

Ref: 12/19/CB

30 August 2019

Successful tram test on new track for the Birmingham Westside extension



Trams arrived in Victoria Square for the first time as a gauge test of newly installed track for the Birmingham Westside extension was successfully completed.

Followed by a team of Midland Metro Alliance engineers, the West Midlands Metro Urbos 3 made the after-hours journey from Grand Central, in another clear sign that the project is progressing as planned.

The tests took place to ensure the track and tram were working properly together and it marked the first time in the UK that a tram has used battery power to run along a modern tram line specifically built without overhead wires.

Further trials will be run over the coming weeks before the project's full testing and commissioning programme commences in October prior to the anticipated launch of services in December. It is a crucially important phase which involves running out of service trams at low speeds along the newly installed track, allowing engineers to complete a series of tests in a working environment.

Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street hailed the success of the first tram test. The former John Lewis CEO said: "Although there have been many milestones in this ambitious project to extend the tram network to the westside of Birmingham, this successful tram test marks a significant moment in the first phase of the project. It is fantastic to see that final preparations are now underway to start services from Grand Central to Centenary Square, with all the benefits that will bring to Birmingham city centre and the wider West Midlands economy."

Councillor Waseem Zaffar, Birmingham City Council Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, said of the milestone: "It was great to see the first tram successfully run along the track that the Midland Metro Alliance team has worked so hard to install. The overnight tests are another important indicator that the construction work is coming to an end, and that those living, working or visiting the city can now anticipate the extension of fast, clean, reliable and eco-friendly trams throughout more of the city.

Phil Hewitt, Director of West Midlands Metro, added: "The overnight testing of the tram and track together is another demonstration of the progress being made on the project. It means we are even closer to delivering the Metro extension in the city centre, providing new opportunities for residents and businesses. In the next few weeks, the public will see our trams on the new extension as we

complete all of the essential testing and training needed to ensure we are ready to carry passengers in December. The fact that these trials are being completed using battery power alone marks a major step forward for light rail across the country. It's a real first for the West Midlands and opens up new opportunities to deliver tram routes in areas that may otherwise have proven challenging for aesthetic and engineering reasons."

As well as providing the opportunity for vital testing of tracks, signals and other infrastructure, the extensive testing programme allows people to get used to trams travelling at low speeds through the city centre ahead of services opening to the public later this year.

The Birmingham Westside Metro project follows the extension from St. Chads to Grand Central, which opened for passenger service in May 2016. Once completed, trams will operate between Grand Central and Hagley Road in Edgbaston, improving transport links in the heart of Birmingham, making journeys faster and more accessible, in turn helping businesses and supporting more jobs.

Construction for the new route commenced in June 2017 and, along with four other tram extensions in the West Midlands, is being planned, designed and delivered by the Midland Metro Alliance on behalf of Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), which has embarked upon an ambitious plan to regenerate the region and provide new opportunities for residents and businesses.

-Ends-

Notes to Editors:

1. Pictures: Trams were successfully tested along the newly installed track that has been laid for the Birmingham Westside Metro extension.
2. The Midland Metro Alliance consists of the WMCA, which owns the West Midlands Metro; a consortium of design experts from Egis, Tony Gee and Pell Frischmann; and rail construction specialists Colas Rail – supported by Colas' sub-alliance partners Colas Ltd, Barhale, Bouygues UK and Auctus Management Group.
3. The West Midlands Metro runs between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, serving locations such as the Jewellery Quarter, West Bromwich, Wednesbury and Bilston.
4. For further information about the release, please contact MMA Head of Communications Antony Lowbridge-Ellis, by emailing: antony.lowbridge-ellis@metroalliance.co.uk.