Light Rail and Rapid Transit Consultation – ASLEF Response
May 2019

1. The Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) is the UK's largest train drivers' union representing approximately 20,000 members in train operating companies and freight companies as well as London Underground and light rail systems including Croydon Tramlink and North East Metro Operations Ltd.

2. ASLEF is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. As a rail union, we are strongly in favour of increasing the use of rail transport in the UK and therefore broadly supportive of any work which makes it easier for passengers to choose the train over other less sustainable modes of transport.

3. The union maintains a priority of campaigning for heavy rail wherever it is possible, including into the hearts of cities and to link urban centres. Permanent heavy rail is an efficient and effective way to move large numbers of passengers at a much higher rate than road or any other alternative mode of transport.

4. ASLEF does, however, recognise that the nature of the urban environment in many English cities means there is a lack of space available to construct heavy rail routes that are not already existing, and therefore is in favour of light rail and rapid transit solutions where these can be an addition to other transport infrastructure, in particular interfacing efficiently and easily with other modes of transport.

5. There have been recent proposals, and indeed some implemented, in which existing heavy rail tracks and infrastructure have been repurposed for the running of light rail. The union is in favour of more investment in rail but does not believe it should be to the disadvantage of heavy rail. Our position is that where heavy rail infrastructure exists, this should be operated as fully as possible and remain as heavy rail.

6. The Department for Transport's analysis shows that light rail is more efficient than buses in terms of passengers moved per hour. This is a clear incentive to put in place light rail and tram routes particularly in areas frequently used for commuting and leisure. Light rail also has the advantage over buses that it can run to strict times rather than be affected by other traffic on the roads, which is a particular issue for buses in many urban areas in England.

7. The more efficient operation of light rail over buses makes it more likely people will use public transport. Figures from the Bus Passenger Survey Autumn 2018 (Transport Focus) show that up to 33 percent of passengers reported their journeys were affected by congestion and traffic jams, with up to 22 percent of passengers reporting boarding time to be a delaying factor. Light rail, and particularly tram solutions which run on rails could mitigate both of these issues and therefore increase passenger satisfaction.

8. The delay figures above are particularly high for passengers the West Midlands and West of England regions, both regions with multiple urban areas, none of which currently have a light rail or rapid transit system. As the West Midlands in particular has some existing commuter heavy rail infrastructure, ASLEF's preference for future development would be to increase the frequency, capacity and route options of commuter rail but the union recognises that light rail or rapid transit may offer a more expedient solution.

9. In order for light rail and tram solutions to be successful, as many are in European cities including Amsterdam and Berlin, there needs to be inbuilt an ease of access which includes logical and consistent fares. Cities with successful and highly regarded public transit systems often have in common the benefit of integrated ticketing, meaning passengers can switch from one mode to another without requiring a different ticket or having to access different providers for different legs of their journeys.

10. Alongside this integration, any new light rail or rapid transit systems should be designed and built with intermodal travel in mind – connecting to pedestrian routes, cycle hire, cycling infrastructure, buses and of course to heavy rail links so that passengers can easily complete a journey using more than one mode with easy and efficiency.

11. In terms of the wider commercial opportunities brought by light rail and tram solutions, there is an incentive for businesses and developers to create new housing or locate their business near to light rail, tram or metro stops. The permanence of rail-based infrastructure is much more reassuring to investors than the current presence of a bus route which could be withdrawn at any time. Physical infrastructure is a visual symbol of the intention to maintain a reliable transit link. This permanence is also appealing to people choosing where to live, as the inherent unreliability and lack of long-term security for bus routes can discourage people from factoring in the convenience of a bus route to their housing choice.

12. ASLEF is in favour of a fully publicly owned and operated rail system, which would mean a 'guiding mind' for the railway could look at long-term strategies for the network and make sure it is efficient, effective and able to integrate across routes and regional areas. The union therefore also believes that any light rail and rapid transit solutions should similarly be publicly owned and operated, giving taxpayers the best value for their investment and meaning that profit does not leak out of the system.

13. Alongside this, the union believes that good industrial relations are key to an effective transport operation, and would therefore seek to include in any proposals for future transit

systems that trade unions are fully consulted, in a stakeholder capacity, about the working patterns, terms and conditions for drivers and other staff.

14. In conclusion, the union supports the aims of increasing the use of public transport in cities in England, and while we would firstly call for heavy rail to be expanded, where this is not possible we would be in support of light rail solutions where they are on new infrastructure, not repurposing existing heavy rail tracks.