagement was needed from the government on the proposed devolution and “the asks” that the Authority had put forward.
- Members noted the benefits of joint working between local authorities and other public services, such as the NHS, particularly in the current climate of austerity.
- Members discussed the issue of risks. It was noted that the government was keen to transfer a lot of responsibility on the Combined Authority.
- Members also discussed the issue of uncertainty and the lack of a precedent in relation to a Mayoral Combined Authority in the region. In response it was confirmed that the Authority was approaching this matter with caution. Whilst there was a framework available, there were currently no details available. These were being awaited, although it was not clear at this point in time if the government had worked out the detail. The Monitoring Officer explained the process with regard to the framework, the orders and the scheme. It was

noted that whilst there were uncertainties and challenges, a fuller picture would emerge in due course.

- Members queried the powers of the proposed Mayor and commented on the level of responsibility of the role and the importance of a democratic approach to decision-making.
- Members commented on the importance of certainty in relation to funding.
- Members discussed the uncertainties and quickness in relation to timescales. It was noted that the Authority was pressing the government to ensure the timescales did not slip. In referring to the quickness of the process, including elections in 2017, Members queried whether the process was rushed.
- Members queried the impact of the region's ability to retain business rates.
- It was confirmed that there was no impact envisaged on the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
- The Chair expressed concern about the uncertainties and the lack of answers from the government and thanked Councillor Henig and the Monitoring Officer for their representations.

RESOLVED – That:

- I. the report be noted; and
- II. the devolution item should remain a standing item on agendas for future meetings.

CHAIR'S COMMENTS

The Chair thanked everyone for their work and support during this municipal year. The Chair thanked the Vice-Chair for his support.

49 **DATES AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The dates and times of future meetings would be confirmed at the annual meeting on 21 June.