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Green light for UK tram-train... finally

Simon Johnston, Editor

Thursday 17 May could prove to be a landmark day for LRT development in the UK. On that day, Transport Minister Norman Baker chose the UK Light Rail Conference to announce funding approval for the UK’s long-awaited tram-train trial. Although the announcement was met with rousing applause from the audience of the great and the good from the industry, it was very much one of relief.

The UK has been talking about the application of (what should be) relatively simple to implement technology for over five years now and after much debate, changing of routes and deciding on responsibility, it seems we could see tram-trains in the north of England by 2015. While this is obviously good news, one has to ask why it has taken so long when tram-train units are already running, very successfully, in Germany, France and Spain – with other nations well on the way to implementing their own schemes.

The rest of the Conference provoked stimulating debate on a range of topics and I hope issues like the long-running debate of ‘whose responsibility and who pays’ for utility diversion has also made positive headway as the utilities companies really do seem to want to work with promoters. As an industry, we all need to get better at communicating and cross-pollination with our various stakeholders. In some cases we do it very well, but in too many others the report card would say ‘must try harder’.

Lastly, I must make reference to the proposed GBP1000 (EUR1250) fines for photography on the Glasgow Subway. Such plans do nothing to promote light and urban rail schemes as attractive, inclusive modes – saying nothing of the fact that the ‘Clockwork Orange’ is a tourist attraction in its own right!

As always, I welcome your thoughts on the issues of the day – simon@lrtap.com