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RAPID RAIL SYSTEM FOR DOCKLANDS APPROVED

The Government today gave the Greater London Council and the London Docklands Development Corporation the go-ahead for an exciting new Light Rail Transport system (LRT). This will bring high quality and reliable public transport to docklands and link with the existing London Underground network.

Before the end of the year, a Private Bill is to be introduced in the House of Commons by London Transport. The Bill will seek the necessary approvals, so that work can begin speedily. Detailed design proposals are to be commissioned immediately and construction should start in late 1983, with passenger services fully operational in 1987.

All the authorities concerned with the redevelopment of docklands agree that new public transport links are critical in attracting new businesses, jobs, housing and people to the area. Hitherto, support funds have just not been available. Proposals for the development of docklands and the provision of transport have been the subject of many studies and reviews over the last decade.

The challenge was to find the best system which could be implemented with the funds available. The extension of the Jubilee Line was a proposal which perhaps best met the needs of the area, but the very high costs of construction means it is not high now on the Government's list of priorities.

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In July 1981, the LDDC and GLC agreed that it would not be possible to finance an effective scheme if there were a programme initiated jointly and amounting to approximately £25m. pa over the next decade covering new road schemes, public transport improvements and the LRT scheme which has been selected to fit in with that general constraint.

Earlier this year, local residents and interest groups were consulted. The docklands communities have warmly welcomed the plans to improve their transportation facilities.

The system will comprise short trains operating on standard tracks. These light rail vehicles will incorporate the latest technology and build on the advances made by Continental, Canadian and North American cities, where such systems are already operating successfully and more are being planned.

These systems are highly efficient, reliable and comfortable and can be run very frequently to provide easy access to the new developments planned for docklands. It will complement improvements to existing bus and road networks already being implemented.

Two routes are planned, one running from near Tower Hill and the other from Mile End both to the site of the old North Woolwich station at the foot of the Isle of Dogs overlooking Greenwich. They will cost in the region of £65m, compared with an estimated bill of £500m. for the proposed Jubilee Line extension.

The new line from Tower Hill will have the effect of extending the Circle, District and Metropolitan Lines for 6.6 kilometres, along existing, but disused, rail lines and viaducts. The north/south route from Mile End will act as an extension of the District and Central Lines, taking in a length of Bow Road and then an existing rail cutting for 3.4 kilometres. There will be no demolition, as both routes follow disused railway lines and rights of way.

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Dave Wetzel, who chairs the GLC's Transport Committee, welcomed the Government's go-ahead. He said today: "This is good news for docklands. It should provide a major boost to the development of this long neglected area.

"I look forward to the day when these derelict acres are humming with new life, bringing jobs and hope to the docklands communities. If ever an area has waited too long for investment in its future, this is it."

Reg Ward, the LDDC's Chief Executive, said today: "This announcement, perhaps more than any other could, confirms the Government's total commitment to securing the regeneration of docklands. Our efforts, along with those of the GLC and LT, have been repaid not only with a new transport link with Docklands but with a vital piece of development infrastructure.

"Despite the superb location and potential of docklands for major developments in a totally exceptional water-scape environment, the private investment sector has been holding back pending this decision. Government, the GLC and the LDDC have now opened up the greatest development opportunity of the "80's" in Western Europe."

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