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Tram chiefs target 5 million passengers Blackpool's trams are attracting record numbers of passengers



Tramway bosses are hoping to bust the 5m passenger mark this year after a stunning 20 per cent surge in customers. New figures, released by the Department for Transport, show the tramway carried 4.9m passengers between March 2015 and March 2016. Bob Mason, from Blackpool Transport That is 600,000 up on the previous year. Revenues on the route also rose, up nearly 10 per cent to £6.1m.

The news comes less than 12 months after Blackpool Transport came under criticism for heavy overcrowding on the services. The response – introducing extra trams and from this summer a service every 10 minutes during the day – was hailed in the report as a major factor in driving the increase.



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It's about the quality of transport, the quality of staff Blackpool Transport bosses today paid tribute to the hard work of staff in driving the increase in both passenger numbers and customer satisfaction and promised further improvements.

The Gazette can reveal the firm is considering rolling out free wifi on the tramway to encourage more commuters out of their cars.

Service Delivery Director Bob Mason said: "We do of course keep track of our passenger numbers. "But this report from the Department for Transport highlights just how positive the figures have been. "We are constantly looking at how the service is being operated and looking what we need to match demand. "This year it is easier than ever to use the tram. "We are operating a 10-minute service, up from every 12. "You don't really need a timetable to catch a tram now.

You can get to a stop and know one is going to be arriving soon." Mr. Mason said the company has reacted positively to last year's criticism, brought at the peak of the Illuminations. And he paid tribute to the part Blackpool Transport staff had played. "It was more than just increasing the number of trams we operate," he said. "What we did, and continue to do, when there are special events such as the Air Show, weekends during the Illuminations or the Autumn half term is to man platforms. "We have staff out there giving information, helping customers. "Our conductors are exemplary. They are world host trained and are far more than just revenue collections. "And that is reflected in the fantastic customer service rating we have received."

Figures from Transport Focus are included with the DfT report and show a 96 per cent approval rating for Blackpool Transport – the third highest for any light rail system outside of London and significantly better than Manchester's Metrolink. Repeat custom was also extremely high for Blackpool with the survey reporting 35 passenger journeys per head. It's a success story Mr. Mason puts down to a simple formula. "It's about the quality of transport, the quality of staff, punctuality and reliability and frequency. "It's those key ingredients, whether it's a bus, tram or train you are talking about. "

Satisfaction levels are high and we're doing well in terms of value for money too. "But we cannot be complacent. "We cannot rest on our laurels and we have to continue to improve. "We're hoping we can pass the five million mark on the tramway next year. "With the increase in service that should be possible."

Mr. Mason is hoping improvements made to Blackpool's supertram fleet can tempt commuters onto the rails. "One of the things we are looking at is wifi," he said. "It's been introduced on parts of the bus network and proved very popular.



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"We are seriously looking at how we can roll it out onto the tramway. "It's just one of the projects we have ongoing." The figures have been welcomed by Blackpool Council which is Blackpool Transport's main shareholder and takes a minimum dividend of £1m from the firm every year.

A decision to apply for an order to link the tramway to Blackpool North station was deferred by Blackpool Council's executive last month. The £22m scheme has run into opposition over traffic problems and safety concerns

When Blackpool Transport does well, Blackpool does well'

Coun Gillian Campbell, deputy leader of Blackpool Council, believes the increase provides justification for a proposed extension up Talbot Road to link the tramway with Blackpool North station.

She said: "It's fantastic to see more and more people are using the tramway and it's even better to see customer satisfaction is going up at the same time. "More people using the trams means more revenue for Blackpool Transport to improve the service, which is good news for its customers. "With more people opting to use the tramway network, it makes sense to look at expanding the system to customers coming off the train at Blackpool North."

Conservative Coun Paul Galley, who represents Anchorsholme, said: "This is fantastic news.

"What's unique here is that Blackpool Transport pays a dividend to the local council every year, so when you use the bus or the tram you are paying for the essential services everybody in Blackpool uses.

"When Blackpool Transport does well, Blackpool does well."

Courtesy: Blackpool Gazette