

### Pittsburgh-based company looks to test ‘pop-up’ transit options in the UK and US

By Keith Fender | March 7, 2018

PITTSBURGH — U.S. Railroad investor Henry Posner III and his Railroad Development Corp. have plans to bring rebuilt self-powered former London subway cars to the U.S. to enable cities to introduce low cost rail transit on existing, lightly used freight routes. Railroad Development is the main investor in British firm Vivarail, which bought up more than 150 former London Underground D78-series surface cars with the aim of converting them into diesel or battery powered regional-commuter rail trainsets.

Vivarail scored its first order for its remanufactured trains in Britain in early March with three 2-car Class 230 trains ordered by operator West Midlands Trains for use on the “Marston Vale” regional line connecting Bedford and Milton Keynes, England, north of London. Vivarail has been testing prototype trains using Ford truck engines and gensets in purpose-built underfloor modules on both test tracks and the British network for two years. Earlier plans for test passenger operations were scrapped after a unit sustained fire damage. The company has also announced plans to equip a train with batteries and in the future, hydrogen fuel cell technology.

Posner tells *Trains News Wire*, in an exclusive interview, that he and his British partners initially saw the Vivarail train as a solution to parts of the U.K. market where new trains were too expensive to replace older diesel multiples unit vehicles. The sale of the first trains shows that a market exists — but Railroad Development doesn’t plan to stop there as Posner believes there is opportunity to use the Vivarail trains in the U.S. Posner plans to ship at least one train from Britain to the East Coast as a demonstrator.

Posner says the Railroad Development plan offers a “pop-up” rail transit option to smaller urban areas, cities, or areas of cities that either cannot afford a traditional high investment rail transit construction project or simply haven’t considered it because of the expense normally involved. Key to Posner’s concept is “temporal separation.” In other



An example of Vivarail’s British Class 230 trainset which will soon enter service in England’s midlands. Vivarail

words, rail lines used by passenger trains at certain times and freight at other times.

Posner says that there has been considerable interest in the concept from cities, but no firm commitments yet, on both the East and West coasts and he now has a member of Railroad Development’s management team tasked with selling the concept to U.S. cities and turning the initial widespread interest into orders, or demonstration projects.

He adds that the Vivarail train can “change that perception of cost” as the trains could be tried out — with passengers — on a route as he puts it “for less than the cost of a consultant’s study into the proposed rail service,” adding that by testing the operation for themselves, city officials can find out if people will use the service at the same time.

Railroad Development sees an opportunity, Posner says, in supporting communities that want rail transit and which are willing to try new approaches. He says Vivarail trains may not necessarily be the long-term solution for certain routes that could grow into important commuter rail corridors if only they had passenger trains. He does think, however, that the Vivarail train could help start such services and give cities the confidence to invest, adding that for less busy routes the Vivarail train could be an effective long-term option.