TravelWatch
NORTHWEST

Tel 07807 768124
Email: admin@travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
Website: www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk
Correspondence address – 11 Harvelin Park, Todmorden, OL14 6HX

Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport (2013)

promoting quality public transport……

Steve Berry,
Department for Transport,
Zone 2/14,
Great Minster House,
33 Horseferry Road,
London, SW1P 4DR

10th May 2019

Dear Steve,

Light Rail (and other rapid transit solutions)

1. Introduction

1.1 TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing users of all forms of public transport in North West England. We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on this consultation.

1.2 This is a welcome and long overdue change of attitude from the Government. Successive governments have over the past thirty years blocked well developed light rail schemes promoted by PTEs and local authorities, even after initial approvals and millions of pounds of investment by local authorities in plans, economic justification and obtaining Parliamentary or Transport and Works Act powers. In particular, Alistair Darling when Secretary of State for Transport cancelled the light rail schemes for Liverpool, Leeds, South Hampshire and all the Greater Manchester Metrolink extensions and then Boris Johnson when Mayor of London cancelled all the light rail schemes in London including Cross River Tram and extensions to Croydon Tramlink. In total these projects had cost perhaps over £200m to reach stages where they could have been implemented.

1.3 The official reason given by Alistair Darling for cancelling the light rail schemes was excessive cost increases but at that time many highway scheme costs had also risen, some by much more than the light rail costs and yet not one highway scheme was cancelled. In London the cost of the tram schemes was modest compared to Crossrail and yet Crossrail has been built but none of the tram schemes.

1.4 Many smaller towns and cities undertook feasibility studies in the 1990s and 2000s which could have resulted in attractive tram schemes. There is no doubt that trams would have been very popular options in many places. But authorities were discouraged to proceed any further when they saw cities like Leeds and Liverpool having their projects cancelled at very late stages after considerable investment. The chances of any smaller city tram schemes proceeding were nil.

1.5 The figure of 3,000 passengers per hour is questionable. Manchester Metrolink only had a capacity of about 2,300 passengers per hour when the first phase opened in 1992 and even now most routes have a maximum peak capacity of about 4,200 passengers.

1.6 Para 3.5 is a very brief reference to tram-train. The Sheffield – Rotherham trial has been a long, long time in coming to fruition. We have mixed views on tram-trains, which to some extent have their origins in the conversion of existing rail lines to light rail, vis. Manchester to Bury, Altrincham and Oldham. This had the effect of isolating these routes from the national rail network and removing some traditional on train facilities such as, certainly in the Oldham case, on train toilets. Also the conversions have contributed to integration (or lack of) considerations as set out in 1.13 below. There is currently a concern surrounding proposals, albeit tentative, to convert the Manchester Piccadilly to Hadfield/Glossop line and the Marple line to tram-train operation. Local users of the current rail service are worried that electrified, comfortable trains with toilets and space for bikes could be transformed into slower, lightweight, toilet-less, non-bike-carrying vehicles. There is also the issue of integration with the heavy rail network as outlined above and in 1.13 below..

1.7 Para 4.6 describes the benefits of light rail as experienced by the systems that have been built in the UK. It is encouraging to see the Government at last recognising these benefits and they must now provide for the development of light rail schemes in many more cities so that these benefits can be achieved on a much wider scale throughout the UK.

1.8 Para 4.8 refers to population size between 200,000 and 600,000 for light rail. This would bring in many towns and cities which currently would not even attempt to develop light rail. In France even smaller cities have new tram systems.

1.9 The conclusions are strongly supported.

1.10 Para 5.2 again refers to flows of 2,500 to 3,000 passengers per hour to justify light rail. On this basis the very sucessful Metrolink tram system in Manchester would not have been developed. These figures should be treated with caution.

1.11 Para. 5.4 is particularly important, segregation is an essential characteristic to achieve reliability.

1.12 Para 5.8 refers to integration which we strongly support but which cannot be fully achieved with deregulated bus services (outside London). Also with rail - for example in our latest Annual Review we noted the following regarding Manchester Metrolink –

1.13 As Metrolink expands, there is a need for greater integration with other modes especially through ticketing with rail services. Unfortunately, no progress has been made such that -

- It is still not possible to buy a ticket from Metrolink stations to any national rail station outside Greater Manchester (e.g. Bury to London).
- National rail tickets routed via Manchester originating or finishing outside Greater Manchester and involving a change of station between Piccadilly and Victoria do not include travel on Metrolink.
- Other deficiencies include routing anomalies as the system grows. For example, a ticket from Hebden Bridge to Oldham would assume route via Victoria rather than the more convenient change at Rochdale. It could be cheaper to buy separate tickets in these circumstances.
- By and large (with some exceptions e.g. Oldham) National Rail Enquiries does not recognise any Metrolink station even though there are through fares from rail.

1.14 It can be added that if anything integration with bus services in Greater Manchester is certainly no better and probably worse.

1.15 There are several factual errors in this document e.g. including Tyne and Weat Metro and Docklands Light Railway as tramways. They are light rail but are not tramways as they do not operate on street. The Chinese system mentioned in 3.4 is not light rail or tramway but is a form of guided bus. It has been used in Rouen, France since 2001. Section 3.8 implies that PRT systems are new. In fact they have been under development for over 50 years but have never developed beyond prototype systems and are a 'red herring' for urban transit applications.

2. Specific Questions.

Q1 What is the potential scale of the opportunity for further light rail (or other rapid transit) systems to be introduced in England?

2.1 The potential scale of opportunity for light rail in England is enormous. Most towns and cities over 300,000 population have a need for better public transport and light rail could fulfil that role.

Q2 Is there an appetite for new systems to be introduced in our cities and towns?

2.2 There is considerable appetite for new tram systems but it is currently strongly suppressed because of past experience of Government cancellations. Note the success in Manchester.

Q3 Is there evidence to support this appetite?

2.3 Yes, evidence can be found in many places but particularly in the proceedings of the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group (APPLRG) and enquiries undertaken by the House of Commons Transport Select Committee.

Q4 What would the environmental, economic and congestion benefits be?

2.4 As described in Para. 5.6 for Salt Lake City**,** the benefits are many and include not only faster and more reliable journeys but also environmental and health benefits. Electric systems are much more efficient and less polluting than diesel. More frequent services aid businesses to operate more efficiently, and bring more customers to them. Tram systems aid more use of public transport especially in congestion prone areas thus helping to alleviate that problem

Q5 What impact would it have on jobs?

2.5 By widening the catchment area for employers, tram systems significantly increase job opportunities. Many cities now are difficult to access by car due to congestion and lack of adequate parking and suburban rail services, where available, are overcrowded. There are also jobs created in the construction and operation of the system.

Q6 Does light rail open up new housing or business developments or improve the urban fabric of the area?

2.6 The planning of a light rail route network must be fully integrated with existing and future development, particularly in serving locations of high traffic generation. It should link town and district centres, major hospitals and schools, universities, shopping centres and bus and rail interchanges as well as major residential estates.

Q7 What can we learn from the experience of other countries in adopting new systems?

2.7 The experience of light rail in France is particularly relevant to England. The French Government set the scene in 1973 and there are now nearly 30 new tram systems with more planned. In Germany also there has been much development. For example, Stuttgart pop c. 650,000 has a fully integrated tram, bus and rail system with full ticket integration. Britain has decades to catch up.

Q8 What issues have helped progress light rail schemes or acted as barriers to their development?

2.8 Issues that have helped progress are support and funding from central government and the engineering and planning expertise in local authorities

and local political support. Traffic congestion and the harmful effects of exhaust fumes on the atmosphere has also contributed to the case for Light Rail. Barriers are the high capital cost, disruption during construction, difficulties with statutory undertakers' services and sometimes local public opposition although that has usually dissipated when the system opens.

Q9 What and where are the future opportunities here in England for new light rail systems or alternatives?

2.9 Most towns of 250,000 population in the UK are potential opportunities for light rail. In France tram systems have been built in much smaller towns, some less than 100,000 population. Lists of possible towns have appeared in various publications. Tram systems are currenly being proposed in Cambridge, Coventry, Bath and Preston but many more could follow. The greatest need is in Leeds, the largest conurbation in Europe with no tram, light rail or metro system. There is also scope for more extensions to the existing light rail systems, some possibly using tram-train technology. LRT should also be seen as part of the public transport solution. Co-ordinated public transport needs to be the norm in multi modal areas, where ticketing covers all modes, all operators, to make public transport easier and therefore more attractive for passengers to use.

Q10 What are the key issues that are preventing light rail schemes from being delivered?

2.10 Key issues are funding and lack of Government support. Complex planning legislation can often delay schemes and there can also be resistance if a scheme requires some businesses to relocate, even a short distance, if a new LRT scheme needs to run through where an existing building currently stands.

Q11 How can we deliver systems within a budget as has happened?

2.11 Schemes need to be delivered quickly as otherwise inflation will escalate costs. Contractors with proven records of in budget and timely success on similar projects should be used together with established contract supervision companies.

Q12 What are the key lessons from Europe in progressing light rail and in what way are these different to the U.K.?

2.12 Key lessons from Europe are funding and integration. All other countries have three levels of funding, state or federal, regional and local. In U.K. there is only one level, central government. In other European countries, light rail is part of an integrated public transport network. In the UK it has to compete with deregulated bus services, except in London.

Q13 What does the future of light rail look like with new generation transport schemes coming forward?

2.13 New generation transport schemes are unlikely to make any significant difference to light rail in the future, apart from technical advances that may reduce costs, for example the need for overhead power supply.

Q14 How do you see light rail aligning with new initiatives such as autonomous vehicles; cycling and walking; and wider Mobility As A Service initiatives?

2.14 Light rail should be planned with cycling and walking as part of an integrated transport strategy. Autonomous vehicles are not likely to make any difference in the foreseeable future. Indeed, private vehicles, autonomous, electric or otherwise require valuable city centre space to park. Tram, light rail using off road routes except for short city centre stretches and carrying 30+ people per vehicle minimise traffic nuisance and do not need city centre parking space making cycling and walking more pleasant. Any light rail system should be planned as part an overall transport strategy which must include cycling and walking.

Q15 How can promoters leverage funding from sources beyond central Government?

2.15 The only other significant source of funding in the UK beyond central Government has been European grants and loans but these will no longer be available. In addition to any Local Govt or Transport Authority Funding the potential for commercial and housing growth around new stations and light rail routes makes the consideration of a property tax or increased council or business rates possible and funding contributions from developers along the route could be made from conditions of planning similar to Section 106 obligations. So far though, private sector contributions have been small and very difficult to secure.

Q16 Is there an appetite for considering Very/Ultra-light rail or Personal Rapid Transit as an alternative transport solution to light rail?

2.16 There may be a role for Ultra light rail in some smaller towns but these systems have been under development for at least thirty years and only one has been implemented, in Stourbridge. Although it has performed well and is very low cost, it has not found any other application. Personal Rapid Transit has been developed for over fifty years but has yet to find any significant urban application. It may find occasional use in specialist functions as at T5 in Heathrow.

Q17 What are the estimated costs of delivering such systems and the wider benefits on offer? Please provide evidence.

2.17 Costs are very system specific but cost data is available from various sources, notably UK Tram and the Urban Transport Group. Wider benefits comprise environmental and health benefits, urban regeneration, reduction of congestion and air pollution and 'city liveability' as widely reported from other

countries and some UK systems e.g. Manchester and Nottingham. French tram systems are worth studying, particularly Besançon where costs have been carefully controlled.

Q18 Should such a system be a concept that is promoted?

2.18 Yes.

Q19 How would this system provide a positive contribution to the economic productivity and development of a city or town? Please provide evidence.

2.19 We have a magnificent example here in Manchester where we have an expanding tram service and a booming city economy. For example we believe that the BBC move to Media City was linked to the tram link. Easier access both to and through the City Centre is a factor - one on which Crossrail is partly based. In London the Canary Wharf development would almost certainly have failed or been immensely less successful without the construction of the Docklands Light Railway. See also for example monitoring studies undertaken for UK light rail systems and information available from UK Tram and UTG.

Q20 What are the barriers for developing such systems, particularly those with elevated sections? For example, public acceptance, or environmental sensitivities?

2.20 The main barrier has been capital costs and lack of Government support for light rail schemes. Elevated sections should be avoided except where absolutely essential, tramways should be at ground level to afford easy access. Public acceptance is usually easily obtained provided the system has been well designed and adequate public consultation maintained.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,

John

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary