



Newsletter April 2009

AGM in Stourbridge – and a ride on the new London Midland PPM railcar

We hope you will join us in Stourbridge on the 17th of June for the Annual General Meeting of Lightweight Community Transport. This is your chance to meet the board, and indeed to become a member of the board! If you would be interested in joining the team that runs LCT, please contact me before the beginning of June. In addition to new candidates, two of the existing board members will also be submitting themselves for re-election.

The AGM will be at St John's Church Hall, which some of you will remember from our launch last September. St John's Church is next door to Stourbridge Town railway station – a short ride in a Parry People Mover from Stourbridge Junction, on the line between Worcester and Birmingham. The AGM will start at 12.30pm, and lunch and refreshments will be provided; we would expect to close the AGM around 2pm. Do please let me know if you might attend so that I can send you a full agenda, accounts, and details of nominations.

RAIL magazine coverage

Any day now, an issue of RAIL magazine will be hitting the stands with a lengthy feature on LCT in it, which we are hoping will raise our profile. Steve Broadbent, who wrote the article following an interview with myself, has used the Ealing Comedy 'The Titfield Thunderbolt' as an example of the DIY spirit that we exemplify. I think that's a compliment...

Spread the word

We are doing well, with our share issue – over £35,000 – but we still need more. Our key task is to build up enough working capital to secure our first firm customer, and then sufficient to put down a deposit on our first railcar. In order to do this we are updating our business plan with the latest news and revised figures – which, we anticipate, will show improved financial returns. Do please let me know if you would like to see a copy of this new business plan when complete – it will of course be available through the website.

However, we are counting on you to spread the word as well. There is no better recommendation than one coming from our own members, and if you would like some literature or other support to raise awareness of what LCT is trying to do, please do get in touch.

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velop so that it can (planning, rolling stock, d training in a simple, e package - and will do this t) to benefit the community. eas launched last September, asing £475,000 with a tion of £500. The shares (on at a profit, but they m' and interest will be e success of the case they are known as hares. But as a 'society the community', LCT is for profit organisation. er for many people is return, but the social ment in something happen," says LCT Alex Lawrie. of February the total eching £50,000, gpany to undertake alysis work at specific sufficient funds have posit will be put on the first lends on a business case of these locations. That will in 2010, which benefite

chord. The local station is such a feature of a local community... our approach offers them a way to do that."

The starting point

The idea for LCT germinated in 2006/7 with Parry People Movers, which "had been trying hard to get its rail vehicle adopted for use on the main line network.

But more interest was coming from community groups, and independent and heritage railways. So PPM started to think: "If these are the people who want to adopt our kind of approach, maybe they should be our customers."

“Passengers want to be more than customers, they want to have a deeper involvement, there is something about railways that really touches an emotional chord.”

Alex Lawrie, chief executive of Lightweight Community Transport

But the obvious barrier was that there was no way these small-scale operations could capitalise the purchase of a railcar costing several hundred thousand pounds."



Rail Minister Lord Adonis hears about LCT in Yeovil

Persuading Network Rail to make its track available for ultra light rail was always going to take time; one location where local interest has been growing is in my backyard – Yeovil in South Somerset. Here, a two mile stretch of track, rarely if ever used for passenger services on weekdays, connects Yeovil Junction and Yeovil Pen Mill. If there was a convenient shuttle service on this line, it would in effect add thirty new routes every single day to the rail network. Surely there is a good case to be made for light rail here?

We asked David Laws, the Liberal Democrat MP for Yeovil, to encourage Network Rail to give this more serious consideration. To our delight, it turned out that he was due to meet Andrew Adonis, the Rail Minister, at Yeovil Junction just a few days later. David Laws wrote to me afterwards, saying “We did discuss your ideas. There was a lot of support for the idea of having some sort of connection between the services at Yeovil Junction and Yeovil Pen Mill – it is rather bizarre that we do not presently have this! I am going to ask Lord Adonis whether there is anything we can do to take this forward.”

We are also looking at whether the branch line between Andover and Ludgershall, currently used only for occasional MOD freight movements, might be a good location for a new service. Here we have Caroline Lucas, the Green MEP for the South East, taking up our cause, and some interest from the local authorities in the area.

Cambrian Rail: 'Yes, but not yet...'

One of the best cases for a light rail reopening is the line from Gobowen junction to Oswestry, which would give this borders town a rail connection for the first time in many years. The Cambrian Railway Trust have from the outset been keen to work with LCT, but the limiting factor has been the decay of the unused infrastructure. Now they are embarking on a drive to secure the funding to make those improvements – and when that is done, they assure us that one of the first things they will want to do is host a demonstration service.

Go! Co-operative – a new customer for LCT?

LCT needs customers to work with – train operating companies that will drive the trains and collect the fares. In many cases, independent railways are keen to make their line available, but less keen to take on the responsibility of running a passenger service.

That's why it is great to hear about a new social enterprise starting up that plans to do just that, and has a real enthusiasm for lightweight solutions. Go! Co-operative is unusual in that rather than being owned and run by profit-orientated shareholders, it is a new type of co-operative in which shareholders provide finance, but leave most of the control of the business to passengers. Go! is concerned principally with open access services – conventional rail, but providing routes that are not catered for by the franchised TOCs. However, it is keen to be involved in community level operations as well, such as Yeovil and Ludgershall (mentioned above) and also possible involvement in Bewdley to Kidderminster and Cholesey to Wallingford. This opens up the possibility that it might be a good customer for LCT in the near future.

Go! plans a high profile launch, and a share offer of their own, in early August. I should say that as well as being CEO of LCT (but not a Director) I am a Director of Go! (but not CEO). I hope that's clear...

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