



## RCU announces detailed plans to develop tram project spanning AIUla's landmarks and signs contract for design of eco-friendly infrastructure

- Mobility company SYSTRA to complete design studies in 2023, with the tramway's carriages resembling those from the historic Hijaz railway
- Low-carbon and experiential system will call at some of AIUla's most important locations and landmarks, with stations acting as public transport hubs for surrounding areas
- The tram network will be developed over two phases spanning more than 50km from Hegra in the north to AIUla International Airport in the south

**AIUla, Saudi Arabia, 4 July 2022.** The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) has announced plans to develop a new tram system connecting all of AIUla County's most important landmarks, archaeological sites, tourist destinations, urban areas, and transport infrastructure.

The first phase of the system will be designed by the international mobility firm SYSTRA, which will take the lead on systems integration and the design of rolling stock resembling carriages from the historic Hijaz railway.

Once its two phases are complete, the tram network will stretch for more than 50km.

Passengers will be able to enjoy a comfortable ride in modern and prestigious tram cars travelling along a reinterpretation of the former Hijaz line, which passed through the AIUla valley while transporting passengers from Damascus in Syria to Medina in Saudi Arabia. Servicing visitors and residents, the new line will reflect AIUla's recent history as an important stopping point for pilgrims with its ongoing ambitions to be a global destination for tourism and the world's largest living museum.

Developed as a state-of-the-art low-carbon public transport solution, phase one of the project will run from the historic AIUla Central Hijaz railway station to Hegra, the UNESCO World Heritage Site in the north.

Connecting major tourist areas and important archaeological sites, the northern 'red' line will provide easy links to core locations highlighted as part of RCU's comprehensive Journey Through Time route plan and its vision to promote and protect AIUla's heritage landmarks.

At 21km in length, this section will act as a catalyst for future developments, with stations to be constructed at Hegra South, Equestrian Village North and Equestrian Village South, Nabataean Farms, Al Uthayb, the Incense Museum, Jabal Ikma, Tal Al Khatib, Dadan North, Dadan Village and Dadan, Al Jadidah, Old Town, AIUla Central East and AIUla Hijaz.

Each station will be designed as a hub for alternative transport services such as personal cycles, e-bikes, on-demand electric vehicles as well as other options that can be accessed by the local community.

The second phase of the tram will extend to the south of AIUla County with an additional 33km of track running all the way to the international airport, further strengthening AIUla's development as an important regional transport centre.

A major infrastructure project that will run through urban and rural areas, RCU will work closely with SYSTRA and specialist contractors to divert traffic in places where the tram intersects with main roads. Some routes, such as Oasis Scenic Road in AIUla, will be remodelled to accommodate the tram.

SYSTRA will begin its design work this year with completion in 2023. In its capacity as Lead Tram Design Consultant, SYSTRA will carry out the preliminary and detailed design studies for the project in the fields of infrastructure, landscape and architecture, stations, workshop/depot, rail track in addition to managing the integrity of the rolling stock and systems development.

The AIUla tram, with a maximum speed of 50 kmph, will be the latest low impact public transport initiative developed by RCU to reduce people's dependency on personal cars or diesel buses. Introduced earlier this year in the Old Town, an autonomous pods service has proved to be a success with residents and visitors. Plans are being drawn up for a county wide public transport network under the 360 Mobility programme.

The tram, autonomous pods and a growing network of electric busses, cycle paths and alternative transport options will greatly cut down on traffic in and around AIUla while increasing connectivity and reducing harmful emissions, all in line with RCU's commitment to make AIUla net carbon-neutral by 2035 for local emissions, excluding air travel and food imports.

Following the success of the autonomous pods shuttle service, which regularly carries residents, shop and restaurant staff and visitors, the tram is expected to be a popular addition to AIUla's development as a tourist hotspot and a modern, living destination.

As lead designer and international partner for the project, SYSTRA officially signed a contract with RCU leadership at the firm's London office July 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Moataz Kurdi, RCU's Chief County Operations Officer**, said: "The new tram service is an exciting development that will greatly empower AIUla's continuous growth. Modern, efficient, and accessible public transport is a key component of the Royal Commission for AIUla's plans to transform AIUla into a global destination for sustainable tourism and enhanced liveability. The low-emission service will follow a carefully planned rail line connecting AIUla's main tourist and heritage sites, as outlined in our Journey Through Time project route, allowing people to move freely and easily without the need to rely on busses or personal cars.

"AIUla's rich heritage is the foundation on which our future achievements are built. As such, great care and attention has been paid to the design of the trams to reflect the rolling stock that travelled along the old Hijaz railway line in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Fully updated with modern amenities and technologies, the new tram carriages will function as part of an integrated and enabled network of low impact and easy to use public transport that provides unhindered access across AIUla County.

"Created to be an experience as much as a means of getting around, passengers will enjoy incredible views of the surrounding landscape, growing urban developments, cultural sites and world-famous heritage areas in complete ease and comfort."

**Belal Deiranieh, Chief Executive Officer for SYSTRA in Saudi Arabia**, stated: "We are humbled to be working alongside the Royal Commission for AIUla to design a tram system which aligns with RCU's vision and provides passengers with a unique and immersive experience, in the heart of this remarkable cultural and heritage destination, while taking into consideration innovation, environment, and RCU's low carbon initiative. We look forward to mobilising our global expertise and local know-how and starting the journey with RCU."

## ENDS

For media enquiries please contact the RCU Public Relations team at [publicrelations@rcu.gov.sa](mailto:publicrelations@rcu.gov.sa)

### Note to editors:

It is always AIUla / not AI-Ula

### About the Royal Commission for AIUla

The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) was established by royal decree in July 2017 to preserve and develop AlUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in north-west Saudi Arabia. RCU's long-term plan outlines a responsible, sustainable, and sensitive approach to urban and economic development, that preserves the area's natural and historic heritage, while establishing AlUla as a desirable location to live, work, and visit. This encompasses a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, tourism, culture, education, and the arts, reflecting a commitment to meeting the economic diversification, local community empowerment, and heritage preservation priorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 programme.

## **About SYSTRA**

SYSTRA is one of the world's leading engineering and consultancy groups specialising in public transport and mobility solutions. With unique experience gained on tramway projects throughout the world, SYSTRA offers the most efficient and innovative solutions, while complying with international standards and local environmental and safety requirements. SYSTRA has been working with Saudi Arabia since 1987 to create transport networks throughout the country, particularly in Riyadh, Jeddah, Medina and Mecca, and is now fully mobilised to meet the ambitions of the Saudi government's Vision 2030 development plan and to remain a leading partner of the Saudi authorities in the field of mobility. SYSTRA has also been involved in the development of tramway networks in the Middle East, in Dubai for example, with the Al-Sufouh tramway project, and in Qatar for the Lusail tramway project.

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