

Councillor Howard Sykes

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Dear Councillor Sykes

Re: Oldham & Rochdale Metrolink Line (ORL)

Thank you for your recent letter in relation to Metrolink service patterns for Oldham and also for allowing Peter Cushing, Metrolink Director, to meet with you to discuss this matter in detail.

The 1989 Committee paper for the then future Metrolink system consisted of 'Phase 1' - City Centre operation, conversion of the Bury and Altrincham lines and proposed routes to Salford Quays, Rochdale via Oldham and Trafford. The paper supports the proposal to convert the Oldham Loop to Light Rail Transit (LRT), but rather than a commitment to connect that line to Piccadilly Station the suggestion is to connect the line to the 'conurbation core and the Piccadilly Hub'.

Elsewhere in the report there is a map of potential LRT line which shows the ORL following a path similar to that which it follows today. More importantly the study recognises that it is unlikely that all western and northern extensions could be provided with through services to Piccadilly Station without overloading the Piccadilly Gardens – Piccadilly Station section, and that some services would have to be linked across the Victoria - GMEX axis.

Things have of course moved on considerably since that report and the most relevant business case is that which was submitted to the Department for Transport in 2006, and in response to which the government awarded the funding to construct the route from Rochdale via Oldham.

The 2006 business case was premised on an indicative service between Rochdale Railway Station and Chorlton via the existing Phase 1 city centre route. The contemporary line proposed from Piccadilly to Droylsden was funded locally and comprised an extension of the Bury and Altrincham services then terminating at Piccadilly. The service assumptions set out in 2006 underpinned a number of subsequent business case submissions including Oldham Town Centre, Rochdale Town Centre and East Didsbury.

A major change of approach was signalled by the proposed extension to Manchester Airport when it was appreciated that further operational capacity would be required in the Metrolink Central Area if the desired level of services was ever going to be achievable. The business case for the proposed Second City Crossing was premised on providing access to Manchester City Centre for services commencing at Manchester Airport, and also on the journey time savings which Oldham and Rochdale services could achieve by running more quickly across the city centre to St Peter's Square.

The present day Metrolink Network comprises a complicated combination of routes and services which requires considered scheduling of services. TfGM has been set objectives which include optimising the use of the existing infrastructure and vehicle capacity which it proposes to do in this case by operating the most efficient combination of services. This is the rationale for any service patterns proposals and has underpinned the success of the network without which it is unlikely the network would be as extensive and well used as it is today.

It has been suggested that half of the Rochdale via Oldham service should be diverted to run via Piccadilly on route between Victoria and St Peter's Square. This proposal would create an imbalance in vehicle journey times across the city centre such that it would be impractical to deliver an even headway service on the Rochdale via Oldham line. This would have a number of potential disadvantages including;

- Scheduling of services through the single line section at Newton Heath;
- Another service would require diversion away from Piccadilly to keep operations within practical capacity between Piccadilly Gardens and Piccadilly. For example the Eccles service would have to terminate at Deansgate-Castlefield and not enter the central area; and
- Require additional trams (possibly x2).

As you may be aware, during the closure of St Peter's Square, Rochdale via Oldham service ran to Ashton via Piccadilly, this was determined the best route as services were unable to travel through St Peter's Square. This was however a temporary measure during the planned works.

It is important to note that a large number of tickets bought for travel on the ORL are for journeys within the line, and revenue records for the period before the St Peter's Square was closed for reconstruction indicate that in respect of trips to destinations on the ORL more than three times as many passengers originate at St Peter's Square than Piccadilly. It is more difficult make an assessment based on ticket sales in Oldham as tickets are purchased for the City Centre Zone rather than for a specific

stop. We are currently reviewing CCTV footage to investigate where ORL passengers alight within the city centre to further inform our understanding.

The nature of Metrolink today is of a high frequency rapid transit system with convenient interchanges. The current and proposed service pattern for the ORL allows access to jobs and leisure facilities opportunities in the vicinity of the Market Street, Exchange Square and St Peters Square stops. With a single change of service at Victoria, Oldham passengers can access Piccadilly station, or by changing at Cornbrook to services for Altrincham, Manchester Airport or MediaCityUK, and Eccles. The constructing of the Ordsall Chord will also provide greater connectivity between Victoria and Piccadilly stations.

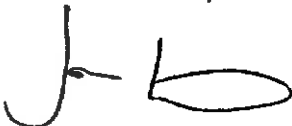
We do of course understand the desire to have a direct link to Piccadilly Station, as the City Region's primary rail station. The expansion of the station to accommodate HS2 services may well include proposals to increase the Metrolink capacity.

However, as the Metrolink system grows it will not always be possible to have direct services between all of the most popular destinations. TfGM strives to ensure that a journey between any combination of starting and finishing points can be undertaken with no more than a single change on route. This is a commonly accepted practise on light and heavy rail networks and is similar to any mature large city network, including the London Underground.

I hope that this information is helpful and helps clarify some of the historic issues you have raised and the rationale for any future service pattern proposals. Ultimately the final decision on the service pattern for Metrolink 2017 will be made by the Transport for Greater Manchester Committee.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not contact me, or our Customer Services manager, Sean Dyball at sean.dyball@tfgm.com.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JL', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dr Jon Lamonte
Chief Executive