



## **Consultation response**

**To: House of Commons Transport Select Committee inquiry into the Rail White Paper**

**Date: 9 October 2007**

### **Contact point:**

Jonathan Bray  
**pteg** Support Unit  
Wellington House  
40-50 Wellington Street  
Leeds  
LS1 2DE  
0113 251 7445  
[info@pteg.net](mailto:info@pteg.net)

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 **pteg** represents the six English Passenger Transport Executives which between them serve eleven million people in Tyne and Wear ('Nexus'), West Yorkshire ('Metro'), South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside ('Merseytravel') and the West Midlands ('Centro'). Strathclyde Partnership for Transport and Transport for London are associate members.

## 2. The significance of PTE rail networks

- 2.1 166 million trips were made on PTE and SPT rail networks in 2005/6 – that's more than one in seven of all rail trips. These networks play an important role in wider local urban public transport networks – particularly for medium to long distance rail commuting. For example, around 20% of all commuter journeys into Birmingham city centre are by rail (contributing to public transport's majority share of this market).
- 2.2 PTEs have a long history of support and involvement in their local rail networks. They have invested heavily in new and additional trains, in opening new routes and new stations (69 opened so far), in upgrading stations and promoting heavy rail as part of wider urban public transport networks.
- 2.3 There has been very rapid growth in rail use on PTE rail networks in recent years. This is largely because of the way in which city region economies are changing. Clustering of high value economic sectors in revived city centres is leading to more and longer distance commuting - something which heavy rail is ideally suited to support. As the White Paper acknowledges growth on PTE rail networks is outstripping London and the South East, with some networks recording astonishing levels of growth in recent years. The White Paper puts growth in rail travel to and from Leeds at 85% for the ten years to 2005/6, and between 60 and 70% for Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. By way of contrast, growth in rail travel for London is below the average for the network as a whole (though of course absolute volumes and market share remains high).
- 2.4 As city region economies continue to grow, rail commuting also continues to accelerate. For example the North West Route Utilisation Strategy forecasts Greater Manchester rail commuting will increase by 44% between 2005/06 and 2017/18. In the West Midlands, the Route Utilisation Strategy medium forecast was for 3.9% growth from 2005 to 2011, but in practice growth has been well over 5% per annum, and on certain key routes passenger journeys are up by over 10% per annum.
- 2.5 Rapid recent growth in rail use has led to significant congestion and overcrowding issues. For example, the White Paper shows that passengers travelling into Leeds experience worse overcrowding than commuters into Victoria, Waterloo or Liverpool Street. This is exacerbated by the fact that many trains are formed of end-door rolling stock that is not designed to handle high-volume commuter traffic.

### 3. The Challenges of growth

- 3.1 The Rail White Paper's focus on growth is very welcome. We are particularly pleased that after years of scepticism from Whitehall over the value of our rail networks there is now a recognition of the importance of those networks in underpinning the sustainable development of city region economies.
- 3.2 However, whilst we recognise that investment in the rail network of the South East is justified by the key role that rail plays in supporting London's economy we are very concerned that the balance of spend will leave the city region rail networks unable to provide the rail capacity those economies need. In particular we do not share the White Paper's conclusion that outside the South East there is no strong case for significant infrastructure upgrades in order to enhance capacity.
- 3.3 Examples of additional infrastructure investment required in PTE areas include:
- The Manchester Hub. Investment to relieve the heavily congested central Manchester rail bottleneck, including development of a tram-train network to complement the successful Metrolink light rail network
  - Tram-train replacement of life expired heavy rail infrastructure on the West Yorkshire network – such as on the key Harrogate to Leeds commuting corridor
  - Linking the currently unused terminal platforms at Birmingham Moor Street to the Derby/Leicester and Worcester/Cheltenham corridors to provide more central Birmingham rail capacity and allowing the development of new local rail routes.
  - Renewal and reinvigoration of the ageing Tyne and Wear Metro (which performs a similar function to the heavy rail network of other city regions)
  - Extensions to the very successful Merseyrail Electric network
  - Additional capacity at key pinch points on the South Yorkshire rail network (such as Meadowhall and Sheffield) to facilitate faster and more frequent services between main South Yorkshire centres.
- 3.4 Whilst PTEs have contributed to renewing, refurbishing and supporting the provision of additional diesel trains in their areas, PTEs remain concerned about both the quality and the quantity of the rolling stock available for non-electrified lines in the city regions. Trains like the Pacers (basically a twenty year old bus body fixed to a wagon underframe) are low capacity, rough riding and do not meet modern passenger expectations or aspirations. We therefore welcome the DfT's moves to develop a specification for a modern regional train as a recognition that the existing regional fleet does need to be renewed. However, there is a trade-off between the uncertainties and delays in developing and procuring a new national standard regional vehicle (which may have to take its place in the queue behind the new national inter city train) and the need to ensure that a more modern fleet of rolling stock is provided as quickly as possible.
- 3.5 We also welcome the commitment to ensuring that 270 of the 1,300 additional new carriages to be procured will be allocated to urban rail networks outside the South East. However, it should be noted that this is against a backdrop of a significant age gap between the rolling stock fleet in the South East and that of the city regions. For example a Parliamentary answer on 14<sup>th</sup> December

2005 revealed that the average age of passenger trains in London and the South East was 12 years while on Northern Trains it was 17 years.

- 3.6 It is essential that the DfT's Rolling Stock Plan delivers a clear strategy for the deployment and enhancement of the rolling stock fleet as growth on the PTE networks will only be possible with a significantly upgraded and expanded rolling stock fleet. As part of this plan the DfT will need to facilitate the transfer of stock between different franchises and create the market conditions for the ROSCOs to play an active part in the procurement process.
- 3.7 We also believe that the tram-train concept has great potential for our areas. Tram-train networks (where a tram-like vehicle uses conventional heavy rail infrastructure on corridors into cities, and then runs on-street in city centres) have proved very effective in cities like Karlsruhe in Germany. Tram-trains could bring many more benefits (including releasing capacity at heavy rail terminals) than a like-for-like renewing of existing life-expired conventional heavy rail commuter routes.
- 3.8 We are disappointed by the continuing prevarication by the DfT on the case for further electrification of urban rail networks. There will always be uncertainties over how technological breakthroughs - combined with wider environmental and geo-political factors - might play out in the future in determining the optimal energy strategy at any given time for the UK's railways. However, just because the future cannot be guaranteed, that is no excuse not to recognise and support the benefits that electrifying urban rail networks can bring. Urban networks with their frequent stop/start work and need for high acceleration, are particularly suited to electric traction. Indeed the Railway Technical Strategy acknowledges that most new urban trains will be electric. It is therefore surprising that there is not a commitment to consider a rolling strategy of infill electrification on the current network, and route electrification when rolling stock fleets fall due for renewal. The electrification and renewal of the Airedale/Wharfedale routes in West Yorkshire is a good example of the benefits that electrification can bring an urban commuter route – with rail use growing faster than on the rest of the West Yorkshire network and a 75% share of key commuter flows into Leeds city centre now achieved.
- 3.9 Although we would not want to see investment in additional urban rail capacity sacrificed as a result, we support in principle the case for a new High Speed Line in order to provide additional capacity and to strengthen connectivity between the major urban centres. A high speed line, such as that proposed by Greengauge 21, would considerably assist the regeneration and economic development of the metropolitan areas and strengthen linkages with Europe. It would also help relieve some of the development pressures that exist in the South East by allowing access to strategic markets from a wide national catchment area. Given the extremely long timescales attached to delivering investment on this scale, waiting a further five years to consider whether to start development work would prevent any rapid implementation should growth continue to outpace predictions, potentially leaving the existing rail network struggling to cope with demand.
- 3.10 We would also be concerned if one of the responses to growth was to seek to 'price off demand' through excessive fares increases. The Metropolitan areas contain both significant concentrations of deprivation, and areas where car ownership and use is growing rapidly. To head off the threat of traffic congestion and to ensure that public transport plays its role in tackling social

exclusion – it's important that local rail fares in the Metropolitan areas remain at an affordable and competitive level.

#### 4. The role of the PTEs on rail

4.1 The important contribution that PTEs make to urban rail networks was recognised at the time of privatisation by making PTEs co-signatories to the rail franchises that directly affect them. Co-signatory status allows PTEs to specify service levels, service quality requirements and fares for local services. These must be included in franchises unless the Government considers it would compromise their wider objectives for the railway. PTEs also have to be consulted on any subsequent significant proposals for service changes. PTEs have used their co-signatory role in a responsible and pragmatic way to help ensure that local rail heavy networks have been developed and provided in a way that dovetails with wider city region transport strategies. These strategies are in turn influenced by wider city region strategies for land use, economic development, environmental protection and social inclusion. In effect co-signatory status has given PTEs a 'seat at the table' on the future of their local rail networks.

4.2 Following the 'meltdown' of railway finances after Hatfield the Government brought in the 2005 Railways Act. The Act means that the Secretary of State has the powers not to grant PTEs co-signatory status on new franchises and to withdraw co-signatory status on existing franchise agreements. So far the Secretary of State has chosen not to grant co-signatory status on the new West Midlands franchise. The White Paper suggests that the Government does not favour PTE co-signatory status – however it states that:

*'Initial consideration is being given to a revised franchising concept for London that could be extended to other metropolitan areas. This will maintain the existing franchise structure and would not require co-signatory status, but would give relevant transport bodies a bigger influence over franchise specifications.'*

4.3 **pteg** welcomes the prospect of an enhanced role in franchise specifications. This would be in line with the recommendations of the Eddington report that city region transport authorities need to be able to plan, and make balanced investment decisions, across the modes. It would also reflect the success of the devolution of rail powers that has already taken place. The two leading examples being:

- Merseyrail Electrics, which has seen significant investment, and become one of the best performing rail systems in Britain, since the local PTE, Merseytravel, became the franchise authority in 2003
- North London Railways. Now that TfL has become the franchising authority it is specifying high quality services, new trains, station improvements as well as common branding and ticketing with other TfL services.

4.4 Given the Government has accepted that there are significant advantages to devolving rail powers we are disappointed and surprised that the White Paper suggests our co-signatory status on rail franchises is removed at a time when the Local Transport Bill suggests an enhanced role for PTAs. The co-signatory system has proved effective – and removing co-signatory status will

unnecessarily complicate PTEs involvement in heavy rail planning and development.

4.5 On the Merseyrail network, we believe there is the opportunity to take devolution even further and Merseytravel continues to press for the development of full local decision making (FLDM) for the Merseyrail network. The overarching strategy is for the establishment of long-term partnership between Merseytravel, the train operator and other users to enable FLDM, with a vision of rail becoming part of a Single Integrated Public Transport Network. The key objectives can be summarised as follows:

- delivery of local solutions, to local problems by local people
- improved performance and passenger satisfaction, and
- increased value for money for passengers, tax payers and government.

4.6 By integrating the network in this way, there are demonstrable benefits to the user - particularly as there would be greater focus on performance enhancement through the shared management objectives of the infrastructure manager and operator.

## **5. Key areas for improvement for the rail sector**

5.1 The White Paper identifies three key areas where the rail sector needs to make faster progress: carbon reduction, stations and ticketing.

5.2 Carbon reduction relates mainly to operational issues over which we have limited controls. However stations and ticketing falls more within our remit.

5.3 We share the White Paper's view that station environments and facilities can fall short of passenger expectations. There is good practice within PTE areas from which lessons could be learned for the wider rail network. For example:

- All Merseyrail Electric stations in the Merseytravel area are staffed throughout traffic hours – which creates a more secure and welcoming environment
- Three quarters of significant PTE bus station and interchanges are new or comprehensively modernised. For example, all South Yorkshire's bus stations are now new and modernised – and have Chartermark status
- Metro has invested in new and re-staffed station buildings at key commuter stations
- Centro provides more station car parks that have achieved "Park Mark" status (an accreditation scheme for safety and security standards) than any other operator on the national rail network.

5.4 Building on this good practice there is scope for PTEs to have a greater role in the specification and operation of station facilities (outside the major stations). This would also help ensure that city region public transport networks are presented as a single coherent and branded network, with more consistent standards of service across the modes.

5.5 The White Paper also makes the case for faster introduction of smartcard ticketing for urban rail networks – pledging the introduction of ITSO

smartcards on rail in the major cities allowing facilities like ‘pre-pay’ that have proved popular in London. **pteg** welcomes this commitment. However there will need to be significant read-across into bus policy if the benefits of smartcard ticketing are to be fully realised. The vast majority of public transport trips in PTE area are by bus so for a PTE smartcard to have the same value as Oyster does in London it will also need to be valid on all buses. This will require the stronger and more effective partnerships and quality contract arrangements envisaged by the Local Transport Bill. It might also require funding of smartcard readers on buses – perhaps through a diversion of funding via the reform of the BSOG subsidy regime that the Government is currently reviewing.

- 5.6 The White Paper is also positive about the potential for zonal ticketing on urban rail networks. This simplification would also work best if it was coordinated with other modal fares structures. Once again this has significant implications for bus policy.
- 5.7 The extension of a zonal system, crossing boundaries into surrounding areas would help resolve the problems with fares discontinuities where PTE boundaries currently encourage people to drive significant distances instead of using their local station.

## 6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The White Paper sets out a comprehensive policy framework for the development of the national rail network, and as such is welcomed by **pteg**. While we believe there should have been stronger commitments from Government in a number of areas, the overall direction, in particular the acknowledgement of the growth agenda and the importance of urban rail networks, is helpful. During the implementation of the policies and the distribution of funding, it is critical that the Government recognises the essential role that rail plays in the cities outside the South East and caters for the demand growth which is outstripping that into London.
- 6.2 **pteg** looks forward to working with the DfT, Network Rail, ORR and operators on the implementation of the White Paper and HLOS, and we will continue to play our full part in driving the national rail agenda forward.