



ABFLY newsletter

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TRAM CONSULTATION OPEN

Following the announcement on Friday 30th October 2009 by Transport Secretary Lord Andrew Adonis, the joint Department for Transport (DfT) and Herts County Council (HCC) scheme to convert the Abbey Line to tram operation was officially opened for public consultation on Monday 4th January 2010. The consultation runs until 31st March 2010.

At the moment, trains on the Abbey Line are operated by London Midland as part of a franchise let by the government. The DfT proposes that control of Abbey Line services will be passed to HCC, which will allow the council to contract an operator to run trams along the route instead of trains. This will allow a more frequent service, which will benefit passengers and encourage more people to use the line, thus relieving congestion on local roads.

Details of the consultation can be found online at www.dft.gov.uk/abbeyline. Or, if you would like a copy to be sent to you free of charge, please write to:

Abbey Line Consultation, Department for Transport, 4/31 Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DR

You can also request a copy by email. Send your request to: abbeyline.consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk.

ABFLY will be seeking expert advice as we prepare to respond to the consultation on behalf of our members. The ABFLY response will be published with the next newsletter. Of particular importance are the legal aspects, as the line must 'officially' be de-classified as a main line railway and re-classified as a light railway for the scheme to go ahead. In order to do this a 'Statutory Instrument' (SI) must be prepared and put before Parliament. The SI is currently in draft and is presented as an Appendix to the main document.

Please do obtain a copy of the consultation and have a good read of it. You may like to consider your own individual responses, but we believe there is greater value in collating all of your views into one document so please write to us with your comments, concerns or suggestions. So that we can review and assimilate your views in good time, please respond to us by **Friday 26th February**. The address is:

ABFLY Tram Consultation response, c/o John Webster, 17 Faircross Way, St Albans, AL1 4RT
E-mail: john.w.webster@ntlworld.com

TRAM SCHEME FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(extracted from Section 4 of the DfT's consultation document)

- 1) Why are you doing this? To get a more frequent service for passengers on the Abbey Line and attract new passengers.
- 2) Why not do it as part of the London Midland franchise? London Midland has worked hard to deliver a good service on this line but the limit has been reached on providing more services with conventional heavy rail. This option provides passengers with the best and most cost-effective option.
- 3) Why would this operation be cheaper when there will be more services? We are allowing potential operators to use light rail technology (trams) and we believe that this will allow them to run more efficiently. Trams are smaller and cheaper than the four car trains currently running and by using trams the proposed new passing loop where they would pass each other on the single line would be cheaper to construct.
- 4) Why use trams and not buses to replace this service? Trams will give a more frequent service using the existing rail infrastructure – the rails, the stations, the overhead lines – with little modification. To use buses on the route would mean ripping up all of that and replacing it with a road and then connecting that road to the rest of the local road network. The up front costs would be large, it would probably not provide any benefits to passengers over a tram service and the line could never again be used for rail.
- 5) What will the trams be like? We expect to give potential operators a considerable amount of freedom with respect of the type of rail vehicle used on this line. We are not specifying a particular type of vehicle as we want potential operators to tell us what they can provide to meet Hertfordshire County Council's requirements. It is likely that the trams will be similar to those running in many European cities currently.
- 6) Will I have to stand? There will be seats on the tram – but inevitably fewer than on a four carriage main line train. At peak time some people may have to stand. However, the maximum journey time on the line is only 16 minutes and most passengers are on for much less than this. In addition, the increased frequency of the service will partially balance a loss of seats per departure.
- 7) What about access for people with disabilities and priority seating? Access will be an important consideration for the operator of this service. We aim to improve on the existing arrangements which already have access for wheelchair users and priority seating.
- 8) Will there be lots of disruption in the construction? There will inevitably be some short-term disruption associated with the change. However, most of the track and stations will not be significantly changed and whilst there may be closures for short periods, we believe the disruption will be relatively small compared with the benefits of a much improved timetable. The construction will be the responsibility of the new operator and the sponsors of this project will ensure that they understand the importance of minimising disruption.
- 9) When will this happen? We will carry out consultation over the next few months followed by procurement during 2010 with the service currently anticipated to start towards the end of 2011.
- 10) Isn't this just a way of getting out of spending money to upgrade the line properly for proper trains? This is about delivering more frequent services for passengers in the most cost effective way.

TRAM SCHEME – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS continued....

- 11) Will I be able to buy a through ticket to other destinations off the line (eg London or Glasgow)? The intention is that they will continue to be available.
- 12) Will there be conductors? This is a decision for the operator.
- 13) Why are you proposing to transfer responsibility for the line to Hertfordshire? The line will be a local transport facility and therefore would best be managed locally and not from Westminster.
- 14) Who is paying for all of this and how? This change from trains to trams will enable savings to be made. The Department for Transport will make funding for these trams available from these savings.
- 15) Is the tram option a specific solution for this line or part of a wider Government plan to cut rail services on smaller lines? There are no wider plans to change services on smaller lines. We believe that a tram is the best way to increase service frequency on this particular stretch of line. The Abbey Line is a unique line where it is possible to simply replace the heavy rail service with a more frequent tram service. Having said this, there is no reason why any useful lessons learnt could not be applied elsewhere.
- 16) Where will the maintenance shed go? Decisions about what maintenance facilities will be needed and the best location will be a matter for the operator.
- 17) Will this mean overnight noise? Maintenance will be the responsibility of the operator. We expect them to behave as good neighbours to local residents.
- 18) Will there be a later service? This is to be confirmed and subject to affordability but it is recognised that the current service finishes relatively early.
- 19) Will the investments that London Midland have committed to continue? (e.g. Customer information system, new Help Points, new shelter) What about the investments they have already made (e.g. ticket vending machine at St Albans)? London Midland is continuing with their programme of investment under their franchise agreement. Which investments will transfer to the new operator will be determined nearer the time of transfer.
- 20) Could the line be converted back to heavy rail? Yes, but the expectation is that this will be a permanent arrangement as there would be costs involved with reversing any change.
- 21) What about the existing staff? London Midland will be keeping their staff fully informed of developments
- 22) Will these changes allow through running on to the main line at Watford Junction? We do not expect through running to be possible. There have been no direct trains to London from this line for many years and there is no chance of them restarting as there is no capacity on the line from Watford to London.
- 23) Are there any plans for additional platforms at Watford Junction or St Albans Abbey to facilitate more journeys? The aim is to increase the frequency of the service and make it more attractive. It would be for the operator to decide whether extra platforms are needed to achieve this – but it is not obvious how additional platforms would facilitate more journeys.
- 24) Will new stops be considered, e.g. Asda / Sainsburys Garston, Sopwell St Albans and the BRE in Bricket Wood? New stations are not part of the initial proposal. However, if there were to be local support and funding available, it would be much easier to install new stops in the future with a tramway, albeit that this line already has a lot of stops for its length.
- 25) Has this been agreed with Network Rail and London Midland? Both parties are aware of these plans and are cooperating in getting appropriate agreements in place.
- 26) I understand the line will be on long lease from Network Rail to HCC. Does this mean that the existing protections afforded to heavy rail lines would still apply? All parties are committed to ongoing long term operation of this line. We have proposed that alternative statutory closure provisions should apply, ensuring that consultation would still need to take place before the line could be closed.
- 27) I understand we are using the term 'trams' and not 'tram-trains'. Is this correct? Does this scheme bear any relation to the tram-train project in Sheffield? It is proposed that trams are used on the Abbey Line, although the precise type of vehicle will be for the operator to propose. This is because there is no requirement to operate with heavy rail vehicles on the line, which will be separated from the main line and therefore trams are suitable. Learning from the hard work in Yorkshire will be of some use on this project, however the Yorkshire schemes are more complex and rather different as they are either diesel tram trains running with other heavy rail services or involve electrification of freight lines and running between existing heavy and light rail systems.
- 28) The use of second-hand trams from Europe is inferred in the DfT press release. Does this mean you intend to buy second-hand or rather adopt an existing design? This will be for the operator to decide – however, the economics will probably mean re-use of existing trams.
- 29) How many trams will you need to operate the service? Again this is up to the operator and will depend on frequency, the size of the tram and assumptions about requirements for maintenance and growth in patronage.
- 30) Will the trams run off the existing overhead AC electric supply? Once again, this will be a decision for the operator. It would be possible to have transformers fitted to existing trams to run from the current system (some tram-trains do this and obviously lots of dual voltage electric multiple unit trains do it too) or the operator could decide that the best way forward is to convert the overhead.
- 31) Will platforms have to be lowered or lengthened? This depends on the vehicle, but initial thoughts are that there should not be a need to have major changes. The platform at Bricket Wood may be extended so that a loop could be installed in the same way as the new Penryn Loop in Cornwall (this design would avoid having two platforms and the issues associated with passengers crossing the track).
- 32) Will there be a passing loop (or two)? We anticipate that there will need to be a loop – the number and location will depend on the frequency of the service. Assuming 30 minutes, one loop would be required – almost certainly at Bricket Wood.
- 33) Will signalling be 'line of sight'? Subject to the views of the operator, signalling will be 'line of sight' with rigorous control on the occupation of the single line sections, in a similar way to other modern tram networks.
- 34) What other expected infrastructure works are there? Will the line be closed or kept open for the duration of these works? There does not appear to be a need to have major construction works (other than one or more loops and potentially a small maintenance facility). There may need to be a service suspension for some of the works to ensure they can be done safely and efficiently. However, this is not expected to be a protracted process.
- 35) Do you envisage a wider network, e.g. extensions through Watford/St Albans or to Hatfield? This is not included in the proposal we are taking forward at present. However, obviously this is a longer term possibility if there is a local demand and suitable funding can be found.