

THE WEST LONDON ORBITAL STORY SO FAR

by Peter Mynors

A report of the LURS meeting at All Souls Club House on 8 September 2009

Peter Mynors has worked in transport planning for over 40 years with Travers Morgan, Symonds Travers Morgan and, now, Capita Symonds.

West London has a population of 1.6 million people and its own thriving economy. It hosts such large scale employers as Heathrow Airport, Wembley Stadium, GSK and the BBC. However, it suffers from very congested roads as about two-thirds of employees drive to work. Restrictive parking standards introduced ten years ago mean that redundant employment sites are now, mainly, being redeveloped for residential use.

The railway lines through West London are only radial (going to and from Central London) and these lines have only two interchanges with the London Overground's North London Line – Richmond and Willesden Junction.

In 2001, Symonds were commissioned by the London Borough of Ealing on behalf of "West London Leadership" (which includes 6 borough councils, and the West London Chamber of Commerce) to investigate improvement in orbital transport to the west of London. The study was updated in 2008.

The conclusion of this study was the proposal to connect the existing radial lines with an orbital underground metro. The choice of tunnel, rather than surface line, was influenced by lessons learnt from the Uxbridge Road Tram proposal. The metro would feature short, frequent, driverless trains (similar to DLR) and platform doors (similar to Jubilee Line extension). The stations would be built first in box structures, and then the running tunnels bored in to the London Clay at a depth of 30 metres (approx. 100 feet). If demand exceeded supply then a second parallel metro could be built later.

Two routes have been considered:-

1. Surbiton/Wimbledon to Brent Cross via Hounslow (outer route).
2. Surbiton to Brent Cross via Richmond and Ealing (inner route).

Whichever route is chosen, the orbital will interchange with Thameslink, South West Trains and Crossrail. The inner route looks the more promising, connecting 20 radial lines.

Studies were undertaken plotting travel possible within 60 minutes from stations and major locations (a) under current arrangements, (b) with Crossrail and (c) with both Crossrail and West London Orbital. Every station/location in west London showed improved access, the improvement arising from West London Orbital being substantially more than that arising from Crossrail alone.

The estimated cost of the West London Orbital is in the region of £1.75 billion. Finance will have to come from the Public Sector as private funds seek guarantees that a proposal will actually happen and the proposal is very much still in the planning stage. West London Business are looking to TfL and the London Mayor to include the West London Orbital in the next London Plan to enable them to source funding. Boris Johnson has stated that he would like to see a rail equivalent to the M25 and that the Overground meets this criterion. However, he has made no mention of the fact that the Overground does not connect up the radial lines to the west of London.

In July 2009 the Outer London Commission recommended relaxing parking standards for business in West London and proposed testing a rail based orbital system – but did not specifically name it as West London Orbital. The commission will commence modelling the system in 2010.

Where to next?

- Get West London Orbital included in the Transport Strategy document; Confirm best route and any additional stations.

- Refine cost estimates.
- Identify funding opportunities.
- Consider extension opportunities at each end.

Peter gave an outline of each of the proposed station sites and feasibility of obtaining land.

The full report from Capita Symonds is available at –

http://www.capitasymonds.co.uk/pdf/WLO_Full_Document.pdf

A number of questions were asked, particularly about possible extensions.

Peter responded that any extension to the north, such as East Finchley or Muswell Hill would be for the Mayor and/or TfL to consider – this is outside the remit of West London Business. Brent Cross Shopping Centre is likely to be included in a fast transit route from Brent Cross station to Staples Corner as part of the major Cricklewood redevelopment. The south of London already has reasonably good orbital connections via Clapham Junction.

Consideration had been given early on to routing the West London Orbital on existing rail lines, but due to their Victorian design this would be very difficult and expensive. By having a completely new line, the interchanges can use existing stops on radial lines, in established locations of demand such as Richmond and Ealing Broadway. A completely new build line would give much less disruption and significantly quicker journey times.

Another question was asked about who would operate the West London Orbital and where its depot is likely to be. Peter responded that the depot would be at surface level and probably use existing facilities such as North Pole (until recently Eurostar's depot) or GWR's Old Oak Common or even Piccadilly Line's Northfields depot. The operator would be TfL, as with the Overground system. It is important that West London Orbital is included in the Oyster system. Peter outlined how the Orbital could be used to assist during engineering works by allowing travellers to connect with an alternative radial line.

Amanda Day