

BRIDGING THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

In the first of a series on rapid transit schemes, Paul Coleman examines the projects hoping to take passengers for a ride, beginning with

Cross River Tram in London

Light rail, metros, trams and guided buses offer a diverse range of solutions to the growing urban transport problem of shifting large numbers of travellers across short distances.

The involvement of some of the largest transport companies strongly indicates that light rail networks are commercially sustainable and viable – once they are up and running. Regional development agencies and local authorities are keen on rapid transit as a means of connecting regeneration areas, new retail parks and converting disused railway lines. High frequency services, with conveniently placed stops at short intervals, have proved highly popular with passengers.

The big question is whether the design, development and construction of new and revamped light rail projects are affordable, given the high capital costs involved. Does the Private Finance Initiative route provide sufficiently tempting bottom-line profits for the large transport and construction conglomerates that command the cash and possess the know-how?

The Government is unlikely to ask the taxpayer for the cash for the foreseeable future. Former transport secretary Alistair Darling refused to inject public funds into rapid transit schemes, notably Leeds Supertram, South Hampshire Rapid Transit and Liverpool-Merseytram. Extensions to Manchester Metrolink have been delayed and Blackpool Tramway's

revamp has withered following the Government's refusal to invest public money.

Darling's successor, Douglas Alexander, has the chance to adopt a fresh approach to rapid transit. However, the driving factor could again be public demand for light rail solutions.

The Cross River Tram (CRT) concept challenges the most parochial way that many Londoners mentally map their city, namely, the 'norf' and 'sarf' river divide. North Londoners perceive that civilisation grinds to a bizarre halt at Elephant & Castle. For south Londoners, north London's ungainly sprawl really starts at what is seen as the jumped-up junk market that is Camden Town and at Kings Cross with its deeply dodgy street-scene history. But CRT promises to link north and south Londoners to the West End's shops, offices, entertainment centres and transport hubs.

CRT is an instance of how regeneration is increasingly driving the development of extra light rail/tram capacity in London. Transport for London and a gaggle of London boroughs genuinely believe the project could be the catalyst for tangible economic and regeneration benefits, linking residents of 50 of London's defined economically and socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods with central London's expanding universities, PFI-injected hospitals and vibrant shopping and business areas.

'Maximising regeneration benefits is a key objective,' says a TfL spokesman. 'TfL is working closely with Southwark Council to integrate the tram with the regeneration schemes at Elephant & Castle, the Aylesbury Estate and the North Peckham area.'

Gentrification in Brixton and the regeneration of both Peckham and Kings Cross Central are seen as potentially lucrative and growing markets for a street tram business like CRT. Camden Town's perpetually

'Douglas Alexander has the chance to adopt a fresh approach to rapid transit'



Mock up of a tram running alongside traffic on London's streets.

overheating property market and boisterous retail scene also promises to spin money into CRT. The aim is to facilitate street tram technology that slices through central London, connecting Camden, Kings Cross Central, Brixton and Peckham with the delights of Theatreland, the Museum Mile and the South Bank. Annual ridership is calculated at 66m journeys. Trams will depart every four minutes leading to a timetable pattern where trams will run every two minutes in central London. CRT is planned to start service in 2016, providing funding is secured and construction doesn't go the way of Wembley Stadium.

One of CRT's key transport goals is to relieve overcrowding on tubes and buses between Euston and Waterloo and to provide a direct route from south and central London to Eurostar's St Pancras International terminal. CRT passengers will be able to use their Oystercards. TfL says that CRT 'will operate after a competitive tender', which is also planned for the new north-south London rail route, the East London Line extension.



The Cross River Tram would link Camden, Kings Cross, Brixton and Peckham with the West End, Kensington and the South Bank.

'One of CRT's key transport goals is to relieve overcrowding on tubes and buses between Euston and Waterloo'

The suggested 16.5km route consists of a core central London route between Euston and Waterloo stations. Branches will veer to Camden and to Kings Cross in the north and, in the south, to Brixton and Peckham. The CRT will interchange with 12 Underground stations and four mainline rail stations.

The cost of CRT's construction is initially estimated at £641m. TfL says that 'a variety of possible funding schemes will be examined'. The development of the CRT design is part of TfL's £10bn five-year investment programme. Consultation starts in the autumn of this year. A preliminary public consultation exercise in 2000 hoisted a 92 per cent claim of public support for CRT.

The driving force behind CRT is the Cross River Partnership that sees Transport for London and Network Rail working alongside the boroughs of Camden, Westminster, Lambeth, Southwark and the Corporation of London. CRT represents a major challenge and opportunity for the partnership. Can it create new economic and regeneration opportunities by forging physical ties between central and inner London areas north and south of the Thames?

TfL estimates that the benefit:cost ratio of CRT is currently estimated at 2.1:1 at net present value. 'We are working with our partners to assess the wider economic benefits on job creation and employment,' adds the TfL spokesman.

London TravelWatch believes trams are generally appropriate where proven demand exists. A spokeswoman explains that 'the devil will be in the detail' with CRT but adds: 'Anything that relieves overcrowding on the Northern Line will be worth examining.'

Not JUST
a pretty face...



The New MASTERSCAN flaw detector series

...it's loaded with talent too

Exceptional Near Surface Resolution
High performance 450V programmable pulser
Minimum range 1mm, maximum 20 metres
Interface trigger for water path compensation
High PRF suitable for high speed scanning
Robust design, Transflective screen display

www.sonatest.com

Tel: 01908 316345

Quote Ref: RP0706

