

# Plans for Leeds Supertram Axed

## “Plans do not represent value for money” says Darling

The Government announced last night that it would not reinstate funding for the Leeds Supertram scheme, proposed by West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (PTE) and Metro, following suspension of funding in July 2004.

Alistair Darling, Government minister for Transport, said that whilst the decision was regrettable “the costs of the scheme had escalated considerably” and “[the proposed scheme] does not represent the best value for money for the people of Leeds or the best use of public money.”

Members of all parties in the council condemned the decision - Liberal Democrat City Council leader Mark Harris, called the decision “a slap in the face for the city” and Conservative councillor Andrew Carter said the government had let down the people of the city.

The plan, which has been over 10 years in the planning, was designed to relieve congestion in Leeds by encouraging people to leave their cars in vast out of town car parks and instead commute on a number of supertrams - large trams which could carry up to 200 people and would travel along 21km electrically powered light rail network. It was proposed that there would be 3 main tram routes carrying 19 million passengers a year, 40% of whom would have been former car users, across the city from Headingley to Kirkstall.

In a statement, Mr Darling suggested that the Super-

tram would be less efficient and more expensive than the alternatives proposals, put forward by West Yorkshire PTE, of an improved rapid bus service. “Such a scheme would involve superior vehicles, high frequency services and some dedicated busways to ensure efficient journey times.”

Cllr Karam Hussain (Lab), a Metro Chairman a person who has championed the project for over 10 years disagreed “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?”

Jonathon Brown, of Yorkshire Forward, a body set up to promote investment in the Yorkshire region, agreed with Mr Hussain that the tram represented a lost opportunity for Leeds but conceded that the Government decision was “probably correct.” “The Government at present, must support the project which offers the best value for money and it appears that unfortunately the Supertram did not offer this.”

One of the concerns held

by some bodies in the city such as Leeds Civic Trust was that the tram system would be an eyesore in Leeds’ historic centre but Leeds Civic Trust responded that “these concerns were allayed by the excellent design standards guide produced by the Leeds Supertram Team.”

Metro, West Yorkshire PTE and Department of Transport will hold a series of meetings into the New year to review plans for improvements in rail and bus connections in the region and attempt to reach a consensus over transport proposals.



A simulated image of the proposed Supertram. Courtesy: Leeds Supertram Group

## Leeds Tram Plans Derailed

With Christmas fast approaching I know that there are many demands upon your charity but I ask you to consider this desperate appeal. The Supertram, once the brave new face of the Government's much vaunted "Northern Way" now limps disconsolately to the scrap heap of scrapped Northern projects. All of them in their time, destined to solve a major problem in our region – in Supertram's case vehicle congestion in the centre of Leeds- all praised by Westminster politicians keen to prove interest in Northern affairs, all lavished with extravagant budgets. But then after elections had been won and every government department started to clamour for increased funding, politicians forgot their lofty

promises to fund Northern projects.

The Supertram is a particularly good example of this all too common breed. First proposed in 1991, the scheme was leapt upon by politicians of all parties touting light rail as the answer to Northern ills of traffic congestion and leading to the publication of the Leeds Supertram Bill in 1993. It was a popular scheme, capturing the public mood of the people of Leeds who have (myself included) long grumbled about the lack of public transport in Leeds and the difficulty of finding reliable transport connections. The plans garnered support from organisations such as Leeds Civic Trust who praised its "stunning design" and Leeds

Chamber of Commerce who estimated it would increase business.

But yesterday Supertram was sent to the scrap heap. The Government tell us that the proposals no longer represent value for money and it is true that costs have risen from £500 million to £800 million. But survey those transport projects in the south such as the Jubilee line extension which ended £1bn over budget. And the government's dithering upon the subject has already cost £40 million. There can only be one explanation- this is the final straw of a Westminster Government not willing to spend money upon projects outside the M4. So this Christmas, spare a thought for the people of Leeds, stuck in the rush-hour traffic.

### Supertram- is there a future?

Trams have been seen before in Leeds. Until November 1959 trams travelled across Leeds, carrying in their heyday over 800,000 passengers a month. But after ten years of planning it would appear that plans for a new Leeds tram are also over. What are the possibilities now?

? Metro appeals the decision by the Department of Transport (Dft). This appears to have the backing of Leeds City Council but is unlikely to happen- there is no precedent for such an action.

? The money allotted for Supertram is spent upon an increase in guided bus routes and services, potentially coupled with the increasing of train services from surrounding districts. Probable- Dft have stated it as their aim and Metro has promised to "investigate the idea."

? Road- charging is introduced to reduce congestion. Dft are refusing to comment upon this but there have been previous suggestions from Westminster sources that this is a possibility.