

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: Friday 12th December 2025

Subject: On the Right Track for Growth: The Greater Manchester Rail Vision to 2050

Report of: Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Portfolio Lead for Transport and Caroline Simpson, Group Chief Executive, GMCA

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to set out the “On the Right Track for Growth: The Greater Manchester Rail Vision to 2050” – a bold strategy for transforming rail in the city region and underpinning our next decade of growth. This vision positions Greater Manchester as the driver of rail-led growth for the North, with Manchester Piccadilly at its heart, and sets out the steps needed to deliver a modern, integrated, and high-capacity rail network by 2050.

Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Note and endorse the ‘On the Right Track for Growth - Greater Manchester Rail Vision’, which has been developed in partnership with GM Local Authorities, the GM business community (CBI, BTAC & Chamber of Commerce) and rail industry partners; and the subsequent next steps to develop a joint investment and delivery plan;
2. Note the update on the Railways Bill legislation;
3. Note the ongoing work to deliver Bee Network Rail Integration by 2030, including development work underway with Northern Trains Ltd to assess and scope the case for GM part-funding additional rail services in GM as part of a Bee Network Rail Integration pilot for the 24-month trial period between December 2027 and December 2029 (i.e. from 2027/28 onwards); and further note that a future update will follow, to include details of the service enhancements and a proposed funding mechanism, including any implications on the GMCA Transport Revenue Budget.

Contact Officers

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BOLTON
BURY

MANCHESTER
OLDHAM

ROCHDALE
SALFORD

STOCKPORT
TAMESIDE

TRAFFORD
WIGAN

Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

A detailed EQIA, Carbon and Sustainability assessment has been undertaken as part of the Rail Integration and Reform Business case.

Risk Management

Risks will be considered as detailed proposals and plans are further developed and considered.

Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations arising directly from this report.

Financial Consequences – Revenue

GM's emerging Rail Reform and Devolution proposition does not, at this stage, result in any material revenue (income and / or expenditure) implications. Financial consequences are, at this stage, limited to development costs which will be managed within existing budgets. Any subsequent revenue consequences will be detailed in future reports to GMCA. Furthermore, the value of revenue based funding required for additional GM rail services is still to be determined. Once this work is finalised, further updates will be provided to seek endorsement and any implications will be included in the relevant GMCA Transport Revenue Budget.

Financial Consequences – Capital

Not Applicable at this stage. Any subsequent capital consequences will be detailed in future reports to GMCA.

Number of attachments to the report: Nil

Background Papers

Greater Manchester Combined Authority - Friday 31st January 2025 - GM Rail Reform and Devolution – The Vision and Delivery Programme for Rail in Greater Manchester

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution ?

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

Bee Network Committee

11th November 2025

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Greater Manchester has delivered a decade of growth, consistently outstripping the national rate. Building on this success, the city region is now using its trailblazer devolution powers and a £1 billion Good Growth Fund to deliver the next decade of good growth – benefiting every part of Greater Manchester.
- 1.2. However, building good homes, employment, and regeneration sites cannot thrive without being underpinned by a bold vision for transport infrastructure. Over the last decade, Greater Manchester has laid the foundations for growth: integrating buses and trams, expanding Metrolink, and pioneering the Bee Network. Yet, current rail network constraints, congested corridors, limited capacity, and fragmented governance, hold us back. If transport is not to become a brake on growth, we need a phased, ambitious plan to expand and transform our rail network – one that aligns completely with the pipeline of growth projects across the city region. Breaking these constraints requires bold investment, deeper devolution, and a unified vision that puts Greater Manchester in the driving seat.
- 1.3. At the heart of our rail vision is Manchester Piccadilly – the beating heart of the network and the catalyst for growth across the North. Everything emanates from Piccadilly, driving connectivity and regeneration outwards to all ten boroughs and beyond. This approach mirrors the scale of ambition seen elsewhere: London has secured 42km of new underground infrastructure in recent years. Greater Manchester must now match that ambition with a plan that delivers transformational capacity, connectivity, and resilience for the next generation.
- 1.4. By 2040, we aim to expand Metrolink and rail to all boroughs, deliver metro-style services, and regenerate key hubs like Piccadilly and Old Trafford. By 2050, our vision is for a fully integrated, high-frequency, carbon-neutral rail network, supporting 75,000 new homes and £90bn in economic uplift across the North West – this can only be unlocked by going underground.
- 1.5. This report outlines the strategic building blocks for rail integration, reform and delivering the transformation infrastructure we need in Greater Manchester. It identified three core priorities to support the Greater Manchester Strategy and unlock growth:

- 1.5.1. **GM Rail Vision:** a clear short, medium and long term plan for rail as part of the Bee Network, including identifying how this transformation will be delivered
- 1.5.2. **Devolution and Reform:** securing a statutory role for GMCA in rail service specification, fares, and customer standards through engagement with Government on the English Devolution and Rail Reform Bills
- 1.5.3. **Rail Integration into the Bee Network:** phased integration of eight priority corridors by 2028 and GM wide rail integration by 2030

2. Greater Manchester Growth Led Rail Vision

- 2.1. The Greater Manchester Growth Led Rail Vision sets out a bold, long-term ambition for rail as a fully integrated part of the Bee Network and how rail needs to support GM's growth ambitions. It's a 30-year vision to transform the city region's rail system into a modern, high-capacity, high-frequency, and fully accessible network that supports inclusive economic growth, decarbonisation, and improved quality of life.
- 2.2. The development of the vision has been a collaborative effort, with TfGM working closely with rail industry partners, local authorities, and the business community. Rather than a top-down plan, it represents a shared statement of ambition, co-developed to reflect Greater Manchester's growth priorities and the opportunities presented by rail reform.
- 2.3. The Vision is structured around a phased 30-year roadmap to 2050:
 - 2.3.1. **By 2030 (Improve):** Integration of local rail services into the Bee Network, delivery of five new stations, upgrades to all existing stations to meet Bee Network standards, and the establishment of a local place-based delivery model. Early priorities include simplified tap-and-go ticketing, improved evening and weekend services, and planning for major schemes such as the Liverpool–Manchester Railway and underground connectivity.
 - 2.3.2. **By 2040 (Grow):** Expansion of Metrolink to all ten boroughs (using tram-train as needed), introduction of metro-style services on selected heavy rail corridors, delivery of new rolling stock, and regeneration around key hubs such as Old Trafford and Piccadilly.
 - 2.3.3. **By 2050 (Transform):** In GM's Rail Vision, Manchester Piccadilly is at the heart of transformational rail infrastructure driving economic growth across

the city-region and the North. This includes a new railway line between Liverpool and Manchester, via Liverpool Gateway, Warrington and Manchester Airport, extending on to Bradford, Leeds and beyond – providing national and international connectivity as part of the wider Northern Powerhouse Rail programme. GM's vision for NPR includes a new station at Manchester Airport and an underground through station at Manchester Piccadilly. An underground station is essential to maximise the economic growth, regeneration and transformational connectivity opportunity. This is to be complemented by further underground capacity and connectivity for local services (including for Metrolink), full decarbonisation of the rail network, and metro-style frequencies across the entire system. The Vision aims to double intercity rail mode share, support 75,000 new homes, and unlock £90bn in economic uplift across the north west area of the Northern Arc.

- 2.4. Delivering the Greater Manchester Rail Vision will unlock transformative benefits for the city region and for the UK. It directly supports the Greater Manchester Strategy's ambition for a fairer, greener, and more prosperous future, and aligns with national government policy priorities including levelling up, net zero, and infrastructure-led growth. The Vision sets out a clear pathway to improve access to jobs, education and training, expand the labour market, reduce road congestion through modal shift, and enhance rail freight capacity.
- 2.5. Realising these benefits will require a fundamental shift in how rail is planned, governed and delivered in Greater Manchester.
- 2.6. The Greater Manchester Rail Board (GMRB), as established through the 2023 Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal, has played a direct role in shaping the Vision, and the Rail industry has been actively engaged throughout its development ensuring the final document reflects a shared ambition and is positioned for joint delivery. This board will play a central role in driving this transformation, bringing together key partners from government, industry and local authorities to oversee delivery, shape investment priorities, and ensure the Rail Vision reflects the needs and ambitions of the city region.
- 2.7. Building on this role, the next phase will see GMRB members work collectively to take the Vision forward into delivery. This will include:
 - 2.7.1. **Developing a shared investment and delivery plan** that sets out the key moves to 2050, including the definition, prioritisation, and alignment of

schemes with definition of funding and delivery responsibilities;

- 2.7.2. **Establishing a future relationship with GBR** to formalise Greater Manchester's role in shaping services, fares, branding, and station delivery – ensuring local priorities are embedded in future rail planning and operations – enabled through the Railway Bill;
- 2.7.3. **Working with Central Govt to shape major regional programmes** such as the Liverpool Manchester Railway and wider Northern Powerhouse Rail, ensuring local needs are embedded from the outset and benefits are maximised. This includes TfGM and MCC continuing to make the case that it is essential that an underground station at Piccadilly is taken forward as part of the Liverpool Manchester Railway / Northern Powerhouse Rail. An underground station will enable transformational connectivity and economic growth across the north, including unlocking a circa 52 hectare development opportunity (nearly twice the size of King's Cross) at Piccadilly, Ardwick and East Manchester and accelerate the scale and pace for delivering Manchester's bold vision of a vibrant and thriving mixed use community bolstered by regional and national connectivity.
- 2.7.4. **Working to shape major city-region programmes including a tunnelled metro system.** Whilst the GM Rail Vision sets out clear plans to add capacity through longer trams and trains – and provide further connectivity through surface-level tram and tram-train extensions – this will not be enough by the middle of this century to keep pace with growth and opportunity. Three main tunnelled options are therefore now being explored, with connectivity to and from Piccadilly at the heart of calculating their potential economic benefits and examining the feasibility of their potential routes:
- 2.7.4.1. South-West to North-East Metrolink 'Relief' Line – this could broadly double the capacity of the existing Metrolink network (reducing crowding) and could provide significant new connectivity with faster journeys across the city centre. Some versions could potentially also allow National Rail trains to use the tunnel, further improving capacity and connectivity.
- 2.7.4.2. North-West to South-East National Rail 'Relief' Line – like London's Crossrail and Thameslink, Paris' RER and Munich's S-Bahn, this option could transform regional rail links across Greater Manchester, on an axis broadly aligned with the Castlefield Corridor

and Salford Crescent to Piccadilly.

- 2.7.4.3. North to South ‘Standalone’ Line – modelled on systems like Paris’ Line 14 or the Copenhagen Metro, this could run underground through areas where there are currently no tram or train lines, connecting major opportunity areas on opposite sides of Greater Manchester.

Rail Reform & Devolution

- 2.8. Central to the GM Rail Vision is ensuring we have the local powers and relationship with the rail industry to enable GM to delivery its growth ambitions. TfGM has been working closely with Government and shadow Great British Railways (sGBR) to explore what a future Mayoral Strategic Authority statutory role would look like for a reformed railway.
- 2.9. This work builds on the principles set out in GM’s consultation response to ‘A *Railway Fit for Britain’s Future*’, which GM strongly advocated a statutory decision-making role for Mayoral Strategic Authorities in the planning and specification of the rail network.
- 2.10. A statutory role would represent a step-change from today’s consultee role - shifting GM from being an ‘influencer’ to a commissioning role, with real control over timetables, fares, station enhancements, and corridor investment, and crucially, enabling it to integrate rail into a single, integrated Bee Network.
- 2.11. Nationally, Shadow GBR and the DfT have developed a Mayoral Partnership Framework, setting out how Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) and GBR will

GBR Mayoral Partnership Framework

In practice, MSAs may take a range of options in their area, e.g. having a local commissioning relationship on some lines, investing in others, with strategic collaboration on all rail services for their area



work together. The framework – summarised below - provides a clear pathway for deepening local involvement in rail planning and delivery, as local capability and governance arrangements mature.

- 2.12. To build on this concept, and in order to commence the development and design of GM's future role and alignment with GBR (and the wider rail industry) under reform and devolution, TfGM is embarking on a programme of 'co-design' with government, GBR and industry.
- 2.13. 'Co-design' will bring together all partners to collaboratively shape GM's Local Commissioning Partnership Model. This is a significant cornerstone of GM's approach to assessing and identifying what and how the operational and contractual elements of the current railway arrangements could change under an MSA statutory role with GBR.
- 2.14. The management and governance of 'co-design' work streams will be coordinated via a Partnership Development Group (PDG), consisting of TfGM, the rail industry, Shadow GBR and DfT Rail Reform colleagues, under the strategic direction of GMRB.

Railways Bill Update

- 2.15. The Railways Bill was formally introduced to Parliament on 5 November 2025, marking a major milestone in the Government's rail reform programme and the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR). The Bill represents a long-awaited step towards creating a simpler, more unified railway that brings track and train together under a single guiding mind.
- 2.16. The legislation provides for the creation of GBR as a new public body, responsible for leading and co-ordinating the rail system in Great Britain. GBR will oversee most passenger operations, manage the rail infrastructure, set strategic direction for fares and timetables, and be directly accountable to passengers, freight customers and taxpayers.
- 2.17. The Bill seeks to embed a more integrated, passenger-focused system by placing GBR at the heart of reform. It will provide the statutory framework for a national Long-Term Rail Strategy, an Access and Use Policy (AUP), governing how capacity is allocated across the network, and a new Passenger Watchdog to consolidate passenger representation.
- 2.18. For places like Greater Manchester, the Bill offers an opportunity to strengthen

local accountability and create new partnership mechanisms between Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and GBR. It introduces, for the first time, a statutory role for Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSAs) on decisions that may significantly affect local or regional passenger services, and for GBR '*to have regard to*' Local Transport Plans (LTPs) when developing its national strategies.

2.19. While these provisions are welcome, our initial analysis suggests that the Bill does not yet go far enough to embed the full partnership and devolution arrangements that GM has consistently advocated for. The proposed duties for various parties are relatively narrowly defined, and the Bill does not currently provide a clear statutory route for local commissioning; financial devolution; or formal Mayoral Partnerships, beyond enabling powers. These will need to be addressed to ensure we can deliver against GM's growth ambitions.

2.20. TfGM has mobilised a cross-functional team to scrutinise, track and influence the Bill through its Parliamentary stages, working closely with Government, sGBR, and other city-regions, via the Urban Transport Group. This will ensure that GM's priorities are reflected in both the legislative detail and the wider national reform programme. Key lines of engagement will focus on securing:

- A formal GM–GBR Partnership Framework with defined local roles and accountability mechanisms;
- Explicit recognition of Commissioning Partnerships as a legitimate model for local involvement, including associated financial arrangements;
- Clear safeguards within the Access and Use Policy to protect devolved and locally specified services;
- Transparency in regional finance and performance reporting to support future performance monitoring, local accountability, integration and deliverability;
- Stronger recognition of democratic accountability, ensuring GBR operates transparency in service of government nationally and Mayora local; and
- The ability to request for full devolution.

2.21. TfGM will continue to brief local authority officers as the Bill progresses through Parliament, providing updates on milestones, amendments and implications for GM's reform and devolution agenda.

3. Bee Network Rail Integration (BNRI) Update

3.1. As set out in the GM Rail Vision, the journey has begun on delivering real local and

customer benefit now and over the next 4 years. BNRI will bring local rail services into the Bee Network to provide a fully integrated multi-modal transport offering and will deliver improved services; accelerated accessibility improvements at stations; rail stations to Bee Network standards whilst enhancing and integrating the customer experience; and will introduce multi modal PayGo ticketing, and unlock housebuilding and regeneration opportunities around stations. A map showing the BNRI phased delivery approach and timescale can be found in **Appendix A**.

- 3.2. The following provides key updates on the progress across each of the identified delivery pillars within the BNRI programme:

Service Enhancements and Performance

- 3.3. TfGM, working alongside the industry have identified a number of potential enhancements to services within Greater Manchester, which could be delivered by supplementary external funding from the City Region.
- 3.4. The basis of this arrangement is still being finalised, but the general principle is a pilot to test the approach, with detailed cost/benefit assessment and analysis to determine the feasibility of the pilots being a viable model for wider rollout under the BNRI programme and more broadly a potential blueprint for our rail reform and devolution proposition.
- 3.5. The first tranche pilot would extend service levels on weekdays and Saturday evenings to support the night-time economy, and serve as a test bed for demonstration of new ways of cross-industry working and collaboration with an MSA, as well as evidencing the benefits that any potential future programme of more ambitious service enhancements might deliver in the future.
- 3.6. The first tranche pilot will include stopping services on three corridors; Manchester Airport, Alderley Edge, and Rochdale. The pilot scheme is set to run for 24 months, from December 2027 to December 2029. An initial review of the pilot's progress will be conducted after the first 12 months. A future update to GMCA will include details of the service enhancements and a proposed funding mechanism, including any implications on the GMCA Transport Revenue Budget.

Infrastructure

- 3.7. The infrastructure programmes comprise both the Access for All Programme and the construction of proposed new stations within GM.

- 3.8. The Access for All Programme provides accessibility improvements and step-free access to priority GM Stations with the objective to make all GM stations accessible through a rolling programme of projects based on CRSTS & DfT Control Period Funding Awards.
- 3.9. The accessibility improvements are being delivered through tranches of projects which comprise two to four stations in each. Funding from DfT (CP6 & CP7) and match funding from GMCA through CRSTS 1 and TCR have been allocated to deliver a rolling programme of design development & construction working in collaboration with Network Rail and Northern Trains Limited. The tranches and relative status are as follows:
- Tranche 1 (Main Programme): Daisy Hill & Irlam (and mid-tier schemes at Bredbury & Rosehill) – works complete.
 - Tranche 2 (Next Tranche): Bryn, Hindley (incl. Hindley Travel Hub), Reddish North & Swinton – construction starts in November 2025 with target completion March 2027 for all four schemes.
 - Tranche 3: Levenshulme, Flowery Field & Newton for Hyde – Outline Business Case is completed with a contract to be awarded in November 2025 to progress the detailed design with target to complete for October 2026, and construction to complete in Spring 2028.
 - Tranche 4: Bredbury, Woodsmoor & Davenport – the Tender is due to be issued in November 2025 for the initial design development to Outline Design. Construction target completion is Summer 2029.
 - Tranche 5: Broadbottom, Hall 'ith Wood, Moorside & Hattersley – an Expression of Interest has been issued with tenders due to be issued in early 2026 for design development. Construction target completion is Autumn 2029.
- 3.10. The New Stations Programme includes new stations at Golborne and Cheadle (both due to complete construction in 2028), with the stated objectives of improving travel links to Manchester whilst supporting the regeneration of the local area as well as encouraging active travel; and the now completed enhancement works at Salford Central to improve the customer experience of the existing station by modernising and repairing various elements to make it more befitting of the local area.

Customer Experience

- 3.11. Work continues to mobilise interventions for uplifting GM rail stations to Bee Network standards whilst enhancing and integrating the customer experience across rail. The physical works are to be rolled out across three distinct phases, with the first critical milestone for delivery being Phase 1 by 13 December 2026.
- 3.12. A hybrid delivery strategy – comprising TfGM and the rail industry - is now in place to fully utilise resources and optimise delivery of the Phase 1 interventions. Network Rail will lead on the delivery of painting and miscellaneous works, with TPE and Northern retaining responsibility for CCTV/Help Points/Customer Information Screens/PA install/upgrades alongside the roll out of their equivalent Business Plan programme. TfGM will lead on the installation of Bee Network branding and multi-modal display screens.
- 3.13. Some near term early outputs are anticipated, including rail station information being incorporated within the Bee Network Website and app by Spring 2026 and more joined up customer information by the summer.
- 3.14. Work is also ongoing to finalise the Bee Network Design Guide and branding, together with the sequencing of its deployment. This is a key consideration in finalising the proposals for progression of the physical works referenced above.

Fares & Ticketing

- 3.15. Aligned to the Government's plans to modernise the railways - and to make using rail simpler, more flexible and passenger focused - rail passengers in Greater Manchester will benefit from more convenient and straight-forward journeys when the currently complex range of train tickets are replaced by four set product options in December.
- 3.16. Presently, multiple types of tickets are currently available for journeys on certain routes, including many which restrict customers to travelling on a particular service, or with one train operating company.
- 3.17. On 7th December, this will change to a clearer retail offering, where everyone who buys a ticket on the day they're travelling between two railway stations in Greater Manchester, will be offered the following options:
- Anytime single
 - Anytime return

- Off-peak single
- Off-peak return

- 3.18. Importantly, this streamlining of tickets will make the products valid on rail services run by all operators; and single tickets will be half the price of return journeys. Tickets will be available to buy at the 96 stations in Greater Manchester and online. This new offering aims to make journeys more transparent, so passengers can trust they have got the best value ticket for the journey they are making.
- 3.19. The new system is designed to also make journeys simpler and more flexible, not increase revenues for train operating companies. Overall, the change will mean that the average fare in Greater Manchester will fall by 5.6%.
- 3.20. More than half of train journeys (52%) in Greater Manchester will be cheaper, with customers saving up to £1.50 on some trips, as many single fares will be reduced to ensure they are half the price of a return.
- 3.21. It could also save money for around 4,000 customers a week who are not currently getting the best deal, by unintentionally using anytime tickets to travel during off-peak periods. On the remaining 48% of journeys, customers will see a slight price increase. But for most of these trips (85%), it will be a rise of 20p or less.
- 3.22. A range of tickets will still be available to customers who book online before the day they travel. Station ticket offices will continue to accept cash payments and print paper tickets. Railcard discounts will still apply and the season tickets currently on offer in Greater Manchester will remain unchanged.
- 3.23. Greater Manchester will be one of the first areas in the country to benefit from this type of rail fares reform, which will also pave the way for contactless payments; and integration with the Bee Network. The first phase of PAYG on Rail will launch at 17 stations across the Glossip and Stalybridge lines in December 2026 with further work underway to finalise the business case to extend the scheme to be a full multimodal proposition, delivered in phases across all GM stations by 2030.

Regeneration & Development

- 3.24. The BNRI programme will support Greater Manchester's contribution to both regional and Government focused objectives of boosting housebuilding and driving regeneration.
- 3.25. Working in partnership with GMCA, Network Rail and wider partners, this work stream will identify and bring forward development opportunities by unlocking and

integrating railway land into the Bee Network.

- 3.26. This approach will support the release of land around key stations – including, but not limited to: Ashton, Stalybridge, Castleton and Cheadle Hulme. Unlocking land parcels near these stations for new housing will bring more people within walking distance of rail services, helping to grow heavy rail ridership and increase the number of new homes.
- 3.27. A dedicated working group has been established, and further updates will be brought to GMCA as the work progresses.

Appendix A - Map of the Bee Network Rail Integration Phases

