WHERE NEXT FOR LEEDS? - DEFINING A REVISED TRANSPORT STRATEGY IN A POST-SUPERTRAM WORLD

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1. INTRODUCTION

The backdrop to this paper is the decision in November 2005 by the Secretary of State for Transport to cancel the Leeds Supertram project. The project arose as a key strand of the 1991 Leeds Transport Strategy – acting as a cornerstone to a whole range of other transport initiatives.

As a result of the cancellation of the scheme, the responsibility for picking up the pieces has fallen on local transport officials. Within a short timescale there has been a pressing local need to develop a credible strategy that will serve Leeds (and the wider City Region) well over the next 15 years and beyond. The process of developing this strategy has had to be placed in the context of potential funding sources to ensure that any proposals put forward will have a level of credibility with local and regional stakeholders.

The process of strategy development is still ongoing. Progress is also being made in terms of the delivery of the transport interventions required for the Leeds City Region.

2. BACKGROUND TO 1991 TRANSPORT STRATEGY FOR LEEDS

The Leeds Transport Strategy was adopted in 1991. Leeds pioneered a ‘Horses for Courses’ approach to transport planning that has served it well in the intervening period. It has pioneered in a number of initiatives such as the introduction of guided busways as well as a High Occupancy Vehicle Lane. The Supertram proposals represented the final, and critical, piece of the transport jigsaw as set out in the Strategy.

Most of the measures originally identified in the Strategy have been implemented. In the City Centre, pedestrianisation has been extended and traffic has been redirected around the one-way loop. Inside the loop, the public transport box gives priority to public transport vehicles. The Inner Ring Road system is near to completion – the final section (Stage 7) has received Government funding approval and is programmed for opening in 2008.

The central area parking policy seeks to change the balance of provision from long towards short-stay spaces. Between 1999 and 2004 there has been a 4% decrease in the number of long stay car parking spaces (with the equivalent increase in short stay spaces), and a further 1,100 long stay spaces (16% of the
total) are currently the subject of proposals for major retail and mixed use development (Eastgate, Quarry Hill and Sovereign Street).

Significant improvements have been made to facilities for bus services in Leeds:

- Implementation of Scott Hall Road guided busway and park & ride site (1995 - 1998);
- The development of Leeds Central Bus Station (1996);
- Completion of the Public Transport Box in Leeds City Centre and priority measures at a number of gateways to the centre (1998);
- Implementation of the East Leeds Quality Bus Initiative (A64 York Road Guided Busway), through a partnership between Metro, Leeds City Council, First and Arriva (2001);
- The provision of a new bus/rail interchange at Leeds City Station (2004);
- Operator investment in vehicles (ongoing); and

A High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane has been introduced on Stanningley Road and Bypass – the first of its type in the UK, which has reduced journey times for buses and other HOVs, with evidence of an increase in bus patronage.

Major works have been completed by Railtrack at Leeds Station and its approaches, including Leeds West End re-signalling, permitting further improvements to the rail network and allowing significantly more train services from the south and the west.

The Airedale and Wharfedale railway lines (to Skipton and Ilkley respectively) have been electrified and a new fleet of Class 333 trains introduced. Metro subsequently secured Rail Passenger Partnership funding for an additional 16 centre-cars, converting the whole fleet to 4-car trains required to meet growing demand.

3. **VISION AND OBJECTIVES**

Whilst much has been achieved in terms of delivery of the 1991 Strategy, Leeds has experienced unprecedented economic growth in the intervening period. As a result, there are significant challenges that still lie ahead. The Leeds Initiative has set out a vision for 2020 for Leeds to be:

> ‘an internationally competitive European city at the heart of a prosperous region where everyone can enjoy a high quality of life’.

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Through the Local Transport Plan, the City Council, Metro, transport operators and partners in the Leeds Initiative are working to provide the transport system that will support the realisation of the Vision for Leeds.

Leeds has attracted substantial private-sector investment in property, leisure and business in recent years, with growth in businesses, jobs and incomes being a result of Leeds’ success. Many existing businesses have expanded, and new firms have created new employment, wealth and increased confidence in spending in the City Centre. This has helped to consolidate Leeds as the major regional centre for retail, fashion, financial, legal and business services, design companies and manufacturing. The media sector is now the second largest outside London, and the number of information and communications technology businesses is growing rapidly. Demand on City Centre accommodation has now out-stretched availability and has required major developments to occur both within the City Centre and its borders.

30% of Leeds Metropolitan District jobs are in the City Centre. It is forecast that in the order of 30,000 jobs will be created in Leeds over the next 10 years, meaning that the city will provide around 37% of the region’s extra jobs. Finance and business services will account for 75% of the city’s employment growth. People employed in these new jobs will come from across the region.

However, transport investment has not kept pace with the growth of Leeds. Although many aspects of the 1991 transport strategy have been implemented, as demonstrated above, the cancellation of Leeds Supertram leaves a significant gap in transport provision.

The aim of a revised transport strategy for Leeds is not only to address the issues caused by the cancellation of the Supertram project, but to develop a fully integrated transport system for the city that meets the three main aims of the Vision for Leeds:

- Going up a league as a city – making Leeds an internationally competitive city, the best place in the country to live, work and learn, with a high quality of life for everyone;
- Narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged people and communities and the rest of the city; and
- Developing Leeds’ roles as the regional capital, contributing to the national economy as a competitive European city, supporting and supported by a region that is increasingly prosperous.

To support this vision means that the transport system must be comparable to other major European cities. It must contribute to the overall quality of space within the city and it must connect people with jobs and opportunity. The future transport system must also both respond to present pressures and help shape future sustainable development and land use.

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4. SUPERTRAM OUTCOME AND IMPACT

4.1 The Proposals

The rejected proposals for Leeds Supertram comprised a three line, 22 km, network serving south, north west and north east Leeds with major park and ride provision at the termination of each line. The network would have involved the operation of the tram on both new reserved track and on the existing public highway, with the Urban Traffic Control (UTC) system providing priority at junctions.

The Supertram network of three lines in south, east and north Leeds is shown in Figure 1.1. The lines complement the planned investment in public transport on the other major radial corridors in Leeds. The Supertram network was developed to:-

![FIGURE 1.1](image)
- Provide a comfortable, reliable and fast alternative to the car on radial routes which are not served by rail services and which have heavy demand for bus services;
- Provide a public transport system accessible to all through the design of stops and vehicles;
- Serve major traffic generators in the city (city centre, town centres in South Leeds, East Leeds and Headingley, Universities, Hospitals, bus/coach stations and rail station);
- Enable a marked shift from car to public transport use in each corridor. Each line of the network would serve a large park & ride site on the edge of the city (larger than those generally served by buses elsewhere in the UK);
- Attract sufficiently large numbers of car users to Supertram to avert the need to increase radial highway capacity in Leeds and help secure the desired accessibility, attractiveness and safety of the City Centre;
- Complement other measures and in particular the traffic management, bus priority and pedestrianisation improvements in the city centre and interchange with rail at the city station;
- Serve major development sites in South Leeds (Armouries and Clarence Dock), Headingley (Bodington) and East Leeds (the Seacroft Centre); and
- Have park & ride sites integrated with appropriate developments to ensure all day use of Supertram services and the car parks, thereby improving the economics of the scheme and security at car parks.

The network as defined provided a strong ‘fit’ with the findings of the National Audit Office (NAO) report published in May 2004 “Improving Public Transport in England through Light Rail”.

4.2 The Decision to Cancel the Scheme

The History of the Leeds Supertram project is long and complex, and the author will not attempt to cover these issues in any detail. However, in respect of the ultimate decision to cancel the scheme, there are a couple of key areas that merit discussion since they have a bearing on the direction that is required of a future strategy. These include:

- Affordability criteria: progressing schemes, or packages of schemes that have agreed (or identified) funding sources;
- Mode comparison: limited evidence on relativity of attractiveness, and modelling tools that were not originally designed for this task.

In the Transport Secretary’s statement of 3rd November 2005, a number of points were made in relation to the above two issues. It is worth repeating some of them here:
“it (Supertram) does not represent the best value for money…or best use of public money…. When compared to the alternative proposals… for top of the range rapid bus scheme”

“review by consultants…suggests that such a scheme could deliver the majority of the benefits…at only half the cost”

“an opportunity for Leeds to develop a first of its kind, showcase bus system”

“there remains an element of risk….given that a comprehensive bus system has not been delivered in this manner in the UK before”

“the funding will be there for the right proposals”

This paper goes on to discuss the issues around the alternative proposals, as mentioned above, as well as developing the Supertram alternative in the context of a wider Transport Strategy with consideration for potential funding availability.

4.3 The Alternatives for the Supertram Corridors

In line with Department for Transport guidance, the Supertram proposal (The Preferred Option) was appraised against a range of alternative solutions. Guidance dictates that schemes should be measured against other options that broadly meet the same objectives, but offer a lower overall cost.

The tram was appraised in 2000 against a bus-based alternative, and again in 2003 as part of a process that examined all potential modes and their relative performance against a range of criteria. On both occasions, the tram significantly out-performed the alternatives against given criteria and generated a higher Net Present Value of Benefits and a higher Benefit:Cost ratio.

In a report submission to the DfT in November 2004, more detailed work was undertaken (in line with evolving guidance requirements) which focussed on a concept known as Bus Rapid Transit (or BRT).

This option was designed to be as close to having the same characteristics of a tram scheme, while using innovative bus technology. It was considered to be sufficiently distinct from other bus services as to be perceived as a separate mode, predominantly due to having a reasonably high level of segregation, high levels of reliability both of journey time and headways, ultra-high quality vehicles, high-quality waiting environments and a distinctive branding etc.

The appraisal of this BRT option showed that, at half the cost of the Supertram network, it did not meet the objectives of Supertram to the same extent, and that
overall it resulted in economic benefits at around 60% of the level of the tram scheme and a Benefit:Cost ratio of 1.8:1 (tram = 2.4:1).

To further satisfy (and assist) the DfT in making a firm decision on the tram option, a further review of the appraised BRT option was conducted in Summer 2005. This work was undertaken by independent consultants (Atkins) and sought to ‘optimise’ the scheme. It highlighted a number of points, around which there was a difference of opinion on some key points:

- A BRT option could ‘offer many of the attributes of the Supertram system’ – as such it was deemed to represent a new travel choice in terms of perception. The means of modelling the attractiveness of these features remains contentious at best;

- The BRT option could deliver up to 90% of the benefits of tram – as part of the work, there was significant discussion around the lack of evidence that exists in respect of intermediate mode appraisal in the UK to inform the debate on the relative attractiveness of options; and

- There are significant elements of risk attached to the BRT option – it is an untried technology and the forecast patronage and benefit levels cannot be guaranteed. There also exist risk areas relating to the practical means of scheme delivery as well as guaranteeing all of the BRT features for the lifetime of the scheme.

The ultimate decision to cancel the Supertram project appeared to be heavily influenced by the findings of this work. This is despite the fact that a subsequent Freedom of Information (FoI) request made to the DfT has revealed that prior to the Atkins study, Civil Servants briefed Ministers that “the (Supertram) scheme would offer high value for money.” This leads Metro, as the scheme Promoter together with Leeds CC, to question whether the ultimate decision on cancellation was one born out of affordability rather than a straightforward issue of Value for Money.

Metro and Leeds City Council are currently pursuing the BRT option, working towards an Outline Business Case submission to the DfT in the near future. The treatment of benefits and delivery issues are two key aspects that will need to be satisfactorily resolved.

5. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Background

The Leeds Supertram project was cancelled on 3rd November 2005. Shortly following the decision, a meeting of the Leeds Transport Strategy Review Group was convened to review future transport options. Membership of the group included Leeds City Council councillors and officers, senior Metro officers and representatives from local business as well as the Government Office for Yorkshire and The Humber.
Officers were tasked with developing a blueprint (or Plan B) for presentation at the following meeting of the Leeds Transport Strategy Review Group, programmed for the end of January 2006. This represented significant activity within a very short window of opportunity. However work had already been undertaken in advance of the decision for a Plan B scenario. Clearly this ‘Plan’ could not be made public as it would have undermined confidence in the Supertram scheme as it was nearing a decision from DfT.

Planning commenced for a workshop early in the New Year. This meant that a significant amount of pre-planning was required in the short timescale available in the build up to Christmas. The desktop preparation considered the findings from recent relevant transport studies as well as the most recent data on traffic flows, congestion hotspots, public transport supply and demand data, car parking provision and planned land-use changes as set out in the Unitary Development Plan.

Work was also undertaken to consider options for supporting the planned employment growth in both the central area and outside, and the implications for the transport system.

The workshop was held on 4 January 2006 involving Metro representatives, Leeds City Council officers and transport consultants. The purpose of this workshop was to consider the key transport issues across Leeds and to identify immediate and long term transport requirements, which would form the basis of an updated transport strategy for the city.

The study process that is the foundation of the revised strategy relied heavily on the existing technical knowledge of staff who have worked on a variety of projects pertinent to the purpose of this study. No major new technical work was initiated because of the short time available for the report preparation.

5.2 Workshop Structure

The workshop was divided into two initial sessions following a brief introduction to the issues from Metro, Leeds City Council and Government Office for Yorkshire and Humber. Workshop attendees were divided into two groups. Each group was asked to consider specific “wedges” of the city, each of which included several road and rail corridors and were overlapping. Plans showing the geographical extents of each wedge were provided. The wedges themselves can be summarised as follows:

- North Wedge (A660, A61, A58, Harrogate line);
- North East Wedge (A58, A64, A63, York/Selby line);
- South East Wedge (A63, A61,A639, M1, Wakefield line, Hallam line);
• South West Wedge (A62, A58, A653, M1, M621, Huddersfield line, Caldervale line);
• West Wedge (A647, A657, A65, Caldervale line, Airedale line);
• North West Wedge (A660, A65, A647, Harrogate line, Wharfedale line).

A wider discussion was also held relating to the development of an updated transport strategy for Leeds. This yielded a significant amount of information relating to aspects that would need to be covered within the strategy as well as demonstrating a high level of consensus on strategy direction.

5.3 Summary of Workshop Outcomes and Next Steps

One of the key outcomes from the workshop was a comprehensive list of the main transport problems and potential solutions identified in different wedges of the city. This list formed the basis for further discussions and was the subsequent first stage in developing a prioritised list of schemes for Leeds.

The discussion sessions during the workshop identified a range of issues that will require consideration during the development of an updated transport strategy for Leeds. It was agreed that a revised strategy for Leeds must:

• Be born out of a wider vision for Leeds;
• Include all forms of transport including non-motorised modes;
• Have stakeholder support;
• Have buy-in from the DfT to ensure it is deliverable; and
• Focus upon management of the transport network and institutional changes in addition to building new infrastructure.

In terms of the next steps, there were several follow-up actions arising from the workshop which are summarised below:

• A report to be taken to Leeds City Council members at the end of January 2006 to outline transport options for Leeds following the Supertram decision. It was agreed that this report should outline various funding scenarios and must clearly identify potentially difficult future decisions;
• The development of a list of all suggested schemes for Leeds and identify whether they can be delivered in the short, medium or long term; and
• Identification of measures which could be implemented as quick wins but which would also contribute towards a longer term strategy.

The review considered that, in general, the provision of additional radial highway capacity remains undesirable (beyond those schemes already committed).

Additional public transport capacity is required and the quality of public transport needs to be improved in order to provide an attractive alternative to the car.
There is a need to address the loss of some 1,800 long-stay City Centre car parking spaces that will take place over the next 3-5 years, which could be achieved through park and ride, and a shift to public transport.

Notwithstanding the Government’s cancellation of the Supertram project, the review concluded that incremental development of the City’s bus and rail network alone would not meet future needs, and that a step-change in public transport provision is required.

The review also considered the future role of a range of demand management measures, including soft ‘smarter choices’ initiatives such as Travel Plans, tele-working and more flexible working hours, as well as ‘harder’ measures such as the management of car parking provision and the re-allocation of roadspace.

There is also a need for transport infrastructure and services that:

- Cater for orbital movements;
- Support regeneration areas (such as the Aire Valley Leeds and East And South East Leeds regeneration areas); and
- Enhance the accessibility of local centres, for example, Pudsey, Otley and Morley.

Proposals, and options for further study were identified, covering the short-term (0-3 years), the medium term (3-5 years) and the longer term (5 years +). It was envisaged that additional longer term proposals will emerge from the current Metro-led work that is being undertaken on the long term Transport Vision for the Leeds City Region.

6. STRATEGY DELIVERY

The recommendations to take the revised Transport Strategy for Leeds forward were approved by the Leeds Transport Strategy Review Board in January 2006. Responsibility was assigned to individuals to lead on various elements. Meetings take place at an officer level on a regular basis to review progress.

Following the decision to progress the Strategy, the next key step involved in working towards the delivery of a revised Leeds Transport Strategy was to enter into discussions with a number of the key organisations which will ultimately be responsible for decisions on investment and funding of the proposals contained within the revised strategy. These include:

- Department for Transport;
- Bus Operators (principally First and Arriva);
- Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber;
- Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Assembly/Regional Transport Board;
• Highways Agency;
• Network Rail and rail operators; and
• Other Funding Agencies.

Following the decision on Leeds Supertram funding in early November 2005, a meeting was held with officials at DfT to establish how to take proposals forward for the bus-based schemes within the Supertram corridors. These discussions highlighted the absolute requirement for DfT commitment to providing the necessary funding to implement a revised strategy. The discussions considered the likely availability of funding from regional allocations and the possibility that the West Yorkshire LTP authorities would be seeking some form of supplementary funding should those allocations and other regional priorities prevent good progress in implementing a revised strategy that had full DfT support.

Central to further discussions with DfT is to establish how the package of measures for Leeds can be delivered within current funding constraints. The acceleration of a programme of ‘quick wins’ would be possible if Leeds were looked on more favourably with respect to the early release of funds.

Key to the discussions with the above organisations, will be a clear understanding of potential funding availability over the next 10 years in the context of the cost of the various schemes identified. It will also be critical to establish at an early stage, those schemes which can only be delivered by accessing the Transport Innovation Fund.

In addition, we are currently developing with a range of partners and stakeholders a delivery plan that will meet the approval of the various Government bodies and funding organisations.

A number of studies are being instigated to develop outline proposals where schemes are required to demonstrate a robust business case. The outcomes of these projects will be represented as key decision points for the transport strategy as a whole since the conclusions of the various pieces of work will include commentary on the complementary demand management measures that funding bodies (such as DfT) will seek to introduce as a pre-condition to granting scheme approval.

Following the definition of a programme of activity for the various studies, schemes will be prioritised to determine those that best match potential available resources to timescales for implementation. Ongoing dialogue will be necessary with the external organisations, as well as local Members to ensure that the strategy remains on course.
7. **FUNDING THE STRATEGY**

There are five main sources of funding for implementing the recommended programme, as set out below:

- **Local Integrated Transport Block.** The Local Transport Plan funding formula allocates £150 million to West Yorkshire over the 5 year period 2006/07 – 2010/11. On the basis of the current allocations between authorities around £50-£60 million would be available. This sum could be increased by up to 12½% depending upon the DfT assessment of the West Yorkshire Local Transport Plan;

- **Local Transport Plan Major Schemes, as prioritised through advice from the Regional Transport Board.** DfT funding has already been approved for the East Leeds Link Road and Inner Ring Road Stage 7. The A65 Kirkstall Road Quality Bus Initiative has been prioritised by the Regional Transport Board and was granted funding approval in Summer 2006. At present there is little scope for substantial additional funding from this source in the short and medium term. However additional funds from Government following the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review could potentially be forthcoming. Further, indications from DfT are that there will be a further reprioritisation of transport schemes, as a result of new schemes brought forward, as well as an ongoing review of Value for Money by DfT which may release additional funding headroom. Further discussions are required with DfT given their commitment to provide funding for the ‘right bus scheme’ in Leeds;

- **Developer Contributions,** including the funds already secured for Leeds Supertram, although there are conditions attached to the use to which these funds can be spent;

- **Other contributions,** including private sector investment, such as that made by bus operators. Yorkshire Forward recently approved an £8 million contribution to a £16 million package to lease additional trains (the balance of the funding coming from fares); and

- **Funding through the Transport Innovation Fund announced in 2004,** which is set to grow to £2.55bn nationally by 2015.

The scale of the projects identified within the Transport Strategy would cost around £1bn to implement. This represents the requirements for Leeds – for the Leeds City Region (which encompasses all of West Yorkshire as well as conurbations such as Harrogate and York) the figure rises to over £3bn.

It is clear from the identified programme of works that a significant amount of funding will be required to deliver the measures outlined. There is likely to be limited headroom in the regional transport allocations, although there are a number of the schemes where this pot of money is the envisaged source (such as the Supertram replacement scheme). Whilst further discussions will be held with DfT it will also be necessary to consider other funding sources and mechanisms, including the Transport Innovation Fund (TIF) announced in 2004.
The TIF process involves pump priming and full bids to DfT. A Leeds City Region TIF bid was submitted to DfT in July 2006. It is hoped that the ensuing pump-priming activity will open up opportunities to fund, subject to the production of robust business cases, the key components of the Strategy.