

Nexus and Stadler – one year on

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It's been one year since Nexus announced that Stadler was their preferred bidder for the £362m contract to build new trains for Metro, and the first trains will start to be manufactured this year.

Stadler, based in Switzerland, were chosen after a year-long global search for the best manufacturing partner for 42 new trains, and the partnership was announced on 28 January 2020.

The manufacture of the new trains will start in August 2021, and they will be fully delivered by the end of 2024, transforming performance and passenger experience on the Tyne and Wear Metro.

The new trains will cut Metro's high voltage power consumption by 30% while providing 15 times better reliability than the current fleet. Metro passengers will benefit from modern features including charging points, air conditioning and improved accessibility.

A lot has happened since January 2020, and although the first new trains aren't expected to start entering passenger service until July 2023, a huge amount of work continues to be undertaken on the various contracts to make that happen.

In addition to the construction of the new fleet, Stadler also have the responsibility for building a new,

£70m state of the art maintenance depot to service the new trains. The new depot will replace the existing 100-year-old depot in Gosforth, Newcastle. In October 2020 Stadler took over the maintenance of the current fleet and as part of this around 120 maintenance staff transferred from Nexus to Stadler.

Stadler will have the challenge of keeping the existing, aging fleet running at the same time as re-skilling the maintenance staff to maintain the new trains as they start to enter service in 2023. They will look after the new fleet for 35 years.

Another new depot, at Howdon in North Tyneside, was completed and became fully operational in November 2020. This strategic site will be the new home for 10 trains during the demolition and construction of the Gosforth site.

September and October 2020 saw Nexus undertake their largest ever public consultation, asking the public for their views on some of the interior details of the new fleet, including seat patterns, grab poles and bike racks. Over 23,000 responses were received online, plus dedicated feedback was gathered from specialist groups, which has been fed into the detailed design work.

Train drivers also took part in a groundbreaking virtual reality consultation exercise, giving them the opportunity to feedback on the proposed layout of the new drivers' cab.

The Initial Design phase for the new train fleet was completed in December 2020, and the Final Design phase commenced in January 2021.

Neil Blagburn, Nexus' Metro Development Director, said: "The fact that almost all of this has been achieved throughout a global pandemic, largely to programme and without any delay to the delivery date of our new fleet next year is extraordinary.

"I'm extremely proud of the work of everyone involved, and of how our relationship with Stadler has developed despite the lack of face to face contact. We're all prepared for another challenging year and are looking forward to reaching the all-important milestone where we start train manufacturing in August 2021."

Stadler has pledged to support the regional economy and include as many north east or UK-based companies as possible. It is committed to using local suppliers for materials and services for the depot re-build, the manufacturing of the new trains and the service and maintenance contract.

Several local firms have already been signed up to work on the re-build of Gosforth depot, including Thompsons of Prudhoe, who will manage demolition. In November 2020, Stadler also announced a partnership with Newcastle University, incorporating research, education and innovation.

Rob Baxter, managing director of Stadler Rail Service UK, added: "Just 12 months since Nexus named Stadler the preferred bidder for the project, so much has been accomplished and so many milestones have been reached, despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

"We look forward to new trains entering passenger service within a couple of years, but it's worth

remembering that we have a 35-year maintenance agreement in place, which underscores our commitment and long-term investment in the north east.”

Photo credit: Nexus