SUMMARY:

- Calder Valley Line passengers suffered massive and unprecedented disruption immediately following the May 2018 timetable change. Current performance (August) seems to be close to historic levels but reliability, punctuality and capacity still need to be better. (See Section 2.)
- We are concerned that the May chaos and media coverage (sometimes exaggerated) are continuing to put people off travelling. (Section 2.)
- Northern introduced a temporary timetable in June. This involved temporary cuts. Most of these cuts have now been restored but some have not – for example 2-hour gaps in service remain on the Manchester-Blackburn route via Todmorden, a cut to a pre-existent service, not a delayed enhancement. (Section 2, point (b).)
- The May-Dec 2018 timetable itself also contains damage to pre-existent services, not just delays to planned enhancements. Examples (detail in Section 2, point (c)) include:
  - truncation of the important York-Halifax-Blackpool service to operate mainly Leeds-Preston only. We understood this would be restored when sufficient trains were available but with the postponement of the December 2018 recast to May 2019 it is no longer clear when this service will happen.
  - issues about service intervals, for example where uneven patterns in a 4 trains/hr service diverge unacceptably from the ideal (e.g. gaps of more than 20 minutes).
  - gaps in late evening services and examples of last trains being earlier than previous.
  - effective loss of specified frequency e.g. Leeds-Brighouse where direct train overtakes indirect meeting letter but not spirit of Train Service Requirement.
- Strategically (Section 3.1), we are concerned about failure by Network Rail and the TOCs to anticipate the problems that emerged in January 2018 leading to hurried replanning of the May timetable, and about failure of the train operators to foresee and allow for the problems arising from delayed hand-back of the Blackpool route.
- Fragmentation of train planning (Sections 3.2, 3.3) is a major issue which might be addressed by the creation of a joint, devolved and integrated strategic and timetable planning body committed to optimising the timetable across the North.
- We expect the franchise planned enhancements of our service (Section 4) to be delivered by the end of next year but delivered in a robust way, repairing damage done by the May 2018 timetable and allowing improved performance as well as increased capacity.
1 About HADRAG

The Halifax & District Rail Action Group has been established as a rail users’ group since 1985. We are centred on the area around Halifax, Sowerby Bridge, Elland and Brighouse on the Calder Valley Line (York-Leeds-Bradford/Brighouse-Manchester/Blackpool in West Yorkshire). We exist to campaign with environmental, social and economic aims:

- strategically for new or improved services
- and tactically as a “critical friend” of the railway businesses raising issues about the present service.

We are in regular contact with the train operating company Northern (Arrive Rail North), and we are also in touch and with contacts at West Yorkshire Combined Authority, Calderdale Council, and TfN/Rail North Partnership.

2 Immediate comments from May 2018

Calder Valley Line passengers were severely and unprecedentedly inconvenienced in the two weeks following the timetable change, after which there was significant improvement, but some disruption has continued through the summer. In the immediate aftermath of the 20 May changes comments received from HADRAG members/supporters mentioned:

- Complete uncertainty about whether expected trains would turn up.
- Uncertainty among staff about what was happening.
- Situation for example for commuters at teatime at Manchester Victoria – large numbers of delays/cancellations; people just going for the first train going in the right direction with possibility of completing journey by local bus, uncertainty about whether people would get home before the children’s bedtime etc etc.
- Issues about changes to the timetable itself including gaps in commuter services and missing late night services for intermediate stations. Some of these are included as examples in point (c) below.

Concerns about the new timetable fall into three main areas:

(a) Reliability/punctuality over first two weeks and beyond. We acknowledge significant improvement from Week 3 of the timetable. General perception now (late August) is that reliability/punctuality is comparable with historical levels though we are aware that over some periods the number of cancellations was unacceptable. By way of a “random” example an on-line analysis of departures from Halifax station over a 24-hour period starting 0200 on 30 August gives the following results (source: [http://www.realtimetra...](http://www.realtimetra.co.uk/)). Note this is just one day and may not be typical:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Halifax, 30 August</th>
<th>On time</th>
<th>1 to 5min late</th>
<th>6 to 10min late</th>
<th>11 to 20min late</th>
<th>&gt;20 min late</th>
<th>Cancelled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of trains</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative percentage</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>90% Not more than 5 min late.</td>
<td>96% Not more than 10 min late.</td>
<td>99% Not more than 20 min late.</td>
<td>99% Not cancelled.</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two key points:
• The service is usable, with an expectation of running within 5 min of booked time, and we would want to encourage people to use it; performance is not as good as we would want but is now at more like an acceptable level.
• A further concern is that media coverage has probably exaggerated how bad things are so additional off-peak usage is being discouraged.

(b) **Targeting of cuts in the temporary timetable (June-July).** This is the temporary 6% cut in services, which seems to have hit existing services whilst enhancements or improved frequencies were retained on other routes. For example, the May timetable introduced a frequency increase from 2 to 3 trains per hour on the Manchester-Atherton-Wigan Line and this enhanced frequency was maintained when the temporary timetable was introduced; but services such the Manchester-Todmorden-Blackburn route which is only hourly had temporary daytime cuts. 75% of the full timetable has now been restored, though the Manchester-Todmorden-Blackburn service continues to have services missing.

(c) **Issues with the May 2018 timetable itself.** There is a feeling that some enhancements (franchise commitments) have been introduced at the cost of damaging the service for existing users. Most of the promises for the Calder Valley Line have yet to be delivered, including hourly trains to Manchester Airport and to Chester. At the same time there have been temporary cuts to existing services (quite apart from the June-July temporary timetable). The following are examples:

i. **York-Leeds-Halifax-Preston-Blackpool service.** From May 2018 this has been temporarily truncated to mainly operate Leeds-Preston only, part of the timetable short-notice timetable replanning that was announced in January.
   • **It is important to realise that this was not a delay to enhancements but a cut (albeit temporary) to an existing well-established service – extremely disappointing.**
   • Whilst the good news is that these trains now call at Sowerby bridge and Mytholmroyd stations (something we have campaigned for) there is clearly further disappointment that these stations will now have to wait for regular trains to both York and Blackpool.
   • We were told by Northern (before May) that the full York-Blackpool service would be restored as soon as trains were available, but this now seems uncertain because of the recent announcement of postponement of the December 2018 recast. We have asked Northern to restore this cut as soon as possible but have not yet received any assurance.

ii. **Commuting gaps,** e.g. peak hour approx. half-hour gap in services Sowerby Bridge to Leeds between 0724 and 0753. Previously there was an intermediate service between these approximate times.

iii. The above is linked to general **poorer clockface patterns** with significant divergence from even 4 trains/hr. For example, Halifax departures towards Leeds at approximately xx00, xx12, xx34 and xx43: note 22 minutes gap. This is compounded by variations in timings from hour to hour (which can lead to people missing trains).

iv. **Missing stops in late evening services and earlier “last trains”.** The following are examples where the current (May 2018) timetable has a worse service than previous:
2-hour gap in services from Manchester to Mytholmroyd and Sowerby Bridge in the evening despite several Manchester-Leeds trains running through these stations non-stop in the intervening period.

A correspondent who lives in Sowerby Bridge and works in Bradford until late evening complains that his last train home (previously 2252) is now earlier (2200), despite there being two later trains on the Leeds-Bradford-Calderdale-Manchester route (2245 and 2303 from Bradford) that run fast from Halifax to Hebden Bridge, i.e. through Sowerby Bridge and Mytholmroyd without stopping.

Surely there should be a principle that these late or last trains should call at all stations since late at night getting people home is more important than end-to-end journey time. Our correspondent is having to take a taxi from Halifax to his home, paid for by his employer, but may ultimately have to stop using the train.

v. Questionable interpretation of Train Service Requirement (TSR) – unintended consequences of franchise agreement – example of “Brighouse overtaking issue”. The TSR specifies 2 trains/hr Leeds-Brighouse; both are stopping services, one goes direct via Dewsbury the other via Bradford and Halifax. Unfortunately, in the new timetable the direct train via Dewsbury overtakes the one via Bradford in both directions. Effectively this means the Leeds-Brighouse service is reduced to 1 train/hr when the specification is for 2/hr.

- Even if this is legally acceptable it seems not to comply with the “spirit” of the TSR.

vi. Loss of previous connectivity for local journeys. In the old timetable there were good connections from upper Calder Valley stations (Walsden, Todmorden, Hebden Bg, Mytholmroyd and Sowerby Bridge) for Huddersfield changing at Brighouse in one direction or at Halifax in the other. This is an important flow for commuter, students and others. These connections have effectively been destroyed by the May 2018 timetable. For some journeys e.g. Sowerby Bridge-Huddersfield travel by rail throughout is effectively deterred.
Strategic observations

3.1 Failure to anticipate delays to projects etc

- It seems remarkable that rail business collectively (including Northern and Network Rail) did not fully realise until January that the Bolton line electrification works could not be completed for May. This must surely have been obvious to management and staff of all companies operating over that route.
- We understand that the delayed completion of Blackpool electrification resulted the lapsing of a critical six-month period for route knowledge by Northern crews resulting in additional training requirements before full service introduction. Given the possibility from experience of the occurrence such delays to engineering projects, should not this have been anticipated and contingency plans been put in place?
- Given factors such as the above, plus delays to rolling stock cascades etc, was not the original May 2018 plan always founded on optimistic assumptions?

3.2 Train planning issues and questions

- It has been widely quoted that the January 2018 announcement required major replanning in 16 weeks, when the normal time lead time is 40 weeks. (If the numbers are not precise, the principle is clear.) However, we have also heard that the May 2014 timetable change was two years in planning. Also, the draft version of the original May 2018 timetable was put out to consultation almost a year before the change.
- To give credit to Northern, we understand that they sensible asked for a postponement to the May 2018 plans when the situation became clear in January. Why were Network Rail and the other companies allowed to refuse this? Northern operates by far the largest number of services across the North. This could be seen as an example of the railway collectively failing to work effectively together, or an unintended consequence of fragmentation into separate TOCs.
- Senior people at Northern have recently described their company as the “stopping train operator” (the managing director used such words or similar at the Transport Focus open board meeting held in Manchester earlier in the summer) and seem to accept that Northern is therefore last in the queue for putting trains in the plan. We hope this does not imply a lack of ambition. Is this still the case for Northern Connect regional express routes currently being planned? These will include strategic routes e.g. Calder Valley-Chester/Manchester Airport as well as the established York-Blackpool service. Northern should not accept that it is merely the “stopping train operator”.
- To encapsulate the previous point, why should commuters and local travellers on the Calder Valley Line suffer damage to their service because Trans Pennine Express wants to get a relatively small number of passengers as fast as possible from Newcastle and Middlesbrough to Manchester Airport? Is excessive focus on Airport trains damaging the ability of the railway in the North to collectively plan an optimal pattern for existing users whilst encouraging new passengers with new routes?

3.3 Systemic problems?

Some general observations spring from 3.1 and 3.2.
There is an impression that the present system of franchising encourages big promises supported by barely adequate resources, and perhaps a lack of allowance for contingencies.

The vast majority of services in the North are operated by two TOCs, Northern and TPE, who deal with two separate Network Rail “routes” (despite the Shaw Report recommendation that Network Rail should create a single North of England route or territory).

- Each TOC has its own team of train planners. Bids are made to Network Rail for slots in the timetable.
- Network Rail has its own centralised train-planning organisation, which we understand to be somewhat remotely located in Milton Keynes. In terms of staffing, we here that Network Rail train planning office has suffered from recruitment and retention issues, with an increased number of staff with limited experience. Lack of local knowledge is a matter of concern.
- Would it not be better if a single organisation “under one roof” had the job of strategically planning and then timetabling TPE and Northern services across the North, optimising the timetable based on franchise commitments and what is best for passenger rather than through a pecking order of operators? Such an arrangement would be both devolved and integrated.

4 Importance of future developments and need for robust implementation

The postponement of major changes to the Northern timetable in December 2018 is noted. This is another serious disappointment, involving:

- Further deferral of the Leeds-Calder Valley-Chester service originally planned for December 2107 until 2019. This service (required by the original TSR from December 2017) is partly to replace the direct TransPennine Warrington-Leeds trains that have already been withdrawn!
- Further deferral of Calder Valley-Manchester Airport trains.
- Uncertainty over when the cuts made in May 2018 to the York-Blackpool service will be restored (we still hope this may be December 2018)...

Despite this disappointment we accept that deferral of the December 2018 recast may be prudent to prevent a further chaotic timetable change.

However, the franchise commitments/enhancements (and restoration of cuts) must go ahead, we hope by May or at latest December 2019. These commitments include:

- Increased service Bradford-Manchester
- Bradford-Manchester Airport service
- Calder Valley services through to Chester and Liverpool.
- The above to become “Northern Connect” branded services with new rolling stock.

We trust that the additional time to deliver these enhancements will be used to produce a service with the following characteristics:

- Robust timetable, allowing an improvement in reliability and punctuality (and crucially peak-hour capacity) along with the enhancements;
- Fair dealing between different operators. For example, Northern Connect regional express services on the Calder Valley Line to Manchester Airport, Chester, Liverpool, Blackpool, and
York should be planned alongside TPE services between the North East and Liverpool/Manchester Airport, not added in afterwards. The idea of TPE as the InterCity operator and therefore having precedence is out of date; given the number of passengers it serves daily and the increasing number of its strategic routes Northern should no longer be the “stopping train operator”;

- **Introduction of enhancements without damage** to service patterns and intervals for existing users (and indeed with restoration of connectivity withdrawn previously), whilst providing new journey opportunities for both local and longer distance passengers. **The bottom line should be that nobody gets a worse service than prior to 2018.**