

In response to today's announcement by Transport Minister, Alistair Darling that he will not give the go-ahead to Leeds Supertram, a furious Metro Chairman Cllr Karam Hussain said,

"This is a disgraceful decision which reflects the Government's lack of any clear policy on transport or on the development of the cities and regions outside London and the south east.

"What is the point of the Government publishing grand strategies such as its 'Northern Way', which claims to be a strategic plan to increase investment and economic drive across the north and which cites Supertram as an important element, and then turning the scheme down like this?

"Transport affects all aspects of life including 15% of total business costs but the region suffers from a £200m Department for Transport underspend every year.

"Where is the strategic thinking?" he asked. "Does the Government's left hand know what the right hand is doing?"

Councillor Hussain went on to say that Metro already had proposals in place for taking transport forward in Leeds and would need to look in details at what the Department for Transport is offering for bus services, although Metro has always made clear that buses are the second-best option on the proposed Supertram routes.

"In the light of this negative decision by the Government, what we need are some quick short-term benefits," he said. "We need park-and-ride schemes with bus and rail interchange and more bus quality corridors to transport people into and around the city.

"We are going to sit down with the Department for Transport and key stakeholders to draw up a plan but we need a commitment from ministers that they will support that plan in principle and with resources so that we can then go on to deliver it.

"We have also considered alternative strategies in terms of how we might still deliver transport solutions along the original planned Supertram routes and also develop new strategic links into other areas.

“This may be through more efficient use of the rail network or possibly through new technology such as lightweight tram-trains which would reach out across West Yorkshire using a combination of existing heavy rail and new light rail schemes such as in Karlsruhe and Saarbrücken in Germany..”

“With the backing of the business community, Metro, the West Yorkshire Councils and Yorkshire Forward, will be drawing up a picture of this county’s real transport needs in the short, medium and long term.

“But,” Councillor Hussain warned again, “there is no point in embarking on any of these plans unless we can make sure we have a commitment from the outset that this Government is genuinely interested in investing in the West Yorkshire sub-region.

“Otherwise we face the prospect of Government policy on transport for West Yorkshire continuing to be dealt with in the same nonsensical and haphazard way as at present.”

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For further information, contact Metro’s PR Office on 0113 251 7214.

Notes for Editors

Metro is leading the development of a 20-25 year vision setting the interventions and schemes that are required to ensure that West Yorkshire's transport network is 'fit for purpose' supports economic growth sustainably and maximises accessibility for all.

This vision will be developed in parallel with second West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan due for submission at the end of March 2006. It will be used to lobby government for additional resources and to support the development of the City Region Development Plan and the Northern Way Growth Strategy.

It will also provide evidence for a submission as part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

Metro has commissioned consultancy firm Arups to lead the work on the vision including consultation with key stakeholders.

Tram trains

Tram-train systems use light rail vehicles but combine heavy rail running with on-street operation. This type of system enables tram vehicles to share railway tracks with conventional rail rolling stock but to also leave the rail network and run on-street in the same manner as a standard tram system. Tram-train systems have several significant advantages including a high passenger carrying capacity, potential for fast journey times

and a high quality image. Tram-trains can be powered by electricity, diesel or a combination of both.

A further key advantage of tram-train systems is that they can provide increased penetration into the city centre by leaving the mainline railway lines and running on-street through the city centre area. As well as benefiting passengers this also helps to "free up" capacity at main line rail stations.

Examples:

- Bremen, Germany
- Saarbrücken, Germany
- Mulhouse, France (currently in development)

More info at:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tram-train>