



DEVON METRO – A SUMMARY

Introduction

1. Devon Metro is a scheme for the integration and enhancement of rail services in the Exeter travel to work area, now being progressed by Devon County Council (DCC). This paper summarises the expectations of the Avocet Line Rail Users Group (ALRUG) for the scheme, and although the views expressed are those of ALRUG, it has been prepared after extensive consultation with DCC, Exeter City Council (ECC) and First Great Western, the incumbent Train Operating Company.

The Case for Devon Metro

2. Exeter occupies a vital strategic position as the gateway to the South West peninsula: all major routes pass through it. The city has a vibrant and expanding economy. Over the last ten years it has been the seventh largest in the UK for job creation. Exeter University, itself the 25th fastest growing business in the UK, is consolidating its position as a major research centre and centre of excellence. The successful relocation of the Met Office in 2004 has attracted many other technology businesses. Exeter is a major retail centre, and the imminent arrival of John Lewis is a further indicator of confidence in the city's long term economic prospects.

3. The Exeter and East Devon Growth Point, a government supported initiative for the expansion of the city, will involve the building of over 25,000 houses in the next 15 years and the creation of 20,000 jobs in the same period. The main areas of housing development are the new town at Cranbrook, and urban extensions at Newcourt and Monkerton which are all either on or beside existing railway lines. The plans also include a science park, plus a business park and intermodal freight terminal at the airport.

4. Roads to the city centre are congested and operate at capacity during the peaks. There is limited parking and little scope for increasing it. ECC has therefore invested heavily in public transport, principally through a park and ride network, together with a comprehensive network of cycle routes. Planning policy measures, *e.g.* limiting parking spaces in new employment areas, have been implemented to try and reduce the numbers of journeys to work into the city by car, and remodelling of key road junctions has been undertaken to improve traffic flows. So far, there has been little investment in rail.

5. The city is well served by its railways. Unusually for a city of its size, there are eight stations within the city boundaries. Exeter Central station is, as its name suggests, well sited for the city centre. There are five routes radiating from Exeter, four of which carry a substantial amount of local traffic. Of these the lines to Exmouth, Barnstaple and Waterloo were reduced to single track with limited passing facilities in the 1970s; this rationalisation imposes severe operating constraints, and they are now operating at or near track capacity. A general shortage of rolling stock is effectively stifling current demand, but while longer trains may alleviate current overcrowding they will only help but not solve the problems of future growth.

6. Within the next 15 years Exeter will have undergone a major expansion, both in housing and employment opportunity. The pressure on public transport will be even more intense, and the railway has the potential to play a much greater part in meeting the transport needs of the city. But the current lack of capacity means that it handles only a fraction of the potential traffic. Unlocking the unused potential of Exeter's railway network will in turn help to unlock the city's economic potential. A successful local network will involve more than reacting retrospectively to increased passenger numbers; experience elsewhere shows that frequent, reliable well marketed services will generate a major increase in patronage which will more than justify the relatively modest investment required.

The Scheme

7. There are three principal elements to Devon Metro. The first is the provision of new stations to provide rail access to the new housing developments and major employment areas. The second

involves improving the train services to provide a regular clock-face timetable with frequency and train capacity matched to demand. This should also include the branding of train and stations together with an effective marketing and ticketing strategy. Lastly, there is a need for improvements to the infrastructure to provide the necessary line capacity.

New Stations

8. Four new stations have been identified in the Exeter area, with a fifth – Edginswell - on the Torbay line. Of the Exeter stations, planning for that at Cranbrook is already well advanced and the necessary funding identified. The other three are Marsh Barton, to serve the major industrial estate on the west of the city, Newcourt (where a major housing development is already part complete) and Hill Barton to access the Monkerton urban extension, Met Office and Science Park. There is a strong business case for all three (see attached diagram), and they are currently being progressed – albeit slowly- through Network Rail (NR) project development stages.

Service Patterns

9. Current cross-Exeter services are based on an hourly Exmouth-Paignton and an hourly Exmouth-Barnstaple schedule giving two trains per hour (tph) between Exeter and Exmouth. Local stations towards Honiton generally get a two hourly frequency from the hourly Waterloo service. A way will need to be found to improve services on this line to provide 2tph to Cranbrook. A need for an additional hourly Paignton service has also been identified, and a new service to Okehampton may be required in due course. These services should go through to Exeter Central - the hub of Metro services - but cannot terminate there for operational reasons: where they should terminate east of Exeter is not yet clear as track capacity in either Exmouth or Waterloo directions is limited. There is a good case for additional trains to go to Exmouth; the attached diagram shows that this line is where the main demand lies, and it will also ensure that Hill Barton, Digby and Newcourt, the three stations serving the city's main employment complex, get an adequate service.

Infrastructure

10. Two principal capacity improvements are required. The first is to enable a 4tph service on the Exmouth line, initially as far as Topsham. The geography of this line means that tight scheduling is required to achieve a 30 minute interval service, and the planned new stations can only be accommodated with gaps in the stopping pattern, meaning that many stations would only see one train an hour. Increasing the frequency will require some infrastructure improvement but will enable a sensible stopping pattern with all stations on the line getting at least 2tph. It can be done by re-instating double track between Exmouth Junction and a point near Hill Barton station, some 2.6km, with relatively modest signalling changes. Further extending the 4tph service from Topsham to Exmouth will require an additional loop at Lympstone, and more complex signalling changes which may well need to wait until the whole area is re-signalled in the about 2026. The other infrastructure change is the need for additional platform capacity at Exeter St Davids, where the steep bank between there and Exeter Central imposes severe operating constraints. These could be alleviated by adding a single crossover between the local platforms and additional signals to allow each platform to be used by two trains at once.

The Way Forward

11. Although Devon Metro is included in the new Devon & Torbay LTP3 and appears to command widespread public support, there is as yet no formal plan for this scheme, nor is there any structure involving all the stakeholders to drive the project forward and secure the necessary funding. This must now be the priority.

Contact

12. The ALRUG contact for all matters relating to Devon Metro franchise is Noel Harrison, Vice Chairman, who can be contacted on 01392 877425 or r.n.c.harrison@gmail.com.