

# Nottingham Express Transit

**Colin Lea, communications officer for Nottingham Express Transit gave members at Railfuture's annual general meeting in April some of the background to the first light rail route for Nottingham.**



Nottingham Express Transit Line One is the first stage of a network of light rail tram routes for the Greater Nottingham conurbation. It will operate to the highest standards of quality, convenience, and security. It is funded by a £200million Private Finance Initiative.

The 21st century version of the tram, or light rail, system has become an increasingly popular intra-city mode of transport as our over-reliance on the car has proved to bring significant problems with it.

The comparative lack of noise and air pollution from these electrically powered vehicles is another strong argument in their favour – not only when compared with their closest vehicle “cousins”, buses and trains, but even more so in relation to cars, which carry the fewest people and cause the worst pollution and congestion.

Trams also present a more accessible form of public transport by providing level access on to and through the vehicle, as well as having a number of other features for passengers with disabilities.

Continental Europe and America have already seen how effective these systems can be at helping to reduce congestion and pollution, moving large numbers of people around cities and playing a significant part in regenerating the areas they run through.

A number of systems have recently begun operating, in Manchester, Sheffield, Croydon, Birmingham and Wolverhampton, and the UK Government has backed this relatively new development in Britain by announcing in 2000 that it wants a further 25 light rail systems to be created over the next 10 years.

NET Line One was already under construction at this stage, but the promoters of this scheme, Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council, will be competing for Government funds made available for light rapid transit systems to achieve their goal of providing a comprehensive tram network serving the whole

of the Greater Nottingham conurbation.

NET will help to reduce the growth in traffic congestion by improving the public transport system and encouraging modal shift. It will provide employment in system construction and operation, improve accessibility to employment and training opportunities, encourage urban regeneration, enhance land and property values and bring road safety savings of £5million.

## Why trams?

In a city the size of Nottingham it is not advisable for a number of transit systems to co-exist, so the choice of development had to be weighed up very carefully. The reason we chose trams for Nottingham can be summed by the benefits listed below:

**Capacity and speed** 200 people every six minutes travel up to 50mph, outperforming buses and cars.

**Reliability** Rail-based transport with junction priority over other traffic is highly reliable, especially when a high degree of segregation can be achieved.

**Environmentally friendly** No local pollution, reduces traffic and consequent pollution.

**Comfortable, accessible and easy to use.**

**Integrated system** Works with other modes of transport, especially buses with through ticketing and the use of concessions and travelcards on trams and

buses, to help to discourage car use.

**Safe running** through pedestrian, residential and urban areas.

One question usually asked is why are we using the route of the Robin Hood Line? Fundamentally, trains and trams are very different.

Trains are generally suited to inter-city routes where trams are good on urban routes as they accelerate and decelerate quicker to serve 23 stops and directly penetrate the city centre, university, Old Market Square and other places, not just the station. They can also run alongside traffic safely and cater for short journeys across the city.

The system is expected to carry over 10 million passengers per year, taking 2 million car journeys off the roads.

The Bombardier INCENTRO tram fleet consists of 15 vehicles (13 used at any one time) which are 100% low-floor and comply with the Disability Discrimination Act. They can travel up to 50 mph, strictly reduced on street. The vehicle can negotiate 1:12 gradients and curves down to 18m radius.

Anyone who would like further information can contact me at the number below or by email. Our website includes a lot more information. Please check it out.

Tram Hotline: (0115) 915 6600

Email:

tram@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Website:

www.nottinghamexpresstransit.com

## Rail bosses with blinkers

Train operators ignored protests and went ahead in April with their scheme to undermine the Network railcard which provides discounts for travellers in London and the South east.

Their arguments for withdrawing discounts on fares less than £10 were shoddy to say the least and look like greedy opportunism.

The only justification for massive public investment in the railways is if the rail industry can provide a useful transport service to the whole population, including those who do not have much money.

Many rail services are already exclusively for rich people and those on business expenses. The rail network becomes accessible to many people only if they can benefit

from discounts. Until recently, the network railcard, had allowed a family to travel at a reasonable cost with each child being carried for only £1 return. It is surprising that a government supposedly so committed to doing something about “social exclusion”, did nothing to stop the train operators making this mistake.

Perhaps government ministers are fooled by their own spin to believe there are few social exclusion problems in the south east of England.

The network railcard also had the advantage of making people feel that by buying it, they were committed to regular rail use.

If there is a big drop in railcard take-up, it will be a big financial blow to the companies apparently so desperate for cash.

Time and time again when Railfuture members are trying to generate support for rail, we are told the biggest obstacle to using trains for most people is the cost.

What is a real insult – following the network card changes – is to watch the many trains leaving London contra-peak, particularly those running down to the Sussex coast, virtually empty. It was these trains that became accessible with a railcard.

The best thing the train operators could do now would be to recognise the need for a national railcard. It should have the dual function of filling empty off-peak trains but also making the network available to the majority of taxpayers who currently find trains too expensive but have to subsidise their use by “fat cats”.

## Killer roads

Safety experts are examining the cause of the crash of the Cambridge Cruiser at Potters Bar on 10 May which killed seven people.

The Networker carriage remained virtually intact throughout the crash and only three people on board were killed.

A slam-door train, many of them still operating in southern England would probably have fared worse.

The inquiry will continue and action will be recommended to make rail safer.

On that day, as on every other day, an average of nine people were killed on the roads. For most of those road crashes there will be no meaningful inquiry and there will certainly be no remedial action.