

COMMUNITIES AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 2ND SEPTEMBER 2024

GREATER MANCHESTER RAPID TRANSIT STRATEGY

Report of the Corporate Director (Place) and Deputy Chief Executive

1. INTRODUCTION

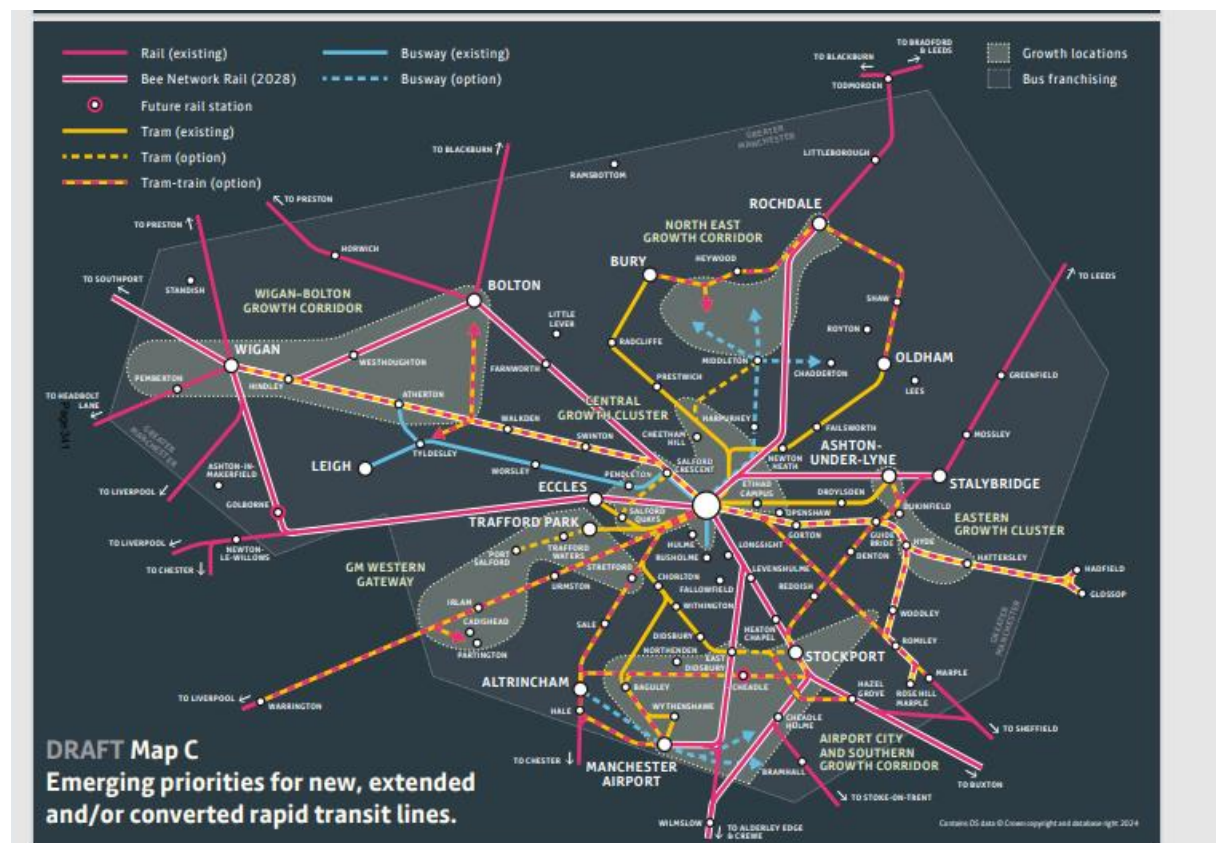
1.1. A report was submitted to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority on 12th July 2024 where Members agreed:

1. That the draft Greater Manchester Rapid Transit Strategy be approved, subject to any feedback from the Bee Network Committee, for wider engagement.
2. That officers would be requested to amend the report ahead of submission to the Bee Network Committee to reference commitment to a full assessment of the case for expanding Metrolink to Leigh.
3. That the proposed extension of the Bee Network to include 8 rail lines during this Mayoral term be noted

1.2. The report was submitted to the Bee Network Committee for Approval on the 25th July 2024 which noted the report.

1.3. The Strategy sets out the rationale and aspirations around increasing connectivity throughout Greater Manchester (GM) where new and improved rapid transit is intended to build the Bee Network, providing an integrated transport system that will support delivery of sustainable growth across the city-region. Rapid transit includes suburban train, tram and busway services that are fast, frequent and reliable. These services sit alongside other public transport services and active travel as part of the Bee Network. The document also references the 15 emerging priorities for rapid transit as illustrated below:

1.4.



1.5. The strategy is informed by the overall policy position for rapid transit as part of the Bee Network including the ‘Right Mix’ vision – aiming to more than double rapid transit trips by 2040 – and for the collective GM ambitions for a greener, fairer and more prosperous city-region in the context of:

- an approximately 10% population increase in that period
- GM’s commitment to be carbon-neutral by 2038, and improved air quality and biodiversity
- transforming opportunities for all, and responding to GM’s growth locations

1.6. Within the Bee Network, buses are being brought under local control and this bus reform will be complete in 2025. Local train services are then to be brought into the Bee Network by 2028.

1.7. In broad terms, the strategy states the need for three things for rapid transit:

- for it to be part of a seamless Bee Network.
- give room to grow because capacity is the single biggest challenge to the shared GM vision.
- it needs to work at its best, which is when it has local accountability.

1.8. The Strategy sets out how GM will seek to deliver that by:

- **Sustaining, integrating and improving.**

- Sustaining a well-maintained, resilient and reliable rapid transit system.
- Integrating the rapid transit system within the Bee Network and the regional and national context, including the rail pay-as-you-go contactless ticketing pilot by 2025.
- Continually improving the offer to customers in terms of the environment and health, safety and security, and accessibility and inclusion.
- **Growing**
 - Addressing mounting capacity challenges on Metrolink with a fleet of longer 'next generation vehicles' that have tram-train capability, working with the rail industry on train and platform lengthening, and remaining responsive to demand on the busway.
 - Developing and delivering new rapid transit stops and stations, whilst improving existing ones with access for all and better first and last mile connections.
 - Working to improve key links that knit together the existing rapid transit system.
- **Transforming.**
 - Integrating rail into the Bee Network by 2030, with 8 priority corridors by 2028.
 - Developing proposals for new, extended and converted rapid transit lines including tram-train technology, the Airport as a hub, and major Regional Centre capacity

1.9. As part of the ongoing work to prepare the next statutory GM Local Transport Plan, the draft rapid transit strategy will also play a key role in shaping the rapid transit elements of the refreshed 2040 Transport Strategy and the next Five-Year Delivery Plan (2027-32).

1.10. Publication of the draft strategy provides the strongest foundation to move rapid transit policy, strategy, development and delivery work forward at pace in line with statutory commitments for the GM Local Transport Plan and CRSTS1 Delivery Plan commitments.

1.11. The publication also provides a full and transparent update to a wider audience, with both the progress made to date and the next steps – including engagement on the draft strategy. The full strategy is attached to this document at Appendix 1.

2. STRUCTURE, PURPOSE AND CONTENT OF THE DRAFT STRATEGY

2.1. The structure of the draft Greater Manchester Rapid Transit Strategy sets out:

- the overall vision for rapid transit and why there's a case for change;
- what is required in broad terms, and how GMCA/TfGM will seek to deliver it in more detail;
- the 8 rail corridors to be integrated into the Bee Network by 2028;
- the c.15 emerging priorities for expansion of the rapid transit system

3. OPPORTUNITIES FOR STOCKPORT

- 3.1. The 'One Stockport' approach adopted by the borough includes the One Future – Five Big Things which includes clean, green transport. Our ambition is to bring Metrolink to Stockport and secure investment into its train stations, including improving Stockport Station and a zero-emission bus network.
- 3.2. The strategy provides a platform for achieving Stockport's strategic transport aims as set out at the roundtable of senior industry leaders hosted by the Leader in December. Commitments were made to unlock the economic potential of the borough through an integrated transport hub in the town centre as the GM Southern Gateway Hub, bringing together a transformed railway station and the Metrolink service to coexist with our brand-new bus interchange. The GM Mayor reiterated his commitment to funding the business case for Next Stop Stockport (Stockport's Metrolink expansion) and there was complete support for completing the business case to transform of the railway station.
- 3.3. **Rail:** Significant progress is being made on rail integration which will help facilitate the delivery of the 8 priority corridors by 2028. For Stockport, this includes Alderley Edge and Buxton via Stockport; Glossop, Hadfield and Rose Hill Marple via Guide Bridge.
- 3.4. The overall aspirations for rail are set alongside recognised capacity issues in central Manchester as well as capacity issues in and around Stockport for rail, including the uncertainties arising from the current proposals for High Speed 2 services to run on the existing rail network in the North.
- 3.5. TfGM will seek the best solutions where proposed new inter-city lines do not release capacity for rapid transit. It is anticipated that some existing highly-constrained lines – notably the lines via Bolton, Chat Moss, Calder Valley, Stockport and Manchester Airport – are less likely to experience released capacity from new inter-city lines. They will continue to present challenges in finding a balance between serving inter-city, regional, rapid transit and freight markets. TfGM will continue to work with the rail industry to seek better rapid transit on these lines, including taking advantage of capacity provided by upgrades.
- 3.6. **Regeneration:** TfGM will work with industry partners to develop a formal vehicle for delivering regeneration and commercial and housing development in and around rail stations where opportunities on land owned by the rail industry are not being fully realised. In 2023, TfGM and Network Rail announced a new partnership to deliver a joint vision for stations within the Regional Centre and will establish future regeneration and development opportunities at stations and attract partners for delivery of future projects. Work is now underway to look at opportunities at Stockport, Piccadilly, Victoria, Oxford Road, Deansgate, Salford Central and Salford Crescent.
- 3.7. **Rapid transit - Connectivity:** The draft strategy presents a principles-based prioritisation of options for new, extended and converted rapid transit lines, with c.15 emerging priorities identified for rapid transit system expansion.

These include the Mayoral Manifesto prioritisation of plans for Stockport and, overall, include introduction of tram-train services to join up the light and heavy rail networks, and potential major new tunnelled capacity

3.8. Sustaining southern competitiveness – Airport and southern gateway.

The strategy acknowledges that the potential of key assets such as Manchester Airport and the town centres of Stockport, Altrincham and Wythenshawe are essential in GM's prosperity where the further development of rapid transit can play a vital role in supporting the objectives of the development of the Airport and Southern Growth Corridor and international connectivity via Manchester Airport as the region's 'Global Gateway'. Further, jobs growth in this area means that the Airport has the potential to become a second hub for rapid transit in GM. In the nearer term, the cancellation of the northern sections of High Speed 2 means that Stockport's role as GM's southern gateway is more important than ever. This connectivity has the potential for 22,000 new jobs as well as the continued redevelopment of Stockport town centre and Wythenshawe town centre.

3.9. Tram Train: multiple challenges around pressures on the heavy rail network's key junctions and overall capacity could, potentially, be addressed by using tram-train technology to extend existing Metrolink services that run through the city centre and terminate at Piccadilly out towards Glossop, Hadfield, and Marple. This would also make better use of trams that currently terminate at Piccadilly by carrying passengers from the Glossop, Hadfield and Marple lines to and through the city centre without the need for interchange. Tram-train services could provide opportunity to join up the light and heavy rail networks, and potential major new tunnelled capacity.

3.10. Bringing forward new stops and stations. The following proposals are currently in different stages of development and delivery, in some cases working with the rail industry:

- **Stockport Rail Station** – to progress the redevelopment of Stockport Station to support its role as the southern gateway to Greater Manchester
- **Cheadle rail station** on the Mid-Cheshire Line connecting Cheadle into the regional public transport network, transforming accessibility to Stockport Town Centre and beyond.
- **Tameside to Stockport via Denton and Reddish** Study work in the mid-2010s showed that tram-train services between Tameside and Stockport, on the line via Denton and Reddish, were likely to have a weak case for investment. More recent Restoring Your Railways study work has shown that the case for train services is also weak. However, this remains an important strategic resource of the existing railway line via Denton and Reddish and further assessment is still recommended within the strategy as part of a potential wider network of services, so that this route is not precluded from playing its part in the future – for example by linking Tameside with other proposals between Stockport and the Airport

- **South Manchester to Stockport / Hazel Grove** Metrolink to Stockport from East Didsbury has a long history of proposals and there are now new significant opportunities to strengthen the business case for funding, including development within Stockport town centre (with 4,000 new homes where public transport and active travel will be the first option) and wider economic opportunities across the Airport and Southern Growth Corridor. Stockport Council's 'Next Stop Stockport' programme is recognised as a vehicle that provides opportunity to bring together partners in pursuit of the economic opportunities and to embed these benefits in the Metrolink business case. Officers expect to be involved in the development of this Metrolink business case this year and anticipate this to be completed in Summer 2025. Work is in progress and will continue to establish the case for funding around all potential tram and tram-train options as part of a wider future network to link with services between Stockport and the Airport, between Stockport and Ashton via Denton and Reddish, and to Hazel Grove using the Adswold freight line.
- **Stockport to Airport** For a potential tram-train service between Stockport and the Airport, recent business case work shows promise for making greater use of the Mid Cheshire line via the new station at Cheadle. This service would depend on the prior completion of the Metrolink Airport line 'Western Leg' (described earlier in this draft strategy, and again below). There is also an opportunity to consider a joined-up approach with rapid transit services from East Didsbury to Stockport and/or Hazel Grove – these schemes might share infrastructure or become combined services. To ensure that options are kept open, TfGM and Stockport Council are working with Network Rail on their replacement of the life-expired Greek Street and Stockholm Road bridges. In 2023, a Strategic Outline Business Case to use City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding to safeguard space for potential future tram-train routes at these bridges was approved. Work continues with Network Rail to implement the required options at each of these bridges.
- **Busway corridors to the east and west of the Airport** Busway corridors to the west and east of the Airport could also provide more local connections. From the east, this could enable enhancements to a range of bus routes connecting into Stockport and Cheshire East, including from Bramhall, Cheadle Hulme, Handforth, Hazel Grove, Heald Green, Poynton, Stanley Green, Woodford, and Wilmslow. (From Trafford to the west, this would be through the Davenport Green development to provide a more attractive alternative to the car for journeys between Altrincham and the Airport.) However, the extent to which these corridors could truly achieve bus rapid transit conditions with segregation from general traffic remains an open question. These bus-based options will also need to be considered against rail-based proposals which could provide alternative forms rapid transit to the Airport

3.11. Rail integration: Significant progress is being made on rail integration. To facilitate the delivery of the 8 priority corridors by 2028 (Wigan via Bolton;

Wigan via Atherton; Wigan via Golborne; Airport; Alderley Edge and Buxton via Stockport; Glossop, Hadfield and Rose Hill Marple via Guide Bridge; Ashton-under-Lyne and Stalybridge; Rochdale) we have developed with the rail industry a collective understanding of Bee Network rail integration. The proposition for this is included in the draft strategy, to facilitate further detailed implementation plans coming forward.

- 3.12. Work as part of the CRSTS1 Delivery Plan in support of the draft strategy's aims will continue. Much of this work concerns schemes 'in flight' (such as Golborne Station, Access for All, Bury Interchange Redevelopment and Metrolink Next Generation Vehicles / Tram-Train Pathfinder); these schemes are reflected in the draft strategy and included in wider master planning activities.
- 3.13. With regard to rail integration, TfGM is seeking to agree the long-term partnership with the rail industry so that local accountability for the rail network is embedded.
- 3.14. **System expansion:** The draft strategy presents a principles-based prioritisation of options for new, extended and converted rapid transit lines, with c.15 emerging priorities identified for rapid transit system expansion. These include the Mayoral Manifesto prioritisation of plans for Stockport, Heywood and Middleton, along with building a business case for Bolton. A business case will be developed to bring Metrolink to Stockport although clear timescales are not yet available.
- 3.15. Further detailed prioritisation will take place during 2024 of the c.15 emerging priorities for new, extended and/or converted rapid transit lines to sequence a potential future expansion programme, alongside ongoing business case development, working with local authorities to space-save for potential future routes in Local Plans, and planning for capacity in the regional centre and network optimisation.
- 3.16. All of the above is in support of the current Right Mix vision which anticipates more than doubling rapid transit trips by 2040. This is within a context of 10% population growth in that period, the city-region's commitments to be carbon neutral by 2038 with improved air quality and biodiversity, and the need to transform opportunities for all and respond to the conurbation's growth locations. Ultimately, the draft strategy's contents are in support of the Greater Manchester Strategy's vision.

4. **ENGAGEMENT**

- 4.1. This is a draft strategy with a key next step being of wider engagement on the contents of the draft strategy through 2024, including targeted engagement sessions to help shape its final contents. These sessions will be planned in consideration of the wider engagement work on the next GM Local Transport Plan. They will take place:

- with groups of people who could be affected in different ways by the contents of the draft strategy (for example, the Disability Design Reference Group);
 - with business (for example, the Business Transport Advisory Council);
 - with government (for example, the Department for Transport);
- 4.2.** No further details are currently available although it is expected that the engagement process will continue as plans evolve in support of the strategy, including consideration of place-based and community approaches.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1.** The draft strategy, with its contents ultimately being adopted via the process to create the next statutory GM Local Transport Plan, will support Transport for Greater Manchester in planning its work. This will be achieved by having a document that:

- informs decisions on prioritisation;
- underpins the case to government and external organisations, including those that make up the rail industry;
- can be referred to as part of the planning and policy case when promoting schemes.

- 5.2.** The draft strategy is not a costed or funded delivery plan and its full ambitions would require significant funding to be delivered. Plans will come forward over time to support implementation of the strategy, for example, concerning integration of rail into the Bee Network.

- 5.3.** The draft strategy is built upon the network principles of the 2040 Strategy and Bee Network Customer Commitments.

- 5.4.** The draft strategy addresses sustaining, integrating and improving rapid transit so that it is:

- well-maintained, resilient and reliable;
- environmentally responsible, healthy and sustainable;
- safe, secure, accessible and inclusive. This includes steps already in hand as part of the Bee Network to 2025 – including the integration of information, fares, ticketing and operating hours between tram and bus. It also includes interim milestones towards bringing rail into the Bee Network, such as the pay-as-you-go contactless ticketing pilot in 2025.

- 5.5.** Growing rapid transit coverage and patronage is described by the draft strategy:

- addressing mounting capacity challenges on Metrolink with a fleet of longer, walkthrough 'next generation vehicles' with tram-train capability;
- working with the rail industry on train and platform lengthening, and remaining responsive to demand on the busway;

- developing and delivering new stops and stations – and improving our existing ones, including with access for all and better first and last mile connections;
- working to improve key links that knit together the existing rapid transit system.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

6.1. Not applicable at this time

7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1. Not applicable at this time

8. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

N/A

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

9.1. Not applicable at this time

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

10.1. Not applicable at this time

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1. That Scrutiny Committee welcome the strategic opportunity this strategy brings for the borough and that the funding has been identified for developing the business case of Next Stop Stockport as one of three Metrolink schemes prioritised for early development.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Mark Glynn on telephone number Tel: 0161-474-3700 or alternatively email mark.glynn@stockport.gov.uk