

Harrogate "Metro" Line proposals supported by local rail enthusiasts

Proposals for electrification of the Harrogate Railway Line between Leeds, Harrogate and York were endorsed at a meeting of local rail supporters on Monday evening 8th August in the HIC Queen's Suite.

Harrogate Chamber invited all who had written to the Harrogate Advertiser or placed messages on web sites for or against the proposals. In total 32 attended out of 48 invited. Chamber Chief Executive Brian Dunsby presented a summary of the reasons why the Harrogate Line services needed to be substantially upgraded in terms of both quality and quantity. Project Director Mark Leving then explained why the best option was to take advantage of some recently refurbished D78 electric trains currently running on the London District Line between Richmond, Ealing, Wimbledon and Upminster.

He said that there appeared to be no prospects of getting new build diesel or electric trains for the Harrogate Line due to their cost and the current policy of allocation of new trains to the South East. He added that the dream of so-called "Tram-trains" would not meet the needs of the whole line in terms of passenger capacity and the ability to serve the extra stations that are needed along the route.

The technical issues of electrification were discussed in detail, with the modern ground-level bottom contact 3rd rail 750volt DC system, as used on the Docklands Light Railway, shown to be more suitable for our line than the 25kV AC overhead cable system used on the East Coast mainline for example.

Initially there were strong feelings in the audience that Harrogate deserves better than second-hand underground trains, but when the excellent performance and seating capacity of the proposed D78 trains were illustrated, it was accepted that this was a cost-effective solution that merited support. At the end of the meeting the Chairman Councillor Don Mackenzie asked for a show of hands in favour of submitting this proposal to the Department for Transport and it was unanimous – with even the early critics recognising the merits of the scheme.

Councillor Mackenzie said: *"I believe the meeting achieved its primary purpose, which was to bring together the various contributors to the debate about the upgrade proposals, and to discuss their hopes and concerns. The overriding message from the gathering is that this bid deserves our full backing, and that is exactly what it will get".* Mark Leving added: *"this meeting was a vital part of the process of winning the hearts and minds of an informed and important group of stakeholders, and in which we were successful, given the unanimous support expressed at the end of the meeting".*

Chamber President Simon Cotton said *"the presentation was 'first class' (no pun intended!). Whilst there appeared to be a number of critics in the room at the beginning of the meeting, I was delighted to see by the end that there was a unanimous vote to take forward these plans to see if they are in fact feasible. Everyone was grateful for this voluntary effort to date and I thank Brian and Mark wholeheartedly. Their time, commitment and sheer professionalism are very much appreciated.*

For details see: www.harrogateline.org Comments welcome: enquiries@harrogateline.org