



A tram viewed from the Nottingham Eye

Picture: Paul Clark

Tram-trains at last

An idea long advocated by Railfuture after being successfully tested in Germany has been given a chance to prove itself to rail-unfriendly Britain.

Tram-trains, made famous in Karlsruhe, are to be tried out on the 37-mile long Penistone line between Huddersfield, Barnsley and Sheffield in two years time.

There are suspicions that some officials at the Department for Transport are determined to make the tram-train experiment fail.

For one thing, the gradients between Barnsley and Penistone are fearsome.

But there are signs that the Government is not so hostile as it once was to trams.

South Yorkshire Metro chairman Ryk Downes said: "We have been to Germany where tram-trains have been working very successfully."

"Tram-trains would be a way of increasing capacity on the busy Leeds, Harrogate, York line, and the reduced costs of running them would provide new opportunities to run lines into town and city centres, extend routes into areas of growing employment and create a much-needed link to Leeds Bradford International Airport."

Five new vehicles are to be bought and there are hopes that the tram-trains could be linked to Sheffield's tram system.

But Railfuture member Andrew Long said: "The Germans were very clever with track gauge and flange depth in Karlsruhe and Kassel. I'm not sure whether the British have taken this on board."

"This expedient enabled the Germans to run trams on both heavy-rail and the town tram tracks without too many problems."

In fact the idea may make the Government's eco-towns proposals palatable. An eco-town served only by roads or busways is a contradic-

tion in both theory and practice. But if tram-trains are approved, a network could, for instance, be developed based on the Luton-Dunstable line, the former Aylesbury-Cheddington line and the old Wheathampstead line.

There was more good news for trams when Manchester's £244million Metrolink extensions to Oldham, Rochdale and Chorlton were given the go-ahead in May.

The 14-mile extension to Oldham and Rochdale will take over the existing loop line and open in 2012.

The two-mile-long section to Chorlton in south Manchester will open in 2011 and will re-use the disused railway line between Trafford Bar and Chorlton.

A further extension to Droylsden is being funded locally.

A map of Metrolink and its expansion plans can be found at www.gmpte.com/pdfmaps/07_0752_73112_A4metnet.pdf

In Wales, the Welsh Highland Railway has plans to rebuild the tram track across the town centre of Portmadoc.

In Japan, Toyota and Hino have developed a modern version of the Roadrailer first used in Britain in the 1930s.

The vehicle, below, has both steel wheels and rubber tyres and can navigate both road and railways on the island of Hokkaido.

It can carry 25 people, using only 25% of the fuel used by a normal bus.



Severnside

By Nigel Bray

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■ ■ The branch has called for an Integrated Transport Authority for Greater Bristol in order to develop rail and bus services to the level and standard achieved by PTAs in seven regional conurbations.

We pointed out that, in contrast to the rail networks of other major British conurbations, the Bristol area has a lot of catching up to do because of line and station closures in the 1960s.

■ ■ The need for better marketing of local rail networks, so that improvements are justified by increased usage, was a theme in the talk given to the Branch AGM on 26 April by Keith Walton, Chairman of Severnside Community Rail Partnership.

He instanced SCRPs plan to make Clifton Down station more visible by means of a large sign on the road overbridge. The Partnership had successfully lobbied for the reintroduction of direct trains between Cardiff and Taunton in the December 2007 timetable and was now promoting awareness of services from Highbridge station by means of a leaflet drop in the local area as a joint venture with Somerset County Council.

SCRPs knew that many people were deterred from using unstaffed stations which were perceived as drab or unsafe. It had secured help from Rolls Royce to improve CCTV at Patchway, while at Avonmouth it had been assisted by AXA Insurance and nearby residents in the removal of graffiti from a station wall, which now displayed silhouettes of local schoolchildren.

■ ■ The formal part of the AGM re-elected the existing committee, together with Bruce Williamson as media spokesman. It also voted to contribute to the cost of a leaflet being developed by Gerard Duddridge to campaign for restoration of direct trains between the South West and Lancashire, Cumbria and Scotland via the West Coast main line. Stephen Wade described Network Rail's recent launch of its Great Western Route Utilisation Study, which he had attended in Bristol. He noted that the RUS now aimed "to operate, maintain, review and develop the network", so that it could consider new or reopened lines, finance permitting. NR will be holding further consultations over the next 18 months.

■ ■ A long and determined campaign by our corporate member Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways, supported by Railfuture, has won an enhanced service on the Severn Beach line from 18 May.

Sunday services and three trains every two hours on weekdays between Temple Meads and Avonmouth, are being funded by Bristol City Council until 2010.



Campaigner Cat Hobbs, left, from the Campaign for Better Transport and her fellow Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways went to Clifton Down station on day one to publicise the improvements – including a Sunday service – which was achieved by the Half Hour Train Campaign which began in 2007.

Bristol City Council agreed to the improvement after 3,000 people said it was the city's most important financing issue. FOSBR vice-chair Joe Patrick said: "It is a welcome improvement and we hope it will prove the importance of local rail services and their ability to reduce traffic congestion."