

## Nexus sets out Metro extension options

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Nexus is drawing up plans for a major expansion of the Tyne & Wear Metro light rail network with seven potential corridors under consideration.

The passenger transport executive is approaching the midway point in its 11 year long £400m Metro reinvigoration programme which is delivering a major infrastructure overhaul for the first time since the network opened in the late 1970s.

As part of this work the Metro fleet is being refurbished but Nexus says that the Metro cars will need replacement within the next decade. As a result it is now starting to examine what rolling stock would be required in the context of an expanded network.

Director general Bernard Garner told members of the Tyne & Wear Integrated Transport Authority last month that a dual voltage fleet was desirable as that would have the ability to operate not just with the existing Metro DC overhead power lines, but also the 25kV AC system used on the heavy rail network. He added that Nexus was watching developments with the South Yorkshire tram train trial closely.

Garner also revealed the seven corridors identified by the PTE as offering potential for Metro operation. These are Sunderland to Seaham with joint running on Network Rail's Durham Coast line; South Shields to Doxford Park with on-street operation; Newcastle city centre to West Newcastle with on-street operation; Pelaw to South Hylton via Washington using the mothballed Leamside heavy rail route plus a new alignment to access Washington town centre; Gateshead to Team Valley and Gateshead to Metrocentre with on-street operation; and Howdon-Cobalt-Northumberland Park using a former railway alignment to connect the two sides of the existing Metro Coast loop. The latter route could also be extended to Blyth and Ashington.

With an eye to the PTE's planned bus Quality Contract, Garner added that the local bus network could be reconfigured to feed into the Metro, just as it did when the system first opened.

However, funding remains a major obstacle and the PTE admits new routes will depend on securing money from a range of sources. "It is evident that central government funding alone cannot be relied upon in the way that prevailed when the system was built," said Garner.

*Returbished Metrocar: authority says rolling stock will need replacing within about 10 years*



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