

# BIG PLANS FOR LEEDS TRANSPORT

Traffic and transport are issues on which we all have views so it was unsurprising that more than 60 Trust members and guests gathered at Doubletree by Hilton in March to hear about the latest plans for improving the current situation. And there was nobody better able to tell us about what is planned than Gary Bartlett, Chief Officer for Highways and Transportation at Leeds City Council, and David Hoggarth, Development Director at West Yorkshire Metro.

They started their joint presentation by setting the context for the current city and city-region transport strategy as set out in “My Journey West Yorkshire”, the 15-year local transport plan published last year. They identified five main strands of work:

- Developing Trans-Pennine rail links and improving services through the Calder valley (funding for the Trans-Pennine upgrade was announced in the recent Budget)
- Preparing for the arrival of High Speed Rail
- Delivering a rapid transit network for the city-region including NGT for Leeds and tram-train links across the wider region
- Enhancing the rail network in the city-region through opening new stations and electrifying key lines
- Strategic highway enhancement, improving access to the airport and upgrading motorways.



Turning to Leeds more specifically, the transport strategy is intended to support the wider vision for the city to become the best city in the UK by:

- Supporting development and investment projects such as the Arena, Trinity quarter and, in time, Eastgate quarter
- Meeting future demands for travel for both work and leisure, and enhancing transport choices
- Delivering new jobs both directly and through helping to grow the local economy by providing high-quality transport
- Transforming the city centre, including the development of City Centre South.

Gary and David then set out some of the transport issues facing Leeds which need to be tackled by the strategy. In the outer area there is a need for Park and Ride facilities around the outer ring road to reduce the volume of traffic in the city centre, for improvements to the orbital routes round the city and for the introduction of NGT, with the first two lines being to the North and East of the city. Moving nearer to the city centre the new cycle network needs to be delivered and bus services need improvement either by enhanced partnership working with bus operators or through the introduction of a Bus Quality Contract Scheme which would give Metro stronger control over routes, fares, timetables and quality standards, as currently happens in London. In the city centre the rail station was already full and needs to be expanded and significantly improved to respond to a projected 60-100% increase in traffic, trains needed to be upgraded, there is a need to reduce the through traffic in City Square (25-30% of the total) and to tackle longstanding areas of congestion, and more space is needed to respond to an expected increase in bus traffic. In addition better interchange facilities are needed – the idea of moving the bus station to Sovereign Street was not practical as the area was needed for other purposes.

These issues would be tackled incrementally over the period of the plan. In the years up to 2020 the aim is to tackle priority work such as improving Armley gyratory, providing a new southern entrance to the station by 2014, building new stations at Kirkstall Forge and Apperley Bridge, improving orbital traffic management to reduce pressure on City Square, starting park and ride developments and introducing smart card ticketing, initially on buses by 2013. At the same time work would start on electrifying the Trans-Pennine and York-Selby routes and on building NGT if funding was secured (a decision is expected in May).

Looking further ahead to 2025, the aim is to reroute the Loop to go south of the river, to expand NGT, to extend the cycle network, to extend rail electrification to the Harrogate line, to start developing the new high speed

station, which should be close to the current station to facilitate moving to local services, and to decide on the future of the inner ring road – while funds are available for short-term maintenance decisions were needed on its long-term role. And beyond this, in the years up to 2030 the aim is to continue rail electrification to Bradford and the Calder valley, to see the new High Speed station opened with the regeneration it would drive, to develop tram-train routes to the airport, the Aire valley and the five towns to the east of Leeds, to reduce traffic in the inner area and to provide a bigger pedestrian area in the city centre.

Finally Gary and David commented on a number of issues which members had raised in advance of the meeting, including alternatives to NGT (essentially a less effective bus-based system), the need for improvements in the guided bus system, the importance of public involvement in the station master-plan, the need for transport planning to support the move to a family-friendly city centre, where the lead responsibility rested with planners and city centre management, and the need for a strategic approach to city-centre parking (there are concerns that the current pragmatic approach risked undermining longer term plans).

This comprehensive presentation stimulated a lively and wide-ranging discussion which covered everything from the need to improve facilities for taking bicycles on trains to the scope for improving coach facilities in Leeds, from the need to improve bus services as quickly as possible to the idea of a metro system in Leeds (considered too expensive for a city of our size). In the course of this discussion Gary and David made clear that there are no plans for a congestion charge in Leeds, stressed the intention of considering a low emission zone for the city and confirmed the importance of the transport strategy in delivering the overall strategy for the development of Leeds and the wider city-region.

Overall we went away encouraged by the depth of thinking and commitment to real improvements in Leeds which had been on display. If these ideas all come to fruition then Leeds and the surrounding area should have a transport system to be proud of in future years. But – and it is a big but – there were nagging worries about whether the money would be available to turn these plans into reality and about the long-term political commitment, both nationally and locally, to the strategy.

**Martin Staniforth**  
**Chair of LCT Activities Committee**

**May 2012 Newsletter**



*Proposed Southern entrance to Leeds Railway Station*