

Dudley residents weigh in on the proposed 'Stourbridge Dasher'

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The proposed 'Stourbridge Dasher' service has been backed by Stourbridge MP Suzanne Webb, Dudley South MP Mike Wood and also received support from the West Midlands Combined Authority Mayor Andy Street earlier this year before his re-election.

Pre Metro's proposed public passenger service would run on the railway route to Brierley Hill using a Very Light Rail vehicle, and the cost of running such a service would be around 50% cheaper than traditional heavy rail operations.

The service is perfectly feasible and would make the lives of locals easier; it would also help with the decarbonisation of the railway industry, and improve the air quality and environment within the Black Country.

Should the plan be approved it could kickstart a larger railway revolution here in Dudley.

But would the locals actually use it?

Pre Metro worked with Oakham Research to assess how impactful the proposed train service between Stourbridge Town Centre, Brierley Hill and the Waterfront could be.

1,438 surveys were conducted across Stourbridge and Brierley Hill, data on local transport habits and on potential service use. The surveys were conducted across social media between November 2019 and May 2020, with details also published in the Express and Star.

Such questions included:

- What reasons do you visit each location?
- How often would you use the proposed service?
- What is your preferred mode of travel?
- Which factors would encourage you to use the train service?

2/3 of those surveyed used personal vehicles or motorcycles as their main method of transport, the passenger service could strongly reduce personal vehicle use.

The main reasons of visitation in all three locations were found to be shopping and leisure, indicating that such a service could encourage and promote tourism development within Dudley and provide easier access to Merry Hill.

Over a third of the sample also regularly used taxis for evening and nights out. Such a service could end up being a more cost-effective option for both shopping and leisure journeys.

1 in 4 people visit Brierley Hill to travel to work, suggesting a new train service could provide Stourbridge locals with an easier mode of transport to current jobs; also providing better access to future job prospects within the area.

1 in 4 people also regularly visited Stourbridge from Brierley Hill to visit their family. Frequent and reliable public transport connectivity could really make local visitations easier and provide some much needed economic regeneration following recent lockdown restrictions.

The survey also found that 1 in 10 locals would use the service on a daily basis, and half of the respondents would use the service between 1 – 4 times every week.

Overall, 87% of the people surveyed were in favour of the service and would use it.

Pre Metro's Operations Director, Steve Jasper, stated that the service would "significantly increase Dudley's connectivity using existing rail infrastructure to improve the travel network within the local area and get traffic off of busy local roads, like the A461."

The service could also supplement the WMCA's proposals for Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and Clean Air

Zones through the use of a new innovative light rail vehicle.

Mr Jasper stated that such a service could “bring Brierley Hill back onto the railway map; regenerate the local economy; and make it easier for families to visit each other through frequent, clean, and cost-effective light rail”.

The primary concerns with the ‘Stourbridge Dasher’ revolved around the flexibility of the service, the cost of travel, and the comfort of the vehicle.

Pre Metro want to ensure all potential services are easily accessible, frequent and comfortable for passengers, and the recent improvements to the Stourbridge Shuttle indicate that steps are being taken to prioritise their passengers.

As this data was accumulated before the service had gained much attention, Pre Metro are inviting readers to share their thoughts and ask any potential questions on the ‘Stourbridge Dasher’. You can contact them through their website, or email them via info@premetro.org.

Photo credit: Network Rail