

# **TramForward**

## *Campaigning for Light Rail*

**PRESS RELEASE FROM *TramForward***

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**Transport experts confirm that light rail for Leeds IS realistic and affordable and could be started with the NGT £250 million**

**Light Rail for Leeds is realistic, affordable and could be started with the £250 million of public money available from the cancelled NGT scheme, was the unanimous conclusion from the Light Rail for Leeds summit held in the city yesterday (Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December).**

Manufacturers, operators, engineers and promoters of other tram systems came together at the special event, organised by Light Rail (UK), and presented plans and the economic case for light rail, as well as highlighting advances in technology for both trams and track. The summit was proposed by Leeds North West MP, Greg Mulholland, who is Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group, and included people from other Core Cities that already benefit from light rail as well as Elmet & Rothwell MP Alec Shelbrooke, Harewood Councillor Ryan Stephenson (both Conservatives) and former Nottingham Labour Councillor Steve Barber, who led the campaign for the Nottingham tram phase 2 and firmly believes Leeds needs light rail.

The summit demonstrated that light rail for Leeds is realistic and affordable, and that a project could be started with the £250 million of public funding on the table, supplemented by private investment, with a number of proposals put forward.

Tony Young, now retired but a leading advocate of light rail in the UK who is widely regarded as the 'father of the Manchester Metrolink' said that £250-£300 million would deliver a 15-30km starter line and he put forward several options, concluding that the best way to start would be linking the city centre with Stourton Park & Ride.

Preston-based TramPower, which wrote to Leeds City Council in June and didn't even receive a reply, explained how technological advances meant that a tram system could be delivered at a much lower cost than the Supertram scheme cancelled in 2005. They showed that £250 million could indeed deliver light rail for Leeds. TramPower have just been given planning permission to construct a trial tramline in Preston.

Tim Kendall, a former engineer for the Department for Transport, confirmed that plans for a tram-train on the Leeds-Harrogate-York line would work and with a link to Leeds Bradford Airport, something that might never happen if Leeds City Council proceeds with its plans for a 'parkway' station and a costly road link.

Many of the experts were critical of Leeds City Council's decision to invest £180 million of public money into buses. In a presentation by Roger Harrison, former Chairman of the highly successful Nottingham Tramlink consortium, the audience heard that traffic congestion in Leeds is predicted to more than double in the next thirty years, with passenger numbers at Leeds City Station reaching similar levels per year to those at Gatwick Airport. This level of footfall, he said, is far greater than can be served by a bus and taxi-only network, and that an integrated light rail solution would be a far better investment for the city than yet more buses.

Andrew Braddock, Chairman of the Light Rail Transit Association, said that the Department for Transport were "abdicating their responsibility" by simply allowing Leeds City Council to spend taxpayers' money on whatever they liked and that Ministers had a duty to say what the grant envisaged for the trolleybus scheme, which the NGT promoters were allowed to keep in an unprecedented move, should be spent on. It was illogical for it to be put into additional buses when Leeds traffic was at gridlock proportions and he

added that if all political leaders in the West Yorkshire Combined Authority backed a light rail scheme, it could and would get the go ahead – as happened in Manchester and Nottingham.

Steve Barber, who was a senior Labour councillor on Broxtowe Borough Council, was highly critical of former Labour Chancellor Alistair Darling, and pointed out that Nottingham and Manchester campaigned hard for tram extensions when they were turned down, yet Leeds ended up with nothing. He described Nottingham City Council's long term plans for eight light rail lines, when Leeds City Council are not even planning for one and referred to the fact that of the five core cities to be served by HS2 four – Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and Nottingham all have modern tram scheme and one (Leeds) has only buses.

Nick Mallison, from Warwick University Manufacturing Group, presented the case for ultra-light rail systems and John Parry, Chairman of Parry People Movers, referred to the successful operation of his ULR vehicles on the Stourbridge Town shuttle service which could provide a template for tram connections in Leeds with lighter demand.

Other manufacturers were also present including tram supplier Stadler Rail, whose Sales Director, Veronique Ramadi, flew in from Berlin to address the summit on the wide range of options for tram and tram-train vehicles (as builder of the latter for Sheffield).

Commenting, Jim Harkins of Light Rail (UK) said: "Thanks to everyone who came to the Light Rail for Leeds summit. It was clear from all those who presented today that light rail for Leeds is affordable and can be finally got underway with the £250 million of public money on the table. With more and more evidence coming out on the health effects of diesel emissions and particulate matter, we need to look beyond putting ever more buses on our roads. Have we got the right to continue with such a policy when we know that people will be harmed by it? Leeds need to properly invest in convenient, environmentally friendly mass transit and not just think it can deliver change by more of the same, including more buses on already congested streets."

Greg Mulholland, Member of Parliament for Leeds NW and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group, added: "Thanks to Light Rail (UK) for bringing an impressive array of experts together from all around the country and abroad to Leeds to discuss the opportunities for light rail in the city. The summit clearly showed that with real political will we could and should get started with light rail in Leeds and the consensus was that the £250 million of NGT funding should be used for this. Leeds is the driver of the regional economy, and it needs a transport system to match. Leeds City Council's plans to spend the money on a series of questionable smaller projects will not deliver the transformative change that the city's public transport desperately needs".

"We have wasted millions and millions of pounds on a number of failed schemes", he added, "yet now that we have over £250 million and a number of feasible proposals on the table the only thing standing in the way of a fully integrated light rail scheme is Leeds City Council itself".

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. **TramForward** is the campaigning arm of the Light Rail Transit Association (LRTA).
2. The LRTA is the world's leading organisation campaigning for better public transport in urban areas through light rail, tramway and metro systems and has been in existence for more than 75 years. It also supports the revitalisation of suburban and rural transport through the application of light rail and TramTrain technology.
3. The LRTA acts through its network of local branches, which campaign for better transport in their areas.
4. Membership of the LRTA costs less than 14p a day. To join, visit [www.lrta.org](http://www.lrta.org) or write to the Membership Secretary, LRTA, 38 Wolsley Road, Sale, Greater Manchester, M33 7AU. Members receive the monthly magazine *Tramways & Urban Transit* - written and read by experts in the field - and gain other benefits including discounts on videos and books, tours of transport systems and cut-price admission to selected transport museums.
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