



PRESS RELEASE – 21st October 2009 for immediate use

Ultra light rail: the UK's newest industry comes together for Parliamentary inquiry

Lightweight Community Transport has brought together a coalition of UK businesses that are developing new light rail solutions that make good use of existing infrastructure, require less capital expenditure and have even lower running costs and emissions. The coalition is making its case to a Parliamentary inquiry into the future of light rail. This 'ultra light rail' has much to offer smaller towns and suburbs – but, as their submission points out, it can only succeed if regulation and planning regimes allow for it as an option.

The inquiry is being staged jointly by PTEG (the Passenger Transport Executive Group) and the All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group.

Ultra Light Rail (ULR) is generally defined as an intermediate transport system that runs on fixed track, may be self powered or externally powered and

- has emissions of around 40g per passenger km (buses 89g; light rail 65g)
- can run on standard railways, on purpose designed track, or on tracks laid in the street surface
- carries traffic of 350 - 9,000 p/h/d
- costs between 75% and 30% less than standard light rail

There are now a number of enterprises in the UK that are developing and supporting ULR technology. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to employment, exports, and expertise if barriers to ULR schemes are removed. Lightweight Community Transport's role is to raise matched funding, create rolling stock leasing schemes and to act as expert advisor to the local group that would sponsor and operate the service. Parry People Movers, TDI and Trampower each manufacture slightly different variations on the ultra light rail theme, and each will find that certain applications ideally suit the rolling stock and infrastructure they produce. As operators, Go! and Pre Metro are keen to realise the opportunities for passengers around the UK; many other operators would undoubtedly share this interest, if the sector were able to achieve its potential. It is noticeable that ULR has proved attractive to community enterprise: both Go! and LCT are mutual societies, rather than companies; they are democratically run for community benefit, and socially owned. Pre Metro are presently operating the only established ULR route in the UK, in Stourbridge, using railcars manufactured by Parry People Movers.

Alex Lawrie, the CEO of Lightweight Community Transport, said “ Our plea is for these modest, efficient technologies to be given a fair chance to succeed. It is crazy that we can't find a way to bring light rail to towns where tens of thousands of people live and work; or that existing lines that see little or no use can't be reused as ultra light branch lines. All it requires is a willingness to assess the technology on its own terms, rather than insisting it perform like an intercity train; and a willingness to consider the cheaper, more sustainable option over the more prestigious, glamorous and sometimes overblown project.”

Picture editors: photographs and mockups of Parry vehicles are available from LCT.

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