



Bee Network Committee

Date: Thursday 27th November 2025

Subject: Trafford Park Line Impacts – From Evidence to Action

Report of: Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, Portfolio Lead for Transport
and Caroline Simpson, Group Chief Executive, GMCA

Purpose of Report

To present a summary of key evidence from the early years of the operation of the line and implications for broad areas of action.

Recommendations:

The Committee are requested to:

1. Note the post-implementation evaluation headline findings and broad areas for action; and
2. Note the publication on TfGM's website of the supporting summary and detailed reports.

Contact Officers

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Customer impacts are set out in the more detailed supporting documents. Positive evidence on modal shift is apparent from the passenger and business surveys carried out as part of the evaluation, with positive implications in these areas.

Risk Management

Rather than risks, the report presents a range of opportunities that lead from the evaluation evidence.

Legal Considerations

No specific legal considerations.

Financial Consequences

Although developing evidence from monitoring & evaluation activity was a funding requirement of Earn Back, whose requirements have been met for the release of future funds, there are no specific further financial implications at this time.

Number of attachments to the report: 0

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Not applicable.

Background Papers

No background papers.

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution ?

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Trafford Park Line consists of 5.5km of new Metrolink route westwards from Pomona, with six new stops - Wharfside, Imperial War Museum, Village, Parkway, Trafford Palazzo (formerly Barton Dock Road) and Trafford Centre. Services began operating on the line in 2020. The line was largely funded by means of a fund administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government known as “Earn Back”, with the focus of the fund being on supporting local economic growth in Greater Manchester.
- 1.2. To maximise learning from the Trafford Park Line to inform future investment decisions and to demonstrate a range of achievements and outcomes, as an Earn Back gateway condition, an evidence-gathering programme was commissioned from independent transport consultants.
- 1.3. A wide range of evidence was assembled, with concentrated evidence gathering in 2024, then analysis and interpretation continuing into the first half of 2025. This included analysis of existing data (e.g. on patronage, costs and revenues), in-depth stakeholder interviews, and passenger and business surveys.
- 1.4. A summary report of findings, alongside a more detailed report, is published alongside this report on the TfGM website.

2. Overall findings in relation to scheme objectives

- 2.1. The findings need to be considered in the context of the performance in the initial years being affected by Covid-19; the scale of engineering works that have limited city centre capacity; and that the planned operating pattern, with services running through the city centre to Crumpsall on the Bury Line, has not been implemented. Running Trafford Centre services through to Crumpsall is an issue that remains under review due to the additional timing pressures this would place on Victoria station that is already a significant network pinch point and the number of trams and drivers required to operate this service pattern.
- 2.2. Three scheme objectives were determined and the evidence in relation to these is set out in the following paragraphs.
- 2.3. ***Reducing car dependency.*** Based on surveys with passengers and businesses within the Trafford Park area on past and alternative travel patterns, the evidence

assembled indicates a significant level of modal shift from car. Therefore, car dependency to the Trafford Park area has been reduced.

- 2.4. **Connectivity.** Both passenger perceptions and actual performance data point to an enhanced public transport offer now being available in the area served by the line, relative to pre-existing provision.
- 2.5. **Regeneration and growth.** There is evidence of positive trends in relation to employment and development activity, with stakeholder and case study interviews indicating the attractiveness of the Trafford Park area having improved through the arrival of Metrolink and businesses indicating a strong positive impact on productivity. In some ways, it is too early to draw firm conclusions and future evidence gathering to understand local economic impacts will be needed.

3. Evidence to inform near-term opportunities

- 3.1. The report confirms the attractiveness of Metrolink as a part of the transport offer for the Trafford Park area. The importance of journey times, with anticipated tram journey times being successfully achieved, is noted. Reliable service operation is also noted as an attractive feature of the service. The implication being that continued focus on operating a fast, frequent and reliable service remains paramount.
- 3.2. Over the initial years of operation, a wide range of marketing and promotional activities have been developed to build and grow usage of the line. Given the challenges of promoting a line with a very limited adjacent residential catchment, there has been a particular focus on co-creating campaigns with attractions along the line.
- 3.3. Future extension of services further into and beyond the city centre, for example to Crumpsall on the Bury Line, will provide additional opportunities for further promotion of the travel options enabled by the line.
- 3.4. A plan to grow public transport patronage and revenue is in development which will look to deliver transport growth ambitions right across the network and the Trafford Park Line will be included in that plan.

4. How does this evidence inform future rapid transit extensions?

- 4.1. Evidence collected as part of the monitoring and evaluation work carried out has been regularly shared with the rapid transit team at TfGM, informing the development of future strategies and plans.
- 4.2. Examples of the ways in which the evidence from the Trafford Park Line has informed future extension planning is set out in the following table:

Examples of key evidence from TPL	Action in developing rapid transit extensions
A range of lessons learnt from the development and delivery process that have resulted in the line being delivered 7 months ahead of schedule and within the £350m budget have been recorded, e.g. by means of effective partnering with the supply chain and early contractor involvement. Furthermore, contractual arrangements that encourage delivery to time, within budget and while delivering on key outputs such as journey time are highly desirable.	The lessons learnt that have been documented are particularly relevant for contractual arrangements for delivering future extensions efficiently, with effective teams (both internal, and through partnering with the supply chain) needing to be built up at an early stage to a high level of trust and teamwork, there having been a gap between recent Metrolink extensions and forthcoming ones.

Examples of key evidence from TPL	Action in developing rapid transit extensions
Strong evidence exists that the line provides an attractive public transport service to users, with 57% of those switching mode citing an easier journey, 44% a reduced journey time and 20% a reliable journey time, while 90% of all passengers say it offers an attractive alternative to the car.	Segregation of lines from general traffic, wherever possible, is essential in maximising the attractiveness and effectiveness of giving passengers alternative means of travel, while linking in with Metrolink vehicle and stop quality and branding. Reduced and reliable journey times are key to future rapid transit schemes, and this finding informs the principles established in the Draft GM Rapid Transit Strategy (July 2024) and the focus on delivering segregated alignments where possible.
Following the success of delivering a line largely segregated from highways traffic and therefore achieving the anticipated journey time target, a high proportion of users have shifted from car/ taxi, with 33% of users saying that in the absence of the line they would have travelled by car or taxi instead.	The emphasis in developing future extensions, embedded in the Draft GM Rapid Transit Strategy (July 2024) has been on providing fast, reliable and frequent services on mainly segregated alignments.

Examples of key evidence from TPL	Action in developing rapid transit extensions
The line covers the majority of, but not all, operating costs with passenger revenues - and does so to a greater extent than the network as a whole. In part due to the impacts of Covid-19 and the fact that the line has yet to fully penetrate and cross the city centre, however, usage and hence value for money have yet to reach anticipated levels – e.g. for every £1 of costs incurred £1.86 in benefits was anticipated but it is currently estimated that benefits taking into account wider impacts exceed costs with every £1 of costs resulting in benefits in the range of £1 to £1.5.	The need to cover operating and renewals costs is a key aspect of planning future extensions and developing associated business cases. Business case assumptions around outputs and passenger revenue are key in securing benefits and will be captured plans for future schemes.
While longer-term impacts on economic growth will take longer to come to fruition, evidence from commuters and businesses indicate that the line is making an effective contribution to regeneration and growth in Greater Manchester, e.g. 80% of businesses surveyed agreeing that staff site access has improved, with only 15% disagreeing; 76% agreeing that there have been positive productivity impacts.	Planning new lines and extensions to fully consider development opportunities is key – the approach is clearly referenced in the Draft GM Rapid Transit Strategy (July 2024), alongside making sure new routes link well with trains and local development plans. Examples include the new stops at Victoria North, Elton Reservoir and Cop Road which aim to promote sustainable growth.

5. Next steps

- 5.1. As well as taking into consideration further implications of the work carried out on TPL for near term initiatives and future rapid transit developments, in parallel to this report being issued, the summary and detailed findings are being published on the TfGM website.