

Metro drivers get a first look at their new trains thanks to the magic of virtual reality

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Metro drivers are getting a first glimpse of their new trains through virtual reality.

VR headsets, provided by the Swiss train builder, Stadler, offers an immersive experience that allows drivers to see inside the new cab before it has even been built.

The computer-generated images deliver a virtual tour of the new train's state-of-the-art driver's cab. It allows Metro drivers to offer essential feedback on the controls, layout, and instrument displays.

Nexus, the public body which owns and manages Metro, said the VR technology was a vital tool to get train crews ready for the new £362m fleet – which will transform the Tyne and Wear Metro system from 2023.

Metro Development Director, Neil Blagburn, said: "Virtual reality is a highly versatile design tool that allows us to consult our drivers in a COVID secure way."

“The technology delivers a wholly immersive experience that allows them to explore the computer-generated cab and provide feedback that the designers can use to refine the cab design. As many of our 155 drivers as possible will be taking time out to use the VR headsets over a nine-week consultation period.

“The use of VR helps ensure that when the time comes for them to get behind the controls we have delivered the best possible layout for them.

“The new cab will be a world away from what we currently have. The technology will be transformative. The VR technology allows the drivers to see for the first time what they can expect from the proposed cab layout and design.

“This is another significant stage in the delivery of the new Metro fleet, with the manufacturing process scheduled to begin next year.”

Adrian Wetter, Project Manager at Stadler, said: “Stadler makes use of technology to get feedback from its clients, their staff and passengers throughout the build process and to ensure that the right train is built for them. Using virtual reality headsets as part of driver training is one example of this.

“The kit enables drivers to get a feel for the new trains from the very early stages of the project, and means that they can prepare for them well in advance. This ultimately saves time and resources. Furthermore, comments and observations from drivers on the experience is essential for the cab design, contributing to its overall usability and comfort.”

Stadler has provided the VR technology to Nexus so that the driver familiarisation work is able to start now.

The data will be sent back to the designers in Switzerland to iron out any issues before the production line rolls in 2021.

Stadler is building a total of 46 new Metro trains for Nexus, which will be delivered up to 2024. They will be responsible for servicing and maintaining these trains for 35 years, underscoring their commitment to the regional economy.

The new trains, which will be 15 times more reliable and will cut energy consumption by 30%, will have modern features including charging points, air conditioning and a step-change in accessibility.

Among new features will be an automatic sliding step at every door of the new trains, making travel easier for Metro’s 50,000 wheelchair passengers as well as people with children’s buggies, luggage or bicycles.

Find out more about the new Tyne and Wear Metro fleet at <https://www.nexus.org.uk/newmetrotrains>

Photo credit: Nexus