

# Newcastle Airport light rail link celebrates 30 years

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After carrying 7.5 million customers, the Tyne and Wear Metro extension to Newcastle Airport is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Public body and metro manager Nexus said the line was among the most important projects in the history of the service.

The £12m project opened 17 November, 1991 and is considered to be one of the fastest airport to city centre transfers in the country.

Metro operations director, John Alexander, said: “Extending the Metro system to the airport created a vital strategic link for North East England. It was one of the most crucial developments of the network in its history, and it has been a real success story for us.

“The airport has grown massively since 1991 and Metro customer numbers have reflected that. We’re proud to be part of that growth story.

“The money that was invested into the scheme back in the late 80s and early 90s has proved to be money that was extremely well spent.

“It was a vital shot in the arm for the local economy, and for the growth and profile of Newcastle International Airport itself.”

Graeme Mason, planning and corporate affairs director at Newcastle International Airport, said: “As the North East’s largest Airport we are fortunate to benefit from excellent surface access links for our passengers to use. The Metro plays a vital role in providing convenient connectivity between the Airport, Newcastle city centre and beyond and we are delighted to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the partnership this month.

“From a personal point of view, I have used the Metro daily during my time at the Airport to travel to and from the office, as well as to off-site meetings across the region.

“As part of our Net Zero 2035 strategy, which we announced in early 2020, we have committed to working closely with local transport partners to encourage more passengers to travel to the Airport by sustainable means, including the Metro.”

Work to build the airport line began in 1990 once funding had been secured from the EEC. It was the first extension of the Metro since the line to South Shields opened in 1984.



New track, 3.5 kilometres in total, was built across the fields behind Woolsington village, extending the Metro beyond the Bank Foot terminus.

An entirely new station, with a distinct pyramid design, was constructed next to the airport terminal, with a walkway connecting the platforms to the main building.

It also saw the construction of Callerton Parkway Metro station, which has become a popular park and ride site. A second platform was built at Bank Foot.

New level crossings were required at Bank Foot and Callerton Parkway to get the trains over two local roads.

The airport station was purposely built into a cutting to ensure that Metro's overhead lines and signalling equipment were kept well below the flight path.

One of the challenges for Nexus staff is maintaining the western end of the line beyond Bank Foot station, especially in winter. The higher elevation of the railway here often leads to heavier snow falls which, due to the open countryside, can lead to windblown drifts during bad winters.

Retired Metro driver Michael Bushby had the job of taking the first passengers to Newcastle Airport in 1991. He said: "I remember the airport extension opening back in 1991 because it was quite an exciting project and somewhere new to drive the trains. There are lots of things on the airport route that you don't get anywhere else on the network – not least the special trip wires in case of low flying planes.

"It's a much more scenic part of the line than most of the rest of the network. Most of time you are travelling through urban areas, but this route is different. You get to see a glimpse of the country and a lot of wildlife, which can make the journey that bit more interesting.

"I was working on the day of the opening and I remember driving a train up to the airport around mid-morning. There was a lot of hype and press interest. People were on the platforms at stations from Bank Foot onwards meeting and welcoming passengers onto the first trains.

"All drivers had to be assessed and trained on the new route and I remember that the operations manager at the time was there congratulating us for being the first drivers of airport passenger services as we arrived on the platform.

"Generally speaking people travelling to and from the airport are in high spirits and you get to meet some lovely people. It's a lovely place to travel to as a driver. Even the ones coming back from holiday seem happy to see you. After flying back from holiday, shattered, they know that you can take them home. I always tried to greet them with a smile. Whenever I've been off on holiday with my wife and two daughters I've used the Metro as a passenger to get to the airport, and it's great."

*Images courtesy of Nexus*