

Economy and Regeneration scrutiny review

Scrutiny Review Panel –

Economic and Social Case for Metrolink in Stockport

October to February 2023

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Foreword by Councillor David Meller, Chair of the Scrutiny Review Panel

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1.0 Introduction – the local context and background to the review

- 1.1 The council's Transport policy for several decades has stated that more sustainable travel options should be provided including improvements to public transport. Public transport provision includes bus, rail and Metrolink/ tram train. From the early 2000's, South East Manchester Multi Modal Strategy (SEMMMS) identified a number of options for Metrolink and tram train within the Stockport area. These options have been reviewed and updated several times, with the latest revision demonstrating the council's ambitions contained in the Greater Manchester Transport Plan 2040 and the Stockport Local Implementation Plan 2020.
- 1.2 The various potential Metrolink and tram train schemes all meet individual scheme criteria, and have undergone some initial investigation and appraisal but would need significant resource to develop a full business case.
- 1.3 In general, the terms Metrolink and tram train are both used to describe carriages/ trams that can run on a purpose-built fixed track. Metrolink routes are segregated on fixed tracks, utilising disused railway lines or on purpose-built tracks through fields or on the highway. Whereas tram train routes can run along railway lines that are still used by other trains, as well as on purpose-built tracks through fields or on the highway.
- 1.4 Greater Manchester has built a number of Metrolink lines in the previous decades and has ambitions to develop a tram train network, but no work has started as yet. The next phase of work for tram train in Greater Manchester is the identification of several pilot schemes to test the concept and also to identify and commission a suitable and safe vehicle to use on such a network.
- 1.5 All the potential Metrolink/ tram train options would help deliver the council's objectives and depending on the individual routes would bring greater benefits to these areas located along the lines near stations etc. and could longer term form part of a network.

2.0 Scope of the review

- 2.1 The need for good quality public transport is a key element of Greater Manchester and Stockport's transport policies and supports the environmental, economic, and social wellbeing of residents, organisations and businesses in the borough. In order to create appropriate businesses cases to support the investment in bringing Metrolink/ tram train to Stockport, these benefits need to be clearly understood and articulated.
- 2.2 It was therefore agreed that the Scrutiny Review of the Economic and Social Case for Metrolink in Stockport focus on:
- reviewing the historic strategies and plans that have supported the case for Metrolink and tram train in Stockport in order to clearly identify potential future schemes and how they fit into the overall transport policies for Stockport and Greater Manchester and understanding the historical justification for schemes;
 - review and identify key policies and programmes that Metrolink/ tram train would support in Stockport; and
 - investigate and review the impact and benefits of Metrolink and similar rapid transit schemes in other areas of Greater Manchester and the country, as well as considering the effect that covid-19 has had on those schemes.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 The Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee appointed a Scrutiny Review Panel to carry out the review, comprising of the following members:

- Councillor David Meller (Chair)
- Councillor Louise Heywood
- Councillor Will Dawson
- Councillor Oliver Johnstone

3.2 As part of the review, the panel had the support and assistance of:

- Paul Richards, Director of Development & Regeneration
- Sue Stevenson, Head of Highways and Transportation
- Luke Bramwell, Transport for Greater Manchester
- Charlotte Griffin, Senior Democratic Services Officer - CSS Manager

3.3 The panel met on four occasions between October 2022 and February 2023 and followed the timetable set out below:

- **Meeting one** (12 October 2022) – scope the review
- **Meeting two** (30 November 2022) - focus on evidence gathering
- **Meeting three** (7 February 2023) – presentation from an officer from Transport for Greater Manchester and panel discussion
- **Meeting four** (21 February 2023) – final meeting to discuss and agree recommendations for final report

4.0 Metrolink and tram train's role in supporting Stockport Council's plans and policies

4.1 The panel heard that the introduction of Metrolink to Stockport would support a number of Greater Manchester and local policies and plans including:

- The One Stockport Borough Plan, 2021
- The Stockport Council Plan 2022-2023, 2022
- Stockport Climate Action Now Strategy, 2020
- The One Stockport Economic Plan, 2022
- The One Stockport Transport Plan (pre-design draft), 2022
- The Greater Manchester Transport Strategy 2040, 2021
- The Stockport GMTS2040 Implementation Plan, 2020
- Places for Everyone, 2021
- Stockport Local Plan

4.2 The Council is committed to its Climate Action now agenda and part of that is encouraging people to use more sustainable forms of public transport. Metrolink and tram train could provide quality, reliable public transport to key destinations in and around Stockport and connections to the rest of Greater Manchester including Manchester City Centre, Manchester Airport, Media City, Trafford Park etc.

4.3 Good quality public transport improves accessibility and connectivity for people between their homes, employment, education, retail, health social and leisure facilities supporting the overall economic and individual wellbeing of Stockport's residents.

5.0 Potential Metrolink/ tram train routes

- 5.1 There have been proposals for a number of lines including Metrolink from East Didsbury to Stockport town centre and railway station and then tram train lines to Manchester Airport, Hazel Grove, Marple and Ashton. Whilst each line has its own merits, the overall network would be transformative for public transport provision in Stockport.
- 5.2 It was recognised that such a network could take decades to deliver because of funding constraints as it is expensive to deliver new Metrolink/ tram train lines and each line would need to demonstrate its viability via its own business case.

6.0 Metrolink's impact in other Greater Manchester areas

- 6.1 The evaluation report of Metrolink's 'phase 3' expansion project found that public transport door-to-door access improved by 10% or more for the following proportions of the Greater Manchester population:
- 18.2% for employment;
 - 18.8% for further education; and
 - 19.8% for healthcare.
- 6.2 As the Phase 3 Metrolink corridors are generally located in corridors with concentrations of deprivation, the figures for the proportion of the 10% of the most deprived Greater Manchester population are more pronounced. For this part of the population, the improvements of 10% or more in public transport door-to-door access were recorded for substantial proportions of the 10% most deprived:
- 30.5% for employment.
 - 29.5% for healthcare.
 - 27.8% for further education.

7.0 Key findings

- 7.1 The panel felt it was important that the proposed Metrolink and tram train schemes were delivered in Stockport as soon as practicable, as they believed they provided a substantial addition to the public transport options available to residents, visitors and businesses in Stockport.
- 7.2 The panel welcomed the presentation from Transport for Greater Manchester and the evidence of the positive impact of Metrolink elsewhere in Greater Manchester.
- 7.3 The panel noted the importance of continuing to work collaboratively with partners to develop the business cases and schemes to bring Metrolink and tram train to Stockport.
- 7.4 The panel identified the following as key findings to be considered further:
- Securing Metrolink should be the primary transport infrastructure aim for the council, prioritised ahead of further road building. This should be enshrined within council policy.
 - The council must utilise the strength and ambition of the Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) to help secure Metrolink for Stockport.
 - Decisions made by the MDC and all other regeneration decisions made for the town centre should support the aim of bringing Metrolink to Stockport.
 - The economic benefits light rail can bring are significant. These benefits should be used to address the significant deprivation gap within Stockport.
 - Bringing Metrolink to Stockport is a starting point and the council must ensure the end goal is improving interconnectivity within the borough, particularly for areas like Marple and the goal of achieving tram train.
 - Metrolink has seen house prices increase in areas such as Wythenshawe. Whilst this can be a symbol of economic improvement, this could potentially be counterproductive - particularly as Stockport has the second highest average house prices in Greater Manchester.

- Therefore, as part of a wider piece of work, the council should consider if bringing Metrolink to Stockport could impact adversely on home ownership and, if so, what measures could be explored to ensure Metrolink doesn't lead to further difficulties for those aspiring towards home ownership.

8.0 Recommendations

8.1 The panel made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- Requests that the Cabinet consider the Scrutiny Review Panel findings and recommendations at their meeting scheduled to be held on 14 March 2023 and provide a response to the report to members of the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee within six months of the report's consideration.
- The panel's findings show that Metrolink would be of great benefit to Stockport's residents. The panel requests that the Cabinet review the current barriers to acquiring Metrolink/ tram train in Stockport, and consider options/ next steps that could support progression of a scheme.
- Write to the Stockport Council members of the Greater Manchester Transport Committee, as the committee for having oversight across all aspects of Greater Manchester's transport network, providing them with a copy of the work of the panel for their information, and requesting that they reiterate Stockport's commitment and eagerness to bring Metrolink/ tram train to Stockport to the wider committee.
- Write to Transport for Greater Manchester expressing the panel and Stockport Council's thanks for partaking in the review and reiterate Stockport's commitment and eagerness to bring Metrolink/ tram train to Stockport.

Appendices and background documents

Appendix 1: slides from TfGM

[Agenda and minutes of the Scrutiny Review Panel](#)