

Liverpool City Region mayor wants similar transport system to London

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Metro mayor of the Liverpool City Region Steve Rotheram has exclusively told RailBusinessDaily that he wants a transport system similar to London, however he also believes that Merseyside's system will be better.

Speaking exclusively to RBD at the InnoTrans trade show in Berlin on 22 September, he said: "From day one, it's been my ambition to develop a publicly owned, integrated transport system that we can be proud of.

"I actually want something like London, we call it a London-style with better ticketing, better accessibility, clean and greener and cheaper."

He was speaking at the launch of the first Stadler Class 777 Independently Powered Electric Multiple Unit (IPEMU). Merseytravel has ordered 53 four-car trains, seven of which are fitted with batteries; the rest are electric-only. The trains were ordered at the end of 2016 but have yet to enter service although the Mayor said at the launch of the IPEMU that the aim was for them to enter service by the end of 2022.

He told RBD: "These new trains that we're launching today [22 September] are battery-operated, and these will take a sub-part of the network that previously we couldn't get to. That means that we can open up really good quality alternative rail travel to many people who currently use the car, and to areas that have been left behind collect them with opportunity."

Steve Rotheram told RBD that there ordering the IPEMUs made sense after the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) didn't really want to extend the third-rail electrification used in the region.

"These battery operated trains will take us to some of the outskirts of the City Region where people have wanted something. Merseytravel will be going to places that actually haven't been Merseyside. They believe in being part of it geographically but haven't felt part of the Merseyrail network because those trains never went there."

He told RBD that the Merseytravel could now plan for the future and investigate the infrastructure required to expand services. He explained that Class 777s will run initially to Kirkby, but that the IPEMUs will run to Headbolt Lane, which is expected to open next year. There are ambitions to run beyond that to Skelmersdale as well, he said. "That means then we open up a whole conurbation who have not had the opportunity for rail travel.

"Skelmersdale is one of these new towns. Sixty years ago they were promised the station and they still haven't got a station. So I mean, that's for the government to do because it's outside of our jurisdiction, but we would then be able to run our services to that area."

Returning to the Class 777, Steve Rotheram told RBD: "It's exceeded our expectations, I think. It looks fantastic. Fortunately, it works for us and the needs of the passengers in our area. There's much more space for cycles because we're trying to integrate it with active travel, there is more space for more pushchairs and easy access for people with disabilities, and of course more space as well for wheelchairs.

"All of those things, I think, open it [rail] up to people who previously have never thought of using it, because of those accessibility issues."