
newsRELEASE

FROM FIRST

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DARLING LAUNCHES SHAPE OF FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Alistair Darling, the Secretary of State for Transport, today launched a brand new concept in public transport - a cross between a bus and a tram service.

Its objective is to take 10% of car journeys off the roads on the corridors its serves within five to six years. That would increase public transport usage on those same corridors by 30%.

The initiative is to be rolled out nationwide by First, the UK's largest public transport operator, and The Wright Group, the vehicle manufacturer.

It will look like a tram, run on dedicated road space in congested areas, but have the route flexibility of a bus. Each route will be designed to deliver near door-to-door services to a very high specification including real time information and text messaging to identify when the next service is going to arrive at a given point.

The service is to be known as “f t r”, the texting shorthand for “future”, and the vehicle that will deliver it is called “StreetCar.”

First Chief Executive, Moir Lockhead, said: “The first vehicles are coming off the production line, the first contracts are being signed and the first services will be up and running later this year. ‘f t r’ introduces us to next generation public transport - flexible, high quality services that bridge the gap between the bus and light rail. It is the marriage of a next generation vehicle with dedicated infrastructure and hi-tec information systems which together will offer fast, comfortable, reliable and frequent near door-to-door services. ‘f t r’ is the perfect solution for local authorities in the battle against traffic congestion. It can be introduced quickly, without major upheaval on our roads and at a fraction of the cost of a light rail scheme, perhaps as little as a tenth of cost of a new tram network. It is designed to appeal to motorists as a high quality alternative to the car for some journeys.”

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Darling launches shape of future public transport...continued

For local authorities it can be an interim measure for key corridors until demand justifies an upgrade to a light rail scheme. Just like a tram, it will speed past congested rush hour traffic on dedicated lanes, turn red traffic lights green on its approach and access the heart of cities closed to other vehicles."

Alistair Darling said: "It is encouraging to see new types of public transport being developed - offering effective solutions to congestion problems. f t r will give Local Authorities a new option when looking at transport issues, one which can provide a flexible service to meet passengers' needs."

The first 'f t r' services will begin in York later this year. Detailed plans are being developed for other schemes in cities around the UK.

Jeff Wright, President of The Wright Group, said: "f t r is a breakthrough concept in the way we think about urban travel, and the StreetCar vehicle is its most tangible component. The merging of passenger desires, driver needs and operating requirements into one complete package is firm evidence that this industry can deliver a world-beating product."

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Note to editors:

Historically, manufacturers have produced vehicles to their own specifications and operators have bought them. This time, First and The Wright Group have worked together, looking at all elements of the design from the customer's perspective. This partnership has:

- ? researched how buses are used
- ? designed a vehicle that meets passenger needs, ironing out problems identified by research
- ? involved focus groups to give customers a say in the sort of vehicle they want to use
- ? involved engineers, cleaners, drivers and marketing teams in the design to ensure the vehicle is as functional, fit for the purpose, reliable, easy to maintain and attractive to users as it could possibly be made.

The research used on-board video cameras to see how customers used existing vehicles – how they boarded, where they stood or sat, how they behaved on short or long journeys, and how they interacted with buggy users.

Based on our Leeds / Bradford Guideway and extensive bus priority experience we have compared the costs of a light rail corridor with an f t r corridor. We could provide similar capacity at less than a tenth of the cost (example below assumes capital costs only for 7km length):

Light rail corridor:

- ? Probably need 10 double car light rail vehicles @ £2m each = £20m
- ? 7km of track at up to £20m per double track kilometre = £140m
- ? Total cost £160m

f t r corridor:

- ? Probably need 15 f t r vehicles = £4.5m
- ? Extensive Guideway /Bus priorities @ £10m
- ? Total cost £14.5m

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