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Vivarail D-Train to be tested in US cities

Written by Keith Fender

RAILROAD Development Corporation (RDC) has developed plans to take a Vivarail D-Train from Britain to the United States to demonstrate how the rebuilt former London Underground (LU) trains could provide a low-cost rolling stock option for new passenger services.

RDC is a major investor in Vivarail, a British company established in 2012 with the aim of rebuilding LU D78 stock vehicles into multiple units for use on main line railways. Vivarail obtained its first firm order for three two-car class 230 DMUs from West Midlands Trains earlier this month.

RDC chairman Mr Henry Posner III told IRJ the D-train could be used to provide “pop-up rail transit or commuter rail services” in urban areas where rail infrastructure exists but is currently either not used for passenger services or is underutilised.

Posner says that with the established US practise of temporal separation - running passenger trains during one period and freight trains at other times, the lightweight Vivarail trains could be used on existing freight lines in urban areas with relatively little infrastructure expenditure.

RDC has begun sales activity with “multiple cities” on both the east and west coasts of the United States and plans to take at least one D-Train adapted

for North American operation to the USA. The diesel train will be remanufactured by Vivarail at its Long Marston facility in central England.

Posner believes there is an opportunity to change the approach of US cities to rail projects by demonstrating that they can be implemented at lower cost, therefore requiring less state and federal funding, especially at the early development stage.

RDC’s core proposition is that the Vivarail train can provide a solution for cities which have previously discounted passenger rail as an option on cost or complexity grounds, enabling them to test possible services “for less than the cost of a consultant’s study into a possible service,” as Posner puts it.

Posner says that experience from Europe, and particularly Germany, demonstrates that passenger services can be reintroduced using lightweight trains and that by taking a new approach to operating costs these can be reduced significantly from historic approaches.

He reports that there is substantial interest from cities, although “nothing concrete yet” in terms of orders.

Posner suggests that the availability of suitable and affordable rolling stock could spur a “shortline passenger rail” revival in US cities with schemes “designed by communities with local focus.”

