



# TransPennine quick to gain speed with bold strategy for the future

Three new fleets of trains offering new, fast routes plus Wi-Fi and other up-to-the-minute changes will deliver passengers a transformative experience

by **Mike Cowley**

**R**AIL TRANSPORT IN THE NORTH is about to be transformed. “Where Next?”, the slogan of TransPennine Express (TPE), is about to be answered in a way that will provide the first real seismic shift for the sector since the pioneering Victorian engineers laid the track which underpinned the Industrial Revolution in the region.

As part of a major initiative to persuade people to leave their cars and travel by train, getting short haul flyers to opt for rail, the fastest growing oper-

ator in the UK is seeking to chart new territories in expanding the industry.

With three new fleets of trains on the way at a cost of £500m, these will not only be faster, more reliable, and have double the number of seats currently available, but will also provide a truly enhanced on-board customer experience. This will include thoroughly modern interiors and high quality Wi-Fi (that works) but also an on-board entertainment system allowing people to stream the latest films and TV shows directly to their mobiles.

The man in charge of what will effectively be a second revolution for rail in

the North is Chris Nutton, Major Projects Director at TPE, responsible for the introduction of not one but three new train fleets.

Chris has 17 years’ experience in the industry since joining FirstGroup as an Operations Graduate trainee. He has worked across the industry in, operations, fleet projects and commercial, including leading the battle against late trains as Head of Performance at both Northern and at Virgin Trains, before joining the previous FTPE franchise in 2010.

During 2014/15, he led the team developing timetable, infrastructure and fleet plans for FirstGroup’s winning bid for the new TPE franchise. To achieve this, he drew on a range of projects he had previously undertaken – from the introduction of new timetables and a new electric train fleet for TPE’s route between Manchester and Scotland to the collaboration with Network

Rail in the implementation of network upgrades such as the Northern Hub. His team are overseeing a 50% increase in fleet size with 220 new carriages be introduced over the next three years.

With expansion of its routes to include a service from Leeds to Edinburgh along the East Coast up to Scotland – as well as a new three times a day Liverpool to Glasgow service, Chris Nutton insists this is not “a question of nicking someone else’s piece of the rail pie but increasing the size of the pie for the industry as a whole.

“We are growing the overall rail sector encouraging more travel. This is not just predicated on easing congestion – though that is important – but enhancing the customer experience in a way that has not been possible until now.”

“Under the terms of our franchise, it’s our job to come up with creative commercial ideas and that is what we are

doing. At the same time, we never forget our key objective is to provide great connectivity right across the North and up to Scotland – joining together the principal cities.”

TPE has commissioned three new train fleets from both Construcciones y Auxiliars de Ferrocarriles (CAF) and Hitachi UK (see panel for details), both of which have an excellent track record in providing intercity trains for other UK/Irish operators. Due to variations in build time, this means they will need to be introduced at staged intervals over the next three years.

Capacity is going to be doubled with more carriages and more seats provided for the growing numbers of users.

By the end of 2020, most TPE trains running across the North route will run with five or six carriages compared to three today. When all three new fleets are delivered by 2020, there will be 50 per cent more carriages which will deliver



of – often empty – First Class, carriages as often happens on mainline routes as First Class is currently restricted to some 15 seats. However, with these seats now often full, the future plan is to dedicate one carriage to cater for First Class customers on each of the new longer trains when they come into service.

As part of the enhancements, faster journey times will also be introduced, for example, on the route between Liverpool and Huddersfield, a journey which currently takes on average one hour and 20 minutes but from May 2018, will take just over an hour. TPE recognises that capacity, frequency and reliability are the priorities for most people, with the new trains enabling them to fulfil this wish list.

The operator is also well-aware that the on-board experience for customers will be critical to its future success as this is the key area in which they can differentiate themselves from the frustrations facing drivers, particularly on motorways which are so often transformed into giant car parks.

With new fleets being “built from scratch”, this has enabled TPE to take advantage of the latest technology to keep their captive audiences contented, a key strategy in the rail revolution.

TPE is promising a new experience of Wi-Fi on the move as opposed to the current one of dropped signal strength during parts of the journey or total loss of it in tunnels. Working with specialist companies involved in providing Wi-Fi on the move, they are creating what is effectively a network within trains, then linking this to multiple external networks, switching in between them to pick up the strongest signal available.

“Until now there has never been a case for mobile networks to develop a rail network corridor,” says Chris Nutton. “So we are talking to suppliers with the objective of having an innovative Wi-Fi solution that will also work in tunnels as we have a lot of those on our Pennine routes.”

TPE is also introducing media servers to its trains which will allow access to content appealing to different customers for example catching up on the breaking news on shorter journeys such as Huddersfield to Leeds or relaxing with the latest movies and box set episodes on three hour journeys from Manchester to Scotland and vice versa.

“We want to provide people with as many reasons to use trains as we can,” says Chris, “and content to keep them entertained gives us a true competitive advantage because on our trains you have time to do what you want to do for business or pleasure.”

All these advances feed into the complex marriage between operating costs per mile and the amount of revenue generated for TPE to support its com-

an 80% uplift in peak time capacity into the five major cities in the North. Overall, with a combination of longer trains and frequency improvements across the week, there will be more than double the number of seats provided on the network connecting the principal cities in the North and Scotland.

A major timetable change is due to take place in May 2018 and further improvements will be implemented the following year. These will see an increase in daily TPE services between the North and Scotland from 16 to 35 by 2019 with longer trains, with similar improvements on other routes such as Manchester to Liverpool.

TPE customers have never suffered the irritation of walking past a string



Chris Nutton is responsible for the introduction of not one but three new fleets of trains at TPE

mitments for investment in services, to achieve its payments to government for operating the franchise and its shareholder value.

However, the consumer message is that this is not the race to the bottom as is the case of airlines but a race to the top – a case of offering significant enhancements to the rail service rather than the increasingly “no frills” approach adopted by the air sector.

All this is light years from the time Chris Nutton took his first train ride which he recalls as “chugging into St Pancras on a little old diesel train” on a day out with his family from their home in St Albans back in the early ‘80s.

Since then he readily admits that train travel, which unlike car driving

enables people to relax and look out of the window, “has fascinated me”. And he vividly recalls the day he saw his first High Speed Train: “The sense of scale in proportion to a car has stayed with me to this day.”

Born and raised in the Home Counties, Chris came up North to attend the University of Sheffield when he was 18 and he has remained in the region ever since. “I have now lived longer in the North than I did in the South so I’m an adopted Northerner.”

But why a career in rail?

“I sent out about 100 letters to get a job when I first came out of university and didn’t get many responses,” he said. “However, one did come from FirstGroup. This was a lucky break as

being a bit of a map geek, I was fascinated by the way all the routes linked up to make up the network and how many places were served.

“So I did a graduate scheme where I had the opportunity to see how all the elements of the system fitted together and it captivated me. If I hadn’t had the opportunity to see the full breadth of the activities needed to run a train, maybe I wouldn’t have stayed.

“But I soon found out that the rail industry is the place for me as it is for the vast majority of people who work in it. That’s why we have such a low turnover of people. If they stay for two years, they are normally in for the long haul.”

And the more Chris Nutton has become embedded in the rail industry in the North and its technological advances, the more he has developed a sense of awe as to the way the foundations of the industry were laid in Victorian times.

“How did they build this stuff 200 years ago just using spades and dynamite,” he ponders. “And they built it to last. When I’m in the three-mile tunnel between Leeds and Manchester and look at the brick lining – individual bricks laid for three miles up a hill – that’s simply amazing even by today’s standards.

“We owe a duty to our forefathers to live up to what they did but we too are doing some amazing things – with engineering and technology.”



New coaches under construction which the company says will give it a true competitive advantage when introduced

## Futuristic fleets are a game changer for rail travel

TransPennine Express is looking to three new train fleets to ensure it is on track to answer its own “Where Next?” question.

The first will be a fleet of carriages manufactured by CAF, which will contain 287 seats and will be hauled by a locomotive. They offer more than 100 extra seats per train, a 60% increase. The carriages will provide a high-quality travelling experience, and they are much quieter than other trains as there are no under floor engines. Doors are at the end of the coaches rather than at intermediate points which aids climate control and

gives a better travelling experience for customers travelling longer distances

The second fleet consists of new electric ‘Civity’ trains, also manufactured by CAF, each of which has 286 seats and will be capable of operating at speeds of up to 125mph. On all the new fleets a fully fitted kitchen will be provided to enable significant improvements in the catering offer to first and standard class customers.

The third and final fleet will be made by Hitachi in County Durham and will have 342 seats providing more than double the capacity, with an extra 161 seats compared to our existing Class

185 trains. These trains can operate on both electric and diesel power, including dynamic power change on the move and can reach speeds of up to 140mph. These new trains with sleek front end design are the image of modern high speed rail and are a “game changer” for the franchise.

The new trains will be designed with the customer in mind and will contain a modern interior with spacious, more comfortable seating. They will each offer not only fast, free Wi-Fi but also entertainment options allowing customers to stream films and TV shows on to their mobile devices. The

trains will also feature better real-time reservation and information systems plus access to plug sockets and USB ports at every seat.

First to arrive will be the CAF carriages which will operate between Liverpool Lime Street/Manchester Airport – Scarborough/Middlesbrough. Rollout starts in summer 2018, with all trains in service by December 2018.

These will be followed by the CAF ‘Civity’ trains which will operate between Manchester and Liverpool to Glasgow and Edinburgh via Preston with roll-out starting in in spring 2019.

Finally, there will be the 125mph

Hitachi trains – which will be able to run on both electrified and non-electrified sections of the track – and will operate on the Liverpool -Newcastle – Edinburgh and Manchester Airport routes which will be introduced between July and December 2019.

“The 125mph trains are needed for the East Coast route up to Scotland to avoid a bottleneck for other operators’ fast trains on the route” says Chris Nutton. Meanwhile TPE will be keeping 29 of our existing 185 trains which will each be fully refurbished providing new trains standards and facilities on the existing vehicles.