The Relevance of Tram-Trains to Reopening the Portishead-Bristol Line

Background

Tram-Trains have been mooted as a possible alternative solution to Bristol's mass transport problems.

- The planned reopening of the Portishead-Bristol Line is now held up, pending the outcome of a study into the applicability of Tram-Trains. There is no published timescale for this study, so the delivery of any service will now be further in the future than the current MetroWest heavy rail project.

- It has been claimed by some that Tram-Trains will be a cheaper solution than the current £116M project for reopening the Portishead-Bristol Line. This claim is false (see below).

Rationale for why Tram-Trains are an irrelevance to reopening the Portishead-Bristol Line

1. The cost of Tram-Trains on the Portishead Line:
   - The only route is along the south side of the Avon Gorge, but this carries the existing Network Rail freight line - a 'Heavy Rail' line
   - Regardless of whether Tram-Trains are eventually used for the Portishead Line and the wider Bristol area, the existing Heavy Rail line through the Avon Gorge still needs to be realigned and updated to support existing and future Heavy Rail traffic.
       - These costs therefore will remain in the overall 'reopening' cost, as would the costs of relaying the track from Pill Junction to Portishead
       - The track re-laying from Pill Junction to Portishead will still need to be carried out to high standards in order to traverse this notoriously unstable coastal land.

2. Additional costs of providing a dual-usage track from Portishead to Temple Meads (14.5km):
   - Although implementing a dual-signalling and dual-safety arrangement onto the existing Heavy Rail track can be done, implementing mixed Heavy Rail and Light Rail traffic on a single Heavy Rail track would increase costs significantly.
       - In Sheffield, the recently opened 11km Sheffield Cathedral to Rotherham Parkgate Tram-Train pathway, including just 5.1km of dual-use Heavy Rail tracks, cost over £100M
   - The currently proposed Class 160/165 units are widely used 'cascade down' rolling stock. The purchase of new Tram-Train rolling stock, with new Bristol area servicing and garaging facilities, would increase costs.

3. Existing funding and expenditure:
   - Approximately £12M has been committed/spent to date.
   - Pursuing a Tram-Train solution would write off the majority of this spend, and would incur new study costs for which there is no budget, other than the existing budget, which would then be depleted further.

Route and service options:

- The currently planned service for reopening the Portishead line is at an advanced stage, based on an hourly Heavy Rail service to/from Temple Meads using cascade-down Class 160/165 units

- It would be better to forge ahead with the current planned reopening project, investing in the Portishead-Bristol Line infrastructure that will be required <u>regardless of the eventual wider Bristol area mass transport solution</u>

  o This would secure the corridor, provide interim passenger services, and would automatically provide a Tram-Train pathway if required in future.

- There are some advocating a Tram-Train service from Portishead to Bristol centre instead of Temple Meads.

  o This may be technically possible, notwithstanding the route difficulties at the Cumberland Basin and beyond, but it would be both costly and many years away from implementation

  o The employment centres within central Bristol have changed over the years, as has the need for through-travel to other destinations. Consequently, there needs to be a dual-route, to Temple Meads and Bristol centre

PRG Committee Recommendation

MetroWest and Central Government should fund the currently planned project for the reopening of the Portishead line, thus securing the corridor and providing much-needed and very long overdue passenger services to and from Portishead, Pill and the Gordano villages.

This would produce working rail infrastructure that with relatively few modifications could be 'Tram-Train ready' if/when a wider Bristol Tram-Train mass transport solution is implemented.