

# The Tyne and Wear Metro celebrates its 40th anniversary

August 11, 2020



The Tyne and Wear Metro is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

Nexus, the public body which owns and manages Metro, said the network was a regional icon which has become one of North East England's most successful transport projects.

Metro has carried 1.5 billion passengers over four decades of operations.

Events marking the occasion include a virtual Metro depot tour, the launch of a new online Metro game, and the first original Metrocar 4001 as been painted in a special 40th anniversary colour scheme.

Managing Director Transport North East, Tobyn Hughes, said: "We're enormously proud that the Tyne and Wear Metro is celebrating its 40th year. What a fantastic success story for our region it has become.

"I'm sure that August 11, 1980, is a day that will live long in the memory for those who were there, and since then Metro has become a part of everyday life for thousands of people, who rely on it to get to places of work, school, college, and for leisure activities.

"The Metro is undoubtedly one of our region's greatest post-war achievements. It's a source of immense pride, affection, and is the envy of other UK cities."

He added: "Nexus remains the proud custodians of this iconic light rail system which means so much to

our region.

“The Covid-19 crisis has brought new challenges to us but I’m determined that we can now get back to business as lockdown lifts.

“My thanks go to our customers who travel with us every day, and our workforce, who do such an amazing job, day in, day out, to keep the trains running. Here’s to the next 40 years.

“Metro has a bright future. We are looking forward to getting our new trains in 2023 and beyond that we remain committed to extending the network.”

Leader of Gateshead Council and Chair of the North East Joint Transport Committee, Cllr Martin Gannon, said: “I want to wish a very happy 40th anniversary to the Tyne and Wear Metro.

“This is a rail network that was built against all the odds, at a time of huge austerity, and it has transformed the way that people travel around our region.

“Every year Metro helps to take millions of cars off our roads. It helps to drive our local economy and it’s a much-loved mode of travel which has become iconic. It has undoubtedly helped to put our region on the map.”

Light Rail Minister Baroness Vere said: “It is fantastic to celebrate this anniversary and the incredible local contribution the Metro has made over the past 40 years, connecting people to work, jobs and leisure.

“The Metro is part of the fabric of Tyne and Wear, setting new standards for urban transport which have been copied around the world. Passengers will soon benefit from a new greener fleet, increasing reliability and ensuring the network can continue to run smoothly into the next four decades.”

The local politicians and Tyne and Wear PTE staff, who made it become a reality, did so in a bid to reduce local road congestion. They were told that an underground light rail system would cost too much and that it may not be possible.

But they held firm, they won the argument, and Government funding of £280m was secured.

Tunnels were driven beneath the streets of Newcastle and Gateshead in what was a vast engineering project. Stations and viaducts were constructed. A new bridge was built over the Tyne and a fleet of 90 Metro trains was purchased.

Building work began in 1974 and the first passenger services were running by August 1980.

The official opening by Her Majesty the Queen took place the following year, on November 6, 1981.

Nexus brought the Metro to South Shields in 1984, to Gateshead in 1981, to Newcastle Airport in 1991, and to Sunderland in 2002.

Metro 40: timeline:

1971: Studies reveal light rail is a solution to take pressure off Tyneside's congested road network

1972: Government agrees to fund the Tyne and Wear Metro project at a cost of £100m

1974: Construction begins

1980: Metro system opens to passengers – Haymarket to Tynemouth

1981: The Queen officially opens the Tyne and Wear Metro as the line to Gateshead opens.

1984: South Shields line opens

1991: Metro extension to Newcastle Airport is opened

2002: The Queen opens the Sunderland line

2009: Government agrees to fund £350m Metro modernisation programme

2014: Metro train fleet refurbishments completed.

2020: Nexus orders a new fleet of trains to arrive by 2023.

Tyne and Wear Metro in numbers:

60 stations.

77km of track.

90 trains.

3 visits by The Queen.

20 hours a day Metro operates, 5am-1am.

1.5 billion passengers have used Metro over its 40 years.

34 million passengers a year use Metro (pre-Covid-19 stat)

10 million passengers a year use Monument Metro station

17,000 kilometres – the total distance the trains cover every day. Equivalent of Newcastle, England, to Newcastle in Australia.

240,000 – the number of times every Metro train door opens and shuts per year.

100% of stations have step free access

291 – bridges, tunnels and other structures that Nexus manages on the network.

Did you know?

When Metro first opened the minimum price for a ticket was just eight pence.

Metro was the first rail system in the UK to have no smoking in carriages.

Metro was the first underground system to have mobile phone connectivity in tunnels.

Metro was the first railway in the country where every station had step free access for wheelchairs.

ABBA were number 1 in the UK singles charts with 'the winner takes it all' in the week that Metro opened in 1980.

*Photo credit: Nexus*

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