
A Step Change



While incremental and unglamorous enhancements to the existing public transport system are essential, Leeds should embrace some more radical and eye-catching upgrades in the next decade.

Light Rail

Despite sustained efforts to obtain a system over the last thirty years, Leeds does not currently benefit from a rapid transit network. While the capital costs of developing light rail are considerable, such investment should not be out of reach for a city of the size and status of Leeds and should not discourage us from promoting light rail to help Leeds strengthen its transport system.

The merits of light rail have been demonstrated in numerous cities across the world:

- it provides greater capacity than buses and offers a smoother, quieter ride;
- long term operating costs are lower than buses and vehicles are more reliable;
- unlike heavy rail, light rail can run on-street as well as along reserved routes;
- its impact on greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution is low; and
- it can support regeneration and the enhancement of public realm, particularly because light rail uses less space on the highway than buses.

To ensure street-running services have sufficient priority over general traffic, extensive changes to the operation of the highway are likely to be required. However, in a city that values public transport, this investment will be easy to justify – light rail will often be able to make use of existing bus priority.

We support the introduction of light rail in appropriate locations to complement other modes. All existing high frequency radial bus routes are candidates for conversion to light rail. Combined with a review of the bus network, the introduction of light rail routes could revolutionise accessibility in the city.

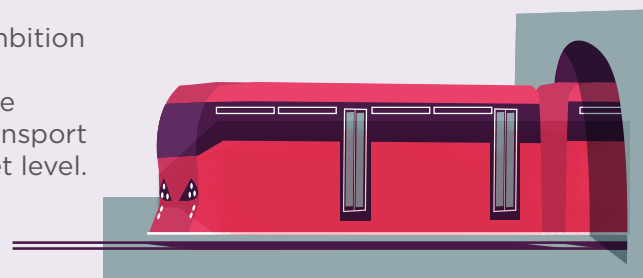
Going Underground

As public transport service level increase, it will become increasingly difficult to accommodate all services on the city centre highway network, even as general traffic is excluded. The ambition to expand the size of the pedestrianised area will be hamstrung if all public transport services must run at street level.

A network of city centre tunnels for the major cross-city public transport services would ensure that those services are not held up by bottlenecks in the city centre and release space for public realm, pedestrians, and cyclists.

A similar case could be made for short stretches of tunnels in the main district centres or elevated track at major junctions.

A similar proposal was shown to be technically feasible in Leeds in the 1940s. Today, cities such as Bristol, Cambridge and Manchester are investigating city centre tunnels. Tunnelling has proven transformational in many European cities of a similar size to Leeds.



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