

Luton DART to start carrying its first passengers next month

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Luton Rising and Luton Council has announced that their pioneering infrastructure project the Luton DART (Direct Air-Rail Transit) is expected to begin carrying its first passengers on Friday 10 March.

Over a three-week period, plans are being made for rail passengers travelling to and from Luton Airport Parkway Station and London Luton Airport to be offered the chance to experience the service for the first time on a restricted timetable.

It is then expected that the Luton DART will fully open for commercial operations around the end of March, with a specific date to be announced on or around 13 March.

Graham Olver, Chief Executive Officer of Luton Rising, said: "Our company's purpose and responsibility is to support economic and employment growth, deliver a positive social impact and act in an environmentally responsible way. Luton Council owns the airport for community benefit and the Luton DART helps ensure a bright future for people in Luton and nearby communities who depend on and benefit from its success."

The Luton DART is a new automated people mover connecting the airport terminal and the mainline railway at Luton Airport Parkway in just over three minutes.

It will support seamless, sustainable travel to London Luton Airport, connecting to more than 60 stations across the rail network, and replacing the existing bus transfer service once fully open.

The journey from London St Pancras International to London Luton Airport terminal will take as little as 32 minutes on the Luton Airport Express, connected by East Midlands Railway (twice-hourly, non-stop service), and from around 40 minutes on Thameslink's current frequent services.

The Luton DART service, which was experienced by His Majesty the King on his visit to Luton on 6 December 2022, is a major local investment by Luton Rising and Luton Council with these key objectives:

- To improve London Luton Airport's competitive position within the London aviation system, helping to safeguard 10,000 jobs at the airport and another 16,000 in the local and regional supply chains.
- Deliver a game-changing experience for rail passengers by offering a seamless journey connecting with more than 60 stations that provide direct services to Luton Airport Parkway, including a 32-minute journey from London St Pancras.
- Support future sustainable growth of London Luton Airport by reducing the environmental impact of journeys to and from the airport and congestion on surrounding roads. Cable-drawn and electrically-powered, the Luton DART will increase the rail modal share for passengers accessing the airport and support the delivery of Luton's 2040 vision for a carbon-neutral town.
- During construction, it has supported around 500 jobs across a range of disciplines, created 80 full-time posts for local apprentices, graduates and other new entrants, and provided construction skills training hub for 720 people, of whom over 40% were drawn from traditionally under-represented groups.

The DART transfer is included in any rail ticket where customers choose Luton Airport as the start or end point of the journey, available from all national rail retailers.

All passengers holding a concessionary bus pass, such as pensioners, people with a disability or acting as companion travellers, will be entitled to free travel on the Luton DART. Residents of Luton will also be able to apply in advance for half-priced travel. Details will be announced soon.

From Friday March 10, it is expected that the Luton DART will operate initially for around four hours per day, gradually extending over three weeks towards a 24-hour service.

During this period, passengers who have a ticket for the existing bus transfer will be invited to take the Luton DART at no additional charge. Alternatively they may continue to take the bus transfer, until this is withdrawn at a later date.

Although the system will not be officially open, we will be delighted to welcome the first passengers on board ahead of formally going live. We will also be seeking vital passenger feedback during this time.

Cllr Hazel Simmons MBE, Leader of Luton Council, said: "The Luton DART is one of the biggest

infrastructure projects ever undertaken in Luton and promises to put our town and our airport firmly on the map for all the right reasons. Electrically-powered, energy-efficient, and future-proofed to support sustainable growth of the airport, it is a vital sign of our commitment to encourage more passengers to take the train rather than individual car journeys to and from our airport.”

Cllr Javeria Hussain, Chair of Luton Rising, said: “The Luton DART will provide a world-class and seamless transfer between Luton Airport Parkway railway station and the London Luton Airport terminal, enabling passengers travelling from London St Pancras to be at the airport in as little as 32 minutes on the fastest trains at peak times.”

Photo credit: Luton Rising