

# HARROGATE LINE - bid for "metro" trains!

*(Embargo until 22.30 Thursday 14/07/11)*

## Proposed new scheme to electrify and upgrade the Harrogate Line

Following their recent success in persuading East Coast Trains to bring back the first direct services from London to Harrogate for 25 years, Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce is now bidding for a complete upgrading of the Harrogate Line train services between Leeds, Harrogate, Knaresborough and York. Thanks to the technical expertise of Mark Leving, the former MD of First Hull Trains, they have found a potentially affordable solution to the recurring complaints of overcrowding, poor quality and inadequate frequency of trains on our local line.

Chamber Chief Executive Brian Dunsby said that this project also responds to the recent report by Sir Roy McNulty entitled *"Realising the potential of GB Rail"* which challenges the high cost of the traditional ways of running a railway. The full McNulty Report Section 19 envisages lower-cost regional railways operating on segregated lines with lower-cost lighter-weight trains that can stop and start quicker than conventional heavy rail. It suggests that such services could be managed locally with timetables and fares set in response to passenger demand and recommends that these principles should be further developed and piloted in a number of locations so that they can be refined before wider roll-out. *"This is just what we are proposing – a McNulty pilot on the Harrogate Line"* said Brian, who personally presented a summary of the Pilot Proposal to the Minister of State for Transport Theresa Villiers in London on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> July.

The Chamber's solution is a modern low-cost ground-level electrification system, similar to that used on the Docklands Light Railway. This should be more reliable and much simpler and quicker to install than the conventional overhead electrical systems used on the East Coast and West Coast mainlines. It would also be less technically challenging in the Bramhope Tunnel and easier to install on the high-level viaducts along the route, including the Wharfedale and Crimple Valleys and the Knaresborough viaduct, where overhead cables would be an eyesore on what are now Grade 2 listed structures.

The proposed rolling stock is a fleet of around 20 six-car light rapid transit electric trains, originally built by Metro-Cammell in Birmingham, which have been totally refurbished within the past few years, with 280 seats per train and lots of proper standing room as well. They have been used on the mainly above ground services in Surrey from Ealing, Richmond and Wimbledon and in Essex from Upminster and Barking into London but they are all due to be replaced by 2014 as part of a major Transport for London standardisation programme. We understand we can acquire them very affordably indeed compared with the cost of building similar new trains. Also, much of the UK's newer rolling stock is already dual voltage (overhead and ground level systems) and so could operate over the Harrogate line in the future with minor modifications. Brian Dunsby says that what the Chamber is proposing is proven technology using conventional rolling stock and simple electrification. These lighter weight "metro" style trains are a ready made, tried and tested lower cost variant of the Tram-Trains that have been under consideration for the Yorkshire Region for several years. We would not have to wait several more years for the outcome of the planned trials with electric Tram-Trains on the Rotherham-Sheffield line. Even then we would have to wait for the development of a diesel version for the Harrogate line that would be prohibitively expensive to buy and to operate.

Project Director Mark Leving says that "Metro" trains on the Harrogate Line should enable all these key objectives – and potentially at a far lower cost than new trains or tram-trains with normal overhead electrification:

- Around 40% higher seating capacity plus significant proper standing room for short journeys
- Some further platform extensions to suit longer trains

- Higher performance trains (better acceleration/braking) so a 12% improvement should be possible on current schedules.
- Potential for more frequent services – aiming for walk-up frequency
- Potential uplift from 30 to 15 minute frequency Leeds-Harrogate-Knaresborough
- Potential uplift from 60 to 30 minute frequency York-Harrogate
- More car parking at all Stations plus several with Park & Ride facilities
- Extra stations to allow access to the services by a much wider audience
- Leeds Bradford International Airport Parkway station
- Significant improvement in reliability and in connectivity
- Lower operating costs and more environment friendly trains

Mark added that *“we’ve had constructive dialogue with some of the key industry bodies including London Underground, Network Rail, the Rail Safety & Standards Board and the Office of Rail Regulation. This has helped us to inform the proposals as authoritatively as possible.”*

The superior performance and capacity of the Metro LRT electric trains proposed for the Harrogate Line would enable the construction of several new stations along the line. Mark says that this is simply not possible with the existing heavy diesel trains that are intensively deployed and already hard-pressed to maintain the current timetable with very short turn-around times at the end of the line.

Of particular interest to residents and businesses in Harrogate and Knaresborough are the following suggested new Stations – subject to a business case for each one to justify the investment plus the necessary Planning Permission:

- Leeds Bradford International Airport Parkway + Park and Ride for Bramhope/Yeadon
- Buttersyke Bar – A658 (Harrogate southern by-pass) /A61 intersection – Park & Ride
- Bilton – near A59 Skipton Road for schools, sports and business park
- Belmont – large residential area near existing level crossing
- Knaresborough East – proposed new housing development at Manse Farm
- Cattal or Hammerton – upgrade to a large Park and Ride site close to A1(M)
- Nether Poppleton – redevelopment of the British Sugar Corp. site for housing etc
- A number of possible locations in West Yorkshire are also being considered by WYPTE

Brian Dunsby says that the Harrogate “Metro” Line is ideal as a McNulty pilot for the following reasons

- Short-term deliverable – a quick win “in our lifetime”
- Segregated line – no freight and no side routes
- High Impact – alleviates overcrowding, improves frequency
- Great value for money, affordable with proven demand growth
- Tried and tested technology – as used across London
- Will provide improved seating with punctuality and reliability
- Efficient operation and environmentally sound.
- Will stimulate modal shift from car to train for commuters and visitors
- Private enterprise partnership with local Councils & Chamber
- “Can do” and “deliverable” approach – driven by local partners

The project is being strongly supported by the Harrogate’s politicians, with **Council Leader Don Mackenzie** making personal presentations to the Leaders of Leeds City Region, North Yorkshire County Council, City of York Council and the two new Local Enterprise Partnerships. **Barry Dodd OBE**, Chairman of the York & North Yorkshire LEP said that the scheme was *“A very worthwhile project which the LEP will be delighted to support.”* **Neil McLean**, Chair of the Leeds City Region LEP said *“This looks to be an exciting and innovative proposal to meet a considerable need.”*

**Richard Flinton**, Chief Executive of North Yorkshire County Council, said *“Harrogate is a major town within North Yorkshire that relies on its connectivity to other parts of the region for tourism and wider commerce. This initiative is important in order to help Harrogate prosper, as well as providing residents with an alternative to travelling by car.”*

**Councillor Don Mackenzie** said *"The timing of this initiative could not be more favourable, and I have given it my full support. Brian has also given a presentation of the proposal to the Conservative Group and my colleagues share my enthusiasm for the scheme. Without question, the residents and businesses of the district need improved transport connections. Our conference, exhibition and tourism industry would receive a great boost from this fundamental improvement to our rail infrastructure. There will be those who doubt that this scheme will receive the necessary funding at a time of financial constraints - but that is exactly when pilot projects, which offer great value for money and an economic boost, are most appreciated. We are going to back this bid to the full."*

Harrogate Council's Opposition Lib Dem Group Spokesman on Transport, **Councillor Reg Marsh**, said *"The Liberal Democrats on Harrogate District Council fully endorse this new rail initiative, which could definitely be the answer to rail travel within Harrogate District for the foreseeable future. The package envisaged is relatively cheap to install and very quick to get up and running. The ease with which the trains can stop and start, whilst being faster than the existing set up, brings the possibility of extra rail halts, extra passengers and less congestion on our roads. Who knows, it could even mean the introduction of new track revitalising different areas of the District. Hopefully the Secretary of State will back Brian and his team by granting a trial status to the scheme to enable everything to happen."*

Harrogate & Knaresborough **MP Andrew Jones** is now promoting the scheme to the Government Ministers concerned, having already arranged a meeting of the other MPs whose constituencies cover the Stations along the Harrogate Line. *"I am pleased to have played a part in bringing this proposal in front of MPs and Ministers. It is an exciting plan and part of the ongoing work to improve rail services to our area – a key part of my priorities since I became a Member of Parliament. Better local services will support investment in our area, bring people to Harrogate for visits, for conferences and for shopping and help to underpin the local economy. I would like to record my thanks to the Chamber of Trade and Commerce and in particular Brian Dunsby and Mark Leving for the work they have done in bringing this project to a point where we have a viable scheme to present to Ministers. We would not be at this point without them."*

**Gary Verity**, Chief Executive of Welcome to Yorkshire said *"Upgrading of the Harrogate Line Train Services with modern ground level electrification will give a massively improved level of service for all train users including leisure and business related tourists. We are particularly keen that our visitors are able to move around the county using a rail service that reflects this modernity."*

*"The tourism industry is hugely important to Yorkshire generating £7bn to the economy each year - we must continue to demonstrate that the county is a must see destination which also includes excellent transport links to and from its key towns and cities. In addition, we have a duty to promote sustainable transport to our visitors to reduce road congestion and to show that travelling by train or bus to different destinations can be a very attractive element of the trip. Harrogate is one of the jewels in the Yorkshire crown that attracts many visitors all the year round. So for these reasons, I am delighted to offer my full support for your bid."*

**Angus Houston**, Director of the Harrogate International Centre said: *"Harrogate International Centre has pioneered the development of the Conference and Exhibition Business since the 1950's, and is a fundamental part of the District's Business and Tourism economy. The success of an International Venue such as HIC is fundamentally linked to logistics and transport for clients and delegates, so this scheme clearly fits the needs for both Harrogate and Yorkshire."*

Local business leaders welcome the prospect of higher quality more frequent connecting service to Leeds and York. **David Ritson**, General Manager, Old Swan Hotel and Chair of Destination Harrogate said *"The success of this project is critical to ensure train access to and from Harrogate is as quick and efficient as possible for the many thousands of leisure and business tourism visitors to the district who are so important in supporting the local economy. The popularity of travelling by train is increasing due to the rise in fuel costs, better availability and cheaper cost of off-peak train tickets. This development would help Harrogate remain competitive as a destination alongside other towns and cities."*

**Mark Lancaster**, Managing Director, Colour It In Ltd and past President of Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce said *"I strongly support the project to enhance the local rail service which I believe is vital to our economy. Our local transport infrastructure has long suffered from neglect which is a shame as it offers the only credible solution to connect Harrogate with the pockets of potential employees in the 16 to 35 age group. This is important as it is the sector that is missing from our District and which has been proven to be a factor in restricting the growth of businesses in the area especially in the hospitality sector. With the prospect of low cost housing and road infrastructure improvements for Harrogate being many years away, a clean, reliable, cost effective rail service is the only viable solution for the foreseeable future."*

#### **NOTES FOR EDITORS:**

**Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce** is recognised as the powerful voice of Harrogate business. The officers have regular meetings with Chief Officers of the Borough Council and the County Council as well as with the Officers of the other Chambers of Trade in Harrogate District and relevant local organisations. The Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce was first constituted in 1896 and has been in continuous existence since then. There are currently over 250 local businesses in active membership and the monthly Chamber Meetings attract an average of 80 business owners and managers from a wide spectrum of business sectors.

**Brian Dunsby** has served the Chamber as Chief Executive and Hon Secretary in a purely voluntary capacity since 2002. He had previously been a General Manager with a division of TILCON and then set up his own business Silvaperl Products Ltd manufacturing horticultural growing media including Perlite, Vermiculite and John Innes Composts. After a subsequent career helping small businesses, Brian was honoured with Her Majesty The Queen's Award for Enterprise Promotion in 2008 and the Ackrill Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010. Brian is a passionate promoter of improved links to Harrogate.

**Mark Leving** has worked in the railway industry all his life, most recently helping Passenger Focus better influence the value realised to passengers from the rail infrastructure. Previously he was Managing Director of Hull Trains who first proposed operating direct services between London and Harrogate via York in 2008, but the Office of Rail Regulation refused to allocate slots on the East Coast Main Line. Prior to this he spent ten years working at Network Rail, so he has a thorough understanding of both train operation and the railway infrastructure. Prior to rail privatisation in 1995, he also managed the infrastructure investment portfolio for British Rail in the North West.

#### **Extract from McNulty Report Summary (Section 6.16).**

*"Regional railways provide a number of key services and the Study recognises that there is a need to identify where the existing delivery philosophy does not deliver maximum value. Opportunities to improve value are likely to be centred on:*

- *different service levels;*
- *different equipment;*
- *lower-cost infrastructure;*
- *different working methods;*
- *different standards.*

*Experience elsewhere in Europe suggests that it is possible to define a more appropriate level of specification for both infrastructure and operations that can maintain existing standards of safety, but which can reduce the costs of supporting networks which are used less intensively. Local authorities and PTE's could potentially play an important role in examining the options in Great Britain."*

*"It is recommended that several routes with different characteristics are identified where the principles of lower-cost regional networks could be developed, piloted in operation and benchmarked."*

*(Source: para. 6.16 "Realising the Potential of GB Rail", May 2011)*

The Full Report and the Summary can be downloaded from the Department for Transport web sites:

<http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/report-of-the-rail-vfm-study/realising-the-potential-of-gb-rail.pdf>

<http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/report-of-the-rail-vfm-study/realising-the-potential-of-gb-rail-summary.doc>

**Further information from:** Brian L Dunsby, Chief Executive, Tel: 01423 879208  
or Mark Leving, Project Director