

Costly tram service only possible with state subsidy

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A report by the Halcrow Group, presented in parliament last week, has put the cost of a tram network for Malta at anything between €221 million to €325 million, and clearly states the system will not be viable without a government subsidy.

The report proposes the use of 14 low-floor electric trams on two separate routes, one from Valletta to Sliema and one from Valletta to the National Stadium passing from Birkirkara. With a projected revenue in fares of €4.3 million a year, this would only partly cover the yearly operating and maintenance costs of some €7.6 million.

The report states that “the balance would therefore require an ongoing government subsidy.”

One of the funding options proposed by Halcrow is a windfall tax on businesses and developers along the tram route. “This would make the tax more specific to those who benefit from the investment.”

Another option is to tap EU funds, or an investment bank to consider pouring money into the project.

Halcrow has based its costings on current bus patronage for the two routes and demographic trends in the localities affected by the project. But the report foresees additional patronage of public transport due to the attraction of modern trams.

The Valletta-Ta' Qali route would run on the old tramway route and that of the old railway in Attard, linking Hamrun, Santa Venera, Fleur de Lys, Birkirkara, Attard, the Pitkali market and Misrah Kola.

Ta' Qali's extensive car parking facilities would also provide the ideal park-and-ride system for passengers, reducing traffic congestions in urban centres.

The Valletta-Sliema route will link Sliema, Gzira, and Ta' Xbiex, but it would require the relocation of the existing petrol station and kiosk near the Manoel Island bridge, as well as the reconstruction of the bridge.

Commuters will be able to interchange tram routes at Sa Maison.

The report says a major problem for the Valletta-Sliema route is a sharp bend along Triq Marina in Pietà. The proposed solution would be for both tram and cars to share traffic, provided that priority is given to trams emerging from their stops.

The tram terminus will be located in the present Valletta bus terminus, but the exit is constrained by the bastion walls and a footbridge in the Phoenicia Hotel grounds. The report proposes a tunnel beneath the bastion walls to solve this problem.
