

All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group

Report of a meeting held in the House of Commons on Tuesday 6th November 2012 at 1500 hours.

Chairman: Mr Greg Mulholland MP, Leeds North West

Speakers

Mr. David Bishop Impact of Metrolink on Local Biodiversity.

Mr. Mike Connelly, Connelly Communications, Managing customer care during construction

The meeting was introduced by Mr Greg Mulholland MP, Leeds North West, standing in as Chairman for Mr John Leech MP. As well as apologies from Mr Leech, Mr Mulholland conveyed the apologies of Mr. Alex Shelbrooke MP Elmet & Rothwell who had been due to speak on the Leeds Bradford Airport TramTrain.

Greg Mulholland: The Government's report "Green light for light rail" had been a very welcome indication of their commitment to light rail but that the Group now needs to consider what should happen next. We now need to see light rail being constructed and delivering the benefits that we know it can offer to our cities.

Alex Shelbrooke was going to discuss the possibility of TramTrain on the Leeds-Harrogate-York line, with, eventually, a rail link to Leeds-Bradford Airport which is one of the worst-served of the main airports in the country in terms of public transport. This is a huge problem, not only for the people using the airport but for people in my constituency who live around the airport. There is a lot of frustration in Leeds and within Metro at the pace at which the TramTrain pilot scheme has been progressing although it is now going ahead. There is frustration with the Leeds-Harrogate-York line which has wholly unacceptable rolling-stock and there has been discussion for many years on how improvements might be made and how light or heavy rail might be able to get to the airport. More recently there was a proposal from Harrogate Chamber of Commerce to use London Underground rolling stock involving third-rail electrification, which led to some lively discussions. This proposal did not include a rail connection to the airport but a station on the existing line and a connecting bus service. Most people think that TramTrain is the more suitable answer. Support is not universal and some in Harrogate particularly fear that TramTrain and associated extra stations on the line might compromise the overall speed of service and the possibility of connection to London. In general there has not been a happy history of light rail in Leeds, which has been let down by successive governments and successive administrations in the Department for Transport. Having been told we were to have supertrams, then being told we had to be more ambitious, then less ambitious and then, in the end, not being allowed to have it at all but to have a bus-based scheme. We are now looking forward to getting the New Generation Transport scheme, the posh trolleybus which is currently at the

planning stage with construction due to take place 2016-2017; so we can look forward to something if not actually light rail. I hope that gives you a bit of a background of some of the things that Alex would have dealt with in more detail. There is certainly a very strong economic case for Tramtrain on that line and for the link to Leeds-Bradford Airport, giving a rail link that will enable more people to use the airport rather than travelling across the Pennines to Manchester. At the moment from many parts of the Leeds area it is as easy to travel to Manchester Airport as to Leeds-Bradford. It is a huge issue for the Airport, which is firmly behind the campaign and is actively lobbying for the link. There is also an aspiration to link the Leeds-Harrogate-York line with the Wharfedale line, the Leeds-Ilkley line. This would open up the possibility of a TramTrain network serving the whole of the Leeds-Bradford conurbation and bring wide economic benefits to the region.

Greg Mulholland then introduced Mike Connelly of Connelly Communications to speak on **Managing Customer Care during Tram Construction** based on his experience working for TIE on the Edinburgh light rail project.

Mike Connelly: There is not necessarily just one way of doing these things and Edinburgh is a complex city, different from other cities, and the response to introducing light rail elsewhere may be different but there are hopefully some pointers towards how to deal with a complex situation. There was considerable resistance to what we were trying to do in Edinburgh. One of the lessons for me was that all tram projects should be regarded as change projects in the same way as a large multi-national corporation would deal with changing its industry I think tram projects should be treated in a similar vein and if we do that the toolkit which comes from some of those multi-national companies will assist us in the way that we have dealt with a large audience of people some of whom do not believe in what we are trying to do

Building the team is absolutely crucial. When I joined the project in 2006 I inherited a team which was highly capable but unfortunately the skill set was six years ahead of itself It was a skilled communications team which was attuned to operational trams and not a large construction project. Building a team of the right people with the right skill set is crucial

You need to gauge the level of expectation from people and that is about asking them to tell you a story about what it is like for them just now when work is going on around them, such as a utility company working outside their house or shop. What level of communication do you get from those companies?

You need to have a set of standards in terms of what the customers expect from you and stick to those standards, that way people will trust you

Whatever happens, the promoter must own the process and you have to have your brand all over it but the contractors must work to the same standards and they have an integral part in meeting those expectations

The contractor's job is to build and you need to be clear on the distinction and that way you will have much more clarity on any issues which may arise and it is also clear where responsibility lies.

Co-operation is a strategy for any street closure. In Edinburgh the biggest one was Princes Street

Co-operation and locking in all the key players is absolutely vital. Teamwork is absolutely essential and must be visibly demonstrated so that everything you produce comes from the team has the team's stamp all over it and everyone has a contribution to make and you know what the contribution is

You need to assess the value of what information already exists.

You need a handling strategy for when it goes wrong, which is Regret, Reason, Remedy. Always apologise but find the reason in terms of why you are doing the project. The remedy is in two parts – the immediate, what you need to do to put things right, but the long term remedy is again based in why you are doing the project. You should always fight your way through such problems if you run away from them you will only have to face the problem later on.

The standards for advance notification of works were for major works 4 weeks; for minor 7 days. There was an emergency: 24-hour telephone response to customers with a free telephone number.

90% of calls should be answered within 30 seconds by a real person while E-mail response to customers should be 24 hours acknowledgement with named owner for subsequent contact and resolution within 7 days.

For letters, a 24 hours acknowledgement, again with a named owner and resolution within 7 days.

The website should be updated weekly.

Another example of something I had used in the past is the Customer Interaction Cycle, an eight week cycle.



Customer Interaction Cycle

In terms of the information you get out, first of all it has to be accurate and that is quite difficult on a major construction project.

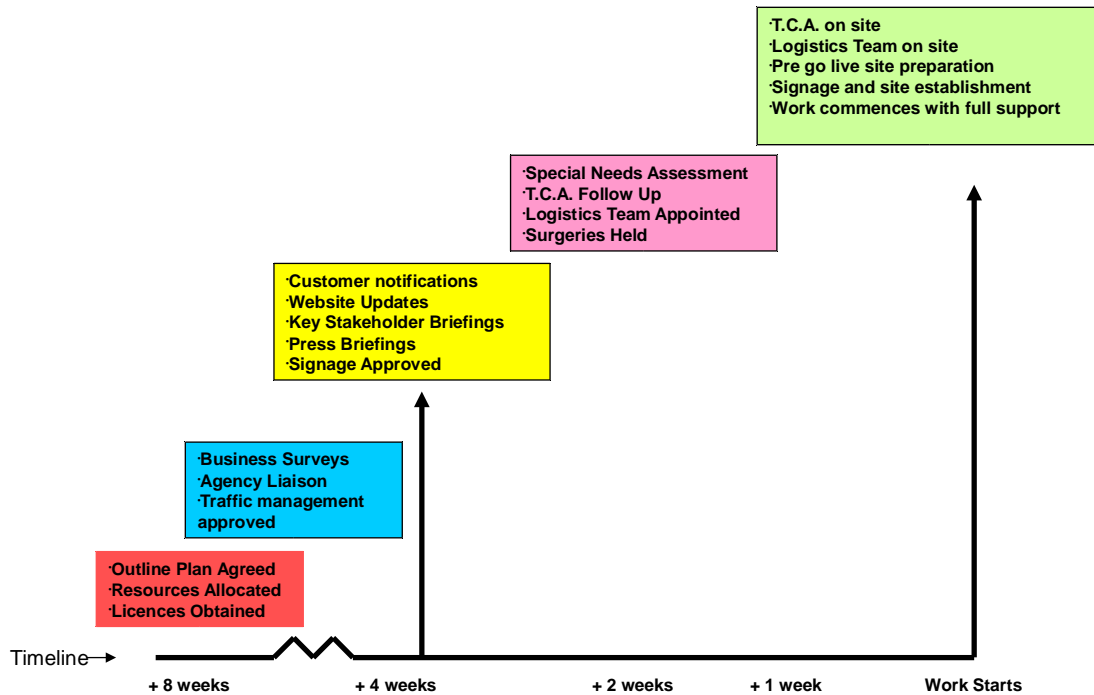
You must close down enquiries and complaints. When I first started at Edinburgh I found that some correspondence had gone on for weeks and had involved extended visits to complainants. I found that 90% of the team's time was spent on people who did not want the project and 10% on people who did. We subsequently reversed these proportions so that most energy was going into constructive work, not ignoring complaints but keeping them in proportion.

Site housekeeping is also crucial for more efficient working and to give a good impression to customers

You must give commitments but, more important, you must deliver and around that you will start to get success.

Something that I spent a lot of time on was requests under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act also the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations. I got about 20 per month, on average. I believe that the resistance movement will use that to their advantage in the hope that it delays construction but in fact it does not delay it at all and things carry on but you need to treat these requests with proper respect and respond. I think I had 80 cases which went to the Scottish Information Commissioner and never lost one but it is a costly and long drawn out process

Stakeholder Communications Process – Pre - Work Commencing



This is another way of looking at the circular thing I put up - it says exactly the same thing. For eight weeks through to when work actually starts. It gives more of an indication of things you need to cover such as the planning stage through to surveys of local businesses, traffic management issues, customer notifications, key stakeholder briefings We did a lot of information surveys around the city probably hundreds which were well-received and respected by people because the information was helpful to them

During major works it needs to be a 70:30 split which informs how resources should be focussed. In other words building the tram 70% and selling the tram and its benefits 30%. People do not want long-term promises of benefits but hard information about what is going to happen and how long it is going to take.

During the Edinburgh Tramway Design Consultation we wrote to 130,000 people inviting them to contribute. Between 2006 and 2008 38 consultation events were held over 22 geographical locations. In 2008 there were nine tram updates, 60,000 of each hand delivered to every resident and business across the city, as well as five tram fact sheets, 40,000 of each hand delivered

We set aside from the budget £1.6M for the Small Business Support Scheme, we created the Edinburgh Tram Retail and Tourism Working Group, which was to get close to the management of the project and doing the impacts analysis and which later became the Tram Operating Group and £600K dedicated to Edinburgh's Open for Business Strategy.

What is important as part of that promise to customers is to know what you're good at and do it and get others to do what they're better at.

The important thing is getting customers across the neutral zone. This is crucial in getting people to engage with you and in winning over hearts and minds and this is classic change management stuff and the best customer response to that is to attend as many meetings as you can, give as many presentations as you can which is a seven day-a-week job and that is when you have to start looking around the team for help otherwise you end up magnifying the plagues and it all becomes too much.

I have not found a business yet that has closed down because of the tram project, some have struggled and we have addressed that

When something changes you have to mark the ending. You need to listen out for and deal with the "murmuring"; give people access to the decision makers and capitalize on the creative opportunity provided by the neutral zone. Resist the urge to rush ahead. Understand that neutral zone leadership is essential and special. Don't over-complicate the message but do tell the story because there is a story about what we are doing. An example was the discovery of 30 skeletons at the bottom of Leith Walk which was a real story which went into our schools programme.

Greg Mulholland then introduced the second speaker, David Bishop who presented his paper **The Impact of the Metrolink Light Rail System on Local Biodiversity in South Manchester**. The paper is given here in full, although, because of time constraints, Mr Bishop had to omit certain sections of it in his presentation. The omitted sections are shown below in italics. The list of references from the original paper has also been included for the sake of completeness.

David Bishop: During the summer of 2011 I noticed that, because of the ground disturbance, in the vicinity of the new St Werburgh's Road Metrolink stop in Chorlton, hundreds of arable 'weeds' had appeared on the newly created embankments. The seeds of such plants can remain buried but viable for decades (perhaps even for a century or more) and disturbance, and subsequent exposure to sunlight, causes them to germinate. Many of these weeds would have been familiar to the old Chorlton farmers and their farm workers (they probably cursed such plants - but they were trying to maximise crop yields). There were poppies, wild pansies, wild radish, fumitories and many more. Many of these plants were recorded in the local floras from the mid-19th century and in the local collection in Manchester Museum Herbarium. And it was not just me that appreciated these profusely flowering plants - they were also covered in bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects.

When I returned, a few days later, with my note book and camera, to record all of this richness, I found that the whole bank had been sprayed

with herbicide. This is, of course, the 'traditional' response to wildlife: "Not wanted here - kill it!"

But in their 'Wildlife Habitat and Tree Replacement' policy, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) have published some very specific promises about 'protecting' and 'enhancing' local biodiversity and 'mitigating' for any losses, and given such promises perhaps they (or their contractors) should not have automatically reached for the herbicide spray in the situation that I have described above.

The loss of my weedy bank is just one of many losses that we have suffered, and are due to suffer, as a result of the recent and planned Metrolink extensions. The old railway cuttings between Chorlton and Old Trafford and Chorlton and East Didsbury had developed into rich wildlife habitats in the 50 or so years since they had been abandoned. Many species of native mammals, birds, amphibians and plants flourished in them. Some sections were flooded and provided good habitats for the amphibians and several species of water plants; both of these groups are now locally scarce because of the very severe shortage of ponds and wetlands. The loss of these wildlife refuges is particularly catastrophic given that so much green space has been lost in this region over the last 20 years or so. In this period we have seen an approach to development which has overwhelmingly favoured the needs of developers and led to the infilling of countless green spaces - including many large gardens.

But worse was, and is, to come; the line to the airport goes straight through the Lower Hardy Farm Site of Biological Importance (SBI) in Chorlton. I have known this site for nearly 40 years and considered its plant life to be particularly important. On the south side of the river a number of mature Beech trees, near Jackson's Boat riverside pub, have been destroyed and at Sale Water Park a large green space will be tarmaced over to create a 300 vehicle car park. The line will then run parallel with the M60 for some distance. In the 1990s much habitat, in this area, was lost as a result of motorway widening; now this transport corridor is to be made even wider.

Recently, we lost over thirty large trees along Mauldeth Road West in Chorlton - all cut down to make way for Metrolink. These were mainly London Planes (*Platanus x hispanica*) and Common Limes (*Tilia x europaea*). Both of these taxa are 'man-made' hybrids, often planted as street trees. Nevertheless, they were big, handsome trees of some age and of considerable amenity value.

It's often assumed that such trees are not as important for biodiversity as native trees - but the devil is in the details! Recently, I've been investigating an unusual local phenomenon: on a number of local roads some London Planes have a particular species of fern growing on them (a phenomenon known as 'epiphysis'). One would expect to find epiphytic ferns on old, native Oaks, in ancient woodland in Devon or Cornwall but not on street trees in a major city. I had an opportunity to discuss this subject with a national fern

expert and he told me that he had not encountered epiphytic ferns on London Planes in any other British city - and it could be unique to South Manchester; but now TfGM have destroyed around a third of the population before it's even been properly studied.

Even more grievous is the impending destruction of veteran native Oak trees in Wythenshawe. Alison Hunt, who is Biodiversity Officer for the West Didsbury Residents' Association, noted that along Poundswick Lane (in Wythenshawe) veteran Oak trees were not being protected from the ongoing Metrolink works. Alison has described these trees as: "... veteran Oak trees of great historic and ecological value, specifically retained from the countryside in the design of Wythenshawe ... The trees are of huge amenity value and retain important green links in the urban landscape." She has measured the girths of these trees and found them to be around 3m - this would make them somewhere between 100 and 200 years old.

She wrote to TfGM who replied as follows:

"I understand that you are aware of our tree replacement policy which provides that more trees will be replaced than are removed. TfGM and our contractor, MPT, discuss all tree removals, tree planting and maintaining the safety of trees during construction with Manchester City Council. The trees that you have photographed [i.e. the old Oak trees] will be removed as part of the ongoing works. However, the current draft tree planting proposals include the potential replanting of 30 new trees (plus other soft landscaping) along Brownley Road."

Green Party member, Anne Power responded to this by commenting: "How do you plant veteran English Oaks? Outrageous!" It certainly is outrageous - but is it crass and ignorant ... or deeply cynical?

Planting, what I call, Mac-saplings to compensate for the destruction of priceless, irreplaceable old Oaks, like those on Poundswick Lane, evokes for me an image of a contractor walking into the Sistine Chapel, gazing up at Michelangelo's masterpiece and saying: "Hmmm! We're going to have to sandblast this ceiling, you know. But don't worry - when we've finished we'll give it a nice coat of whitewash!"

And TfGM can't even seem to get the tree planting right. In early 2011 700 saplings were planted on a site near St Werburgh's Road. By August of that year, 540 of those saplings - that's 77% - were dead. Ironically it wasn't necessary to plant trees in that particular site because it was already full of self-sown trees!

So, what has TfGM done so far to "mitigate" for all of these losses and to "protect" and "enhance" what's left? Well, as far as I can see, very little. A lot of trees have been planted (some very ineptly) and two or three cheap pond liners installed in some fairly inaccessible spots (one, in Withington, has been sited on top of a narrow embankment - hardly an ideal site for a pond!). It should be noted that the pond liners were installed up to two

years after the amphibian habitats had been destroyed. One wonders what the amphibians were supposed to do in the meantime!

It should be noted TfGM does know precisely what it's destroying. The policy document, mentioned above, states: "As part of the planning process for capital schemes (such as Metrolink extensions), comprehensive habitat surveys should be conducted, including specific surveys for protected species such as bats, badgers and voles. An Environmental Statement should be prepared for each scheme that includes measures to reduce the impact on biodiversity."

From where I'm sitting it looks as though TfGM spends public money on having (independent) surveys conducted, ticks the box labelled "survey conducted", files the survey report, destroys what the surveyor has found and then ... well ... plants some trees in 'compensation'. It's worth quoting the great woodland expert, Oliver Rackham here: "Planting trees is not synonymous with conservation; it's an admission that conservation has failed."

But TfGM should be making far greater efforts. I'm not even convinced that it is even meeting its obligations under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006 or under Planning Policy Statement 9.

Section 40 of the NERC Act, 2006 reads: "Every public body must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity."

HM Government's recent white paper, *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (2011)* and the Lawton report (2010), from which it draws much of its inspiration, both recommend that we make a step-change in our approach to nature conservation and start thinking on a landscape scale. They note that the previous approach to wildlife, in which it is confined to specific sites such as nature reserves or SSSIs, is not working very well.

Lawton's report, entitled 'Making Space for Nature' recommended that we: Improve the quality of current wildlife sites by better habitat management. Increase the size of existing wildlife sites.

Create new sites.

Enhance connections between sites, either through physical corridors or through 'stepping stones.'

- And reduce pressure on wildlife by improving the wider environment.

A key concept in both of these documents is that of the 'ecological network whereby key sites are linked together within a landscape so that wildlife can move as freely as possible between the sites.

But constructing such a landscape scale network in Greater Manchester is likely to be problematic. If you look at the region on Google Earth you will see that it is very heavily built-up, with relatively little green space. In 2008 the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit, in collaboration with Salford University, published a report entitled, 'An Ecological framework for Greater Manchester'. A sophisticated spatial analysis which they

conducted revealed that: "... developing such a 'conventional landscape-scale ecological network model in the GM sub-region is likely to be difficult, except at the fringes of the conurbation ... [key] node sites are generally small and very fragmented. [And] there are large areas where there are no node sites at all, particularly in built up urban centres." They proposed that an ecological framework be created instead. Such a framework would provide a context within which wildlife could flourish through the development of a set of principles to guide habitat creation, repair and management. They noted that this wider framework would be perfectly capable of incorporating smaller scale networks nested within the whole.

It's not too hard to see that Metrolink corridors have the potential to provide an important element of a smaller scale network in South Manchester by connecting together domestic gardens, urban parks, miscellaneous green spaces and the Mersey Valley. Indeed, TfGM emphasises the importance of connectivity in their 'Wildlife Habitat and Tree Replacement' policy but they do not discuss, or detail, the principles, ecologically sound or not, they intend to apply to habitat creation, repair and management - more on this later.

Increasingly concerned about these circumstances and a few more, which will be made plain below, I decided to ask TfGM a series of eight questions. I originally posed the questions to TfGM on the 28th February this year - but received no reply. I then tried sending the questions as Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. TfGM received my questions on 19th March and told me that only two of them qualified as FOI requests and would be answered within 20 working days; I'm still waiting!

The first six questions are as follows:

Q1. Does TfGM intend to revise its biodiversity policies (e.g. 'Wildlife Habitat and Tree Replacement Policy') so that they fully conform with the principles contained in HM Government's White Paper, 'The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature' (June 2011)?

Q2. Given that TfGM is not listed as a partner in the 'Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan, 2012 - 2016', does TfGM intend to contribute to the achievement of the plan's objectives?

Q3. Is TfGM exempt from contributing to the plan's objectives?

In the government's 'Natural Choice' white paper, mentioned above, it undertakes to encourage and support the creation of Local Nature Partnerships. Such partnerships are intended to demonstrate local leadership on matters relating to the natural environment and to raise awareness about the vital services and benefits that a healthy natural environment brings for people, communities and the local economy. Such a Local Nature Partnership has recently been established for Greater Manchester. In view of this I asked TfGM the following question:

Q4. Given that TfGM controls so much land with wildlife habitat potential in Greater Manchester, why wasn't it represented at the Greater Manchester Local Nature Partnership consultation workshop held at New Central Hall, in central Manchester, on 3rd February, 2012?

Q5. When the Greater Manchester Local Nature Partnership is set up later in 2012 does TfGM intend to join and to take an active role?

Q6. Given that so much local biodiversity has been lost in South Manchester as a result of the latest Metrolink extensions does TfGM have any further plans (apart from recent tree planting and pond liner installation) to "mitigate" for these losses and to "protect" and "enhance" what remains?

I asked two more questions related to the management of Metrolink embankments *and, for reasons which escape me, these questions were judged to meet the criteria for FOI requests!*

It is generally agreed that if the biodiversity of a particular site is to be maximised then sensitive management of that site is essential. Many designated wildlife sites in South Manchester and Trafford have not been managed for wildlife for many years and have deteriorated badly as a result. The two questions that I asked TfGM are as follows:

Q7. *Have ecologically sound management plans been written for all Metrolink embankments and other TfGM land?*

Q8. *If such plans exist, could I see an example, please?*

In spite of asking these questions under FOI, I still haven't received any answers.

Every time that I pose the questions again, I am told that the plans are in preparation and will be available in "4 to 6 weeks"; this has been going on since April!

In conclusion I would like to say that I am not against the Metrolink light rail system and, in fact, I believe that it has already benefited Greater Manchester and will do so in the future. But the latest extensions to the system have caused considerable damage to our local biodiversity - even though, through their 'Wildlife Habitat and Tree Replacement' policy, TfGM have promised to protect and enhance it. This is, surely, not good enough!

At present we are living through a biodiversity crisis on both national and international scales. This crisis is particularly acute in Greater Manchester because it is such a densely populated conurbation with relatively little green space. Under these circumstances developers, such as TfGM, should be working much harder to fulfil their promises and to meet their obligations with respect to local wildlife.

References:

Transport for Greater Manchester 'Wildlife Habitat and Tree Replacement' Policy:

http://www.tfgm.com/Corporate/environment/Pages/environment_policy_documents.aspx

'Epiphytic Polypodium ferns on London Plane Trees in South Manchester': Personal communication from Dr F. Rumsey (Natural History Museum) to D. Bishop, April 2011

The Loss of Veteran Oak Trees in Wythenshawe Resulting from the Construction of the Metrolink to Manchester Airport Line': Personal communication from Ms. A. Hunt to D. Bishop, March 2012

The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature', UK Government White Paper, June 2011:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>

'Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network', Chaired by Professor Sir John Lawton CBE, FRS, September, 2010:

<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/documents/201009space-for-nature.pdf>

'Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act', 2006:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents>

'Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation':

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/147408.pdf>

'An Ecological Framework for Greater Manchester' by Mr D. Richardson (Greater Manchester Ecology Unit), Dr Philip James & Ms Aleksandra Kazmierczak (University of Salford), April 2008:

<http://www.bolton.gov.uk/sites/DocurnentCentre/Documents/An%20Ecological%20Framework%20for%20Greater%20Manchester.pdf>

'Manchester Biodiversity Action Plan, 2012 - 2016', Manchester City Council, 2012: http://www.manchester.gov.uk/eqov_downloads/BioDiversitv.pdf

'Greater Manchester Local Nature Partnership': <http://qmlnp.org/>

Greg Mulholland: David Bishop has brought up some challenging points for everyone in the industry and in transport and there are some lessons to be learned. The whole theme of "Green light for light rail" is why we have not developed light rail as we should have done and what barriers and obstacles there are which can be removed – problems with construction, problems with the utilities, problems with procurement. There is food for thought from experience on the ground people issuing projects and the Leeds trolleybus is an example, need to take these things into consideration as much as possible. I am aware that there is an irony here with what is one of the most environmentally friendly forms of transport but which if not done in an ecologically friendly way can have negative consequences but there will some times be choices that have to be made.

I am very keen in the remaining time that we have to allow you all to make questions or comments

Geoff English, Metro West Yorkshire: To pick up on Greg's opening statements about the Harrogate line Metro is working with North Yorkshire, Harrogate and York Councils to develop a high level business case for the electrification of the line as a first phase followed by TramTrain at either end of the route which would provide a link to the airport and to street running in Leeds. WE have shared this high-level business case with the DfT and we are looking to build on that now with a more transformational package for the whole line which includes journey time, improvements along the line, line speed improvements, car park enhancements as well as the option for TramTrain. WE are hoping to have that work complete by the spring of next year so that again we can share it with the DfT. It is very timely that Leeds City Region has now got a City Deal we are developing a transport fund very similar to the Manchester transport fund and this is one of the schemes that is currently being modelled and appraised so that the West Yorkshire leaders can take a view on whether the £1 billion fund that we are trying to establish with government through the City Deal can include the Harrogate line and its TramTrain components. This talk today was timely for the work that is going on the Harrogate line.

Tim Finch, Invent: A question for Mike Connelly – you mentioned “murmurings” in relation to Edinburgh. How did you pick up on those, did it involve social media?

Mike Connelly: yes, a combination of things such as Facebook. It's really important to keep up with this, because the City leaks like a sieve and people will pick up conversations that are going on and they will phone you up about it. Those people become the champions of the project and are the eyes and ears of what is actually happening and they will give you advanced warning of things.

Tim Finch: Were you able to measure sentiment, for or against the project?

Mike Connelly: Yes, we had a scale of one to four from pro to anti and in all our communications with people we built up a database of who was for and against.

Stuart Kerr, Vossloh Kiepe: What was interesting about the two talks today was that they were about the same subject; one about focussing on success and the wins and benefits and the other about what is a cheap fix, a cheap win for a project of this nature. Where you are spending £600-700 million you throw £2 million at a cheap fix. Obviously there are some things that you cannot deal with in terms of biodiversity, when trees are in the way, unfortunately, they have to go, but the other things can be dealt with quite easily and then sold in the right way. So there is the possibility for these two aspects to come together and be complementary, rather than acting against each other.

Mike Connelly: In Edinburgh we had habitat management plans which included the things that David talked about. We discussed with people things like best place to resite trees.

Andy Dixon, Parson Brinkerhoff: We were involved in both the Edinburgh and Manchester schemes. It is very important to be open and honest with people even when you are giving them a bad message. Some people will never accept the message. The dying of the newly planted trees was a very unusual event and not one the contractor was happy about. The contractor did not rush out to replant the tree because they wanted to know what had gone wrong, perhaps, for instance, they were an unsuitable species for the site. We did not wish to replant immediately and have the same thing happen again. This may not have been communicated adequately. It is very important to be open, to be honest, to share the problems but it is how not if. We get past the if stage and then we need to deal with the community on the how.

David Bishop: I should like to say that in many ways I am a supporter of Metrolink, I think it is a very good system. I do think that the biodiversity aspects have been mishandled. More important than planting trees, which I do not believe is a fix for anything, I think that TfGM should be focussing on the management of the embankments because that is where the biodiversity aspects are going to be dealt with best by linking habitats

Greg Mulholland: I do not want to put Metrolink on the spot, but do you think that sort of thing was done better in Edinburgh (although lots of things were not)?

Mike Connelly: I think that Edinburgh was quite unique. There was a plethora of other organisations involved and you cannot go into a project like this blindfolded you have to work with all of those stakeholders and that is why the lead-in to the project, before construction starts, was quite lengthy.

Greg Mulholland: Thank you for being here and showing interest not only in light rail but in the work of the Light Rail Group. We have a role to play in pushing the agenda for light rail so that it is the right solution, done in the right way which needs to be accepted and built into how we can do things better. I think there are great opportunities and if we can overcome some of the challenges, particularly the procurement rules, the over-specification with regard to health and safety requirements, and look at improving technology to achieve more light rail mileage delivering people to work and leisure opportunities up and down the country.

The next meeting will be on 22 January 2013 at 14:00 in Room CM8, House of Commons.

The meeting closed at 16:00