

ACE welcomes DfT light rail study

Written by Karl

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ACE has welcomed the publication of the Department for Transport's Green Light for Light Rail paper. The paper looks at the benefits of light rail and tram projects for the economy and for the environment. It also looks at how costs can be brought down to make more projects viable.

The paper recognises that along with the economic activity created by building new light rail routes in urban areas, existing light rail systems have had significant knock-on effects on the areas they serve. However, it also notes that there are difficulties for local authorities looking to finance such projects.

ACE chief executive Nelson Ogunshakin OBE said: "This is another strong sign that the government and industry agree that infrastructure investment is vital to restoring UK economic growth. Engineers look forward to working with government to help overcome the financial difficulties that can hold good investments up and translating this paper's good intentions into action on the ground."

As one would expect (with the exception of non-representative underground sections) the data provided in the DfT report shows a correlation between the overall cost of a project and its length. In addition to this the cost per mile reduces marginally as the length of the project increases.

Although the small sample size limits the conclusions that can be drawn, the figures infer that managing costs on smaller projects is crucial and where possible the implementation of light rail in a manner that avoids very small project phases would result in a more optimal outcome.

The new DfT paper also recognises that costs can prove challenging for a range of reasons. It proposes a number of measures to help resolve this that ACE welcomes.

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Development of a centre for procurement excellence within UKTram is very welcome. Procurement can prove complex, time consuming and costly for the local authorities and companies involved. There are a number of projects underway in the public sector that seek to improve procurement practices and we hope this measure will focus on intelligence sharing to achieve the best result.

The movement of utilities such as water pipes and electricity cables from where tracks will run can be costly. The government's plan for a consultation on this issue and how utilities interact with light rail will enable local authorities and business to seek solutions to this problem.

There are difficulties for local authorities seeking to fund large scale schemes with limited finances available to them. The proposal to reduce the requirement for local funding to levels in line with other modes of transport is very welcome. This will allow light rail proposals to seek funding on a level playing field to other transport projects.