

Transport and Environment Committee

10:00am, Thursday, 4 June 2013

Conference attendance – 8th Annual UK Light Rail Conference

Item number	8.5
Report number	
Wards	All

Links

Coalition pledges	N/A
Council outcomes	N/A
Single Outcome Agreement	N/A

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Executive summary

Conference Attendance – 8th Annual UK Light Rail Conference

Summary

Approval was given by the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 26 February 2013 for the Convenor of the Transport and Environment Committee, officers and opposition Transport Spokespeople to visit current tram operating cities.

The 8th Annual UK Light Rail Conference was held on 15 – 16 May 2013 in Manchester. This is an established conference attended by other local authorities, light rail operators and organisations. The Director of Services for Communities in consultation with the Convenor of Transport and Environment Committee agreed that attendance at the conference should replace the Manchester visit previously agreed by Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee.

Recommendations

Committee is asked to:

1. note the action taken by the Director of Services for Communities, in consultation with the Convenor of Transport and Environment Committee under Committee Terms of Reference and Delegated Function A3.1 in approving attendance at the 8th Annual UK Light Rail Conference; and
2. notes that feedback from the officers and councillors in attendance from Edinburgh was that the conference proved to be of great interest and was certainly worthwhile.

Measures of success

Attendance at the conference will provide the opportunity to gain knowledge from other local authorities who also have trams.

Financial impact

Costs will be minimised and met from within the Services for Communities budget.

Equalities impact

Not applicable.

Sustainability impact

Arrangements will be made in accordance with the Council's Sustainable Travel Plan.

Consultation and engagement

Not applicable.

Background reading / external references

[uk-light-rail-conference | events](#)

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes

**Single Outcome
Agreement**

Appendices

Appendix 1 – summary report from the 8th Annual Light Rail
Conference – Manchester 15-16 May 2013

Appendix 1

Summary report from the 8th Annual Light Rail Conference - Manchester 15-16 May 2013

Introduction and general comments

The two day conference was attended by Cllrs Aldridge, Hinds, Mowat and Orr, plus the Chief Executive. The tone was positive, optimistic and forward looking, as would be expected given the recent proliferation of (reportedly successful) light rail schemes across the UK (particularly the English Midlands), Ireland and Europe. For example, France alone was reported to have 24 individual light rail schemes, including small towns such as Troyes (with a population of circa 62,000).

The chair made a point of welcoming the Edinburgh delegates to the "light rail family" and this was well received as was the presentation from the Chief Executive ("Edinburgh: Back on Track"). It is also worth noting that one delegate from Dublin emphasised a single critical ingredient for the success of any successful light rail project. That ingredient, in one word, was "ownership".

One Nottingham delegate reported that one tram carries 177 people (potentially replacing 177 cars) or 3 buses, and that this statistic highlighted the argument, in terms of transport policy, for investing in light rail projects. Trams were also noted to rate more highly in customer satisfaction than buses.

Nottingham is scheduled to host the conference in 2014 while Edinburgh delegates expressed an interest in hosting it in 2015.

Points of interest

The conference took place over two very full days. The discussions tended to be either updates from delegates from particular cities on their light rail schemes and any expansion plans or items of particular light rail "policy". It is not possible to summarise all the discussions in a short report and so what follows is a selection of topics on which panel discussions and presentations took place and which are thought to be particularly interesting to the Transport and Environment Committee. This report is collated from the notes taken by the Edinburgh delegates.

Ticketing and revenue protection

Given that the vast majority of light rail passengers are loyal customers who want a good service, it was recommended that the approach of fare collection be customer focussed and non-confrontational in terms of the minority who engage in fare evasion. Setting the penalty fare is another challenge. Paying a low penalty fee can become a cheap alternative to paying regularly. Need to deter fare evasion without creating a barrier between customer and tram provider.

Smart ticketing and integrated ticketing were discussed. Transport for London appears to be ahead of the rest of the UK in this regard, partly as they have particular powers enshrined in legislation.

Funding expansion

Various options were discussed such as TIF and PFI. PFI reportedly works best when the contract is for construction and operation. Nottingham introduced a workplace parking levy to fund their expansion and this reportedly contributed £8m in first year. Clearly the better the expansion route and design, the easier it is to fund, particularly when combined with significant economic development opportunities.

Cycling

None of the UK schemes permit cycles to be carried on their light rail systems. However, some representatives stated that they make access to the stations by bicycle as easy as possible. The position of Birmingham is that they are waiting to see whether the pilot scheme in Edinburgh is a success before considering the matter again. It was reported that the carrying cycles on trams is quite common on the continent.

Social media

This is increasingly important in connecting to customers in real time; for example in the event of delays or disruptions to the service. Some operators have a “tweet deck” to help monitor their own service.

Tram Train

Potential for tram-train options highlighted by new Sheffield to Rotherham link. In this situation, trams use main line rail network, normally for a short section of track. A number of complexities always need to be addressed for example around converting the main line voltage to the tram voltage and signalling.

Track Laying

Alternative mechanisms to lay tracks were proposed. In Edinburgh we followed the traditional approach of digging up roads and laying concrete beds to lay the tracks on. However, one French manufacturer claimed that 100m of bed and track can be laid per day on top of the road with relatively little preparation. A number of other delegates suggested such an approach cut corners and was short sighted (leaving “time bombs” under the tracks).

Utility Works

On the complex matter of the movement and renewal of utility works during tram works, it was acknowledged that under certain circumstances utility companies should and do pay a share of renewal costs when they are moved for tram construction, depending on a number of factors such as their condition. However, in spite of the existence of a Code of Practice, there was disagreement on the panel about the practicalities around this and the adequacy of current legislation.

Finally, the Transport Convener indicated that she was keen for the 2015 conference to be held in Edinburgh. The 2014 conference is scheduled to be in Nottingham.