

Newsletter November 2009



Car 12 gets a makeover

This is Car 12 – as the name suggests, the twelfth Parry People Mover to be made and probably the most travelled (that's me next to it – not my best side). It was Car 12 that operated the groundbreaking Sunday service at Stourbridge and that visited Wensleydale for their trials. In fact, it has done so much work that it is time to refit and refresh throughout.

The LPG engine, no longer supported by the manufacturer, is to be replaced by a modern diesel engine – suitable for use in a wider range of locations, and compatible with biodiesel for reduced carbon emissions (I should say, we would only recommend biodiesel made from recycled cooking oil). Wheel profiles will be checked, the flywheel rebalanced, hydraulics renewed, and the windscreen replaced.

LCT is putting £20,000 into the works, which will give it ownership of 10% of the railcar (it is valued at £200,000). This investment gives us a say in how it is deployed, and a share of the receipts that it earns. There has recently been some interest in using the vehicle for six months of next year as a support vehicle for track maintenance crews. This should provide a good return on the investment, while leaving the railcar free for passenger use outside the summer months (which, of course, is when heritage railways have the most spare capacity).

We hope you approve of this step – we'll keep you informed when and where Car 12 is in action.

A new dawn in Dudley

If you follow the rail press, you may well be aware that flushed with the success of its Midland Metro, Centro have for some time been seeking government funding for an extension – in fact, a new route running between Walsall and Dudley. This largely follows the route of an old freight line that

connected Walsall to Stourbridge, and part of the plan is to reopen this route alongside the metro.

However, this summer the government kicked the proposal into the long grass, saying that the business case did not stack up. The plan was very ambitious, costing many millions of pounds per mile, and it has now effectively been ruled out until 2019. But to us that should not be the end of the story: an ultra light rail alternative, using low cost vehicles and without overhead lines, would be much cheaper.

In fact, there is so much perfectly good existing track – especially on the key section between Dudley and Dudley Port – that it may not require government funding at all. Until the 1990s, it was in regular use, and the rail and sleepers are of higher quality than many branch lines.



Go! Co-operative (which you will remember from the previous newsletter – if not, see www.go-now.coop) has investigated further. A recent meeting with Centro established that they would not object, on the basis that Go! would 'keep the seat warm' for the day when the funds were there to carry out a full upgrade.

There are many obstacles still to be overcome – the view of Network Rail, who still own the track, the odd missing section of rail, and the deep cuttings at both ends – but it is at the very least an interesting opportunity for a trial. We'll keep you informed about how this develops.

Telling the story of Ultra Light Rail

You may not have heard, but there is a Parliamentary inquiry underway into the future of light rail in the UK. To be precise, evidence is being collected by the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group and Passenger Transport Executives from around the UK. They set a tight deadline, but fortunately we had already made some progress developing a position paper on 'Ultra Light Rail'.

ULR is the broad term for all the different rail technologies that deliver low costs, low carbon footprints, and low axle weights. They include not only the Parry People Mover, but also vehicles using overhead lines designed by Trampower and the minitram being developed by TDI. Our paper not only aimed to introduce the committee to the ULR industry in the UK (including LCT) but also outline some key steps forward that would help ULR become established on existing branch lines, and in smaller cities and towns than light rail is presently reaching.

By the time you read this, the paper – 'Light Rail Innovation' should be available for download at www.lctltd.co.uk.

Progress and potential

So far, we have raised £76,000 from fifty six investors (including you). That is tremendous progress in the space of a short time, but as I'm sure you'll be aware it represents a little more than a tenth of the cost of two PPM60 railcars. So where do we go from here?

I spend a lot of time talking to social investors, independent financial advisors, CDFIs and ethical funds – for example, at the recent Good Deals conference. They are all saying the same thing: when we reach the stage of having a confirmed customer, with access to track and all necessary permissions in place, it will not be hard to secure funds an order of magnitude larger than we have achieved so far.

We have a list of technically possible routes, but the time has come to pick out the few that we can make the most rapid progress with – where there is real enthusiasm, good grounds for thinking the line is available, and someone locally ready to drive it forward. Some prospects that were good on paper have fallen by the wayside, but more have come to light. My goal for the next few months is to focus on finding our first passenger route.

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