



TRAFFIC AND TRANSIT : "WAIT FOR THINGS TO GO WRONG" (1)

INTRODUCTION

A new Audit Commission report has warned that new housing in major regeneration areas such as Thames Gateway will be built without the necessary transport infrastructure unless the Government sorts out a maze of confusing strategies and funding streams. These are ring fenced and not available for transport, often the most pressing need.

A MODAL SHIFT NEEDED (2)

A warning from the London Southend Movement Study (LOTS) has included a suggestion that a modal shift of up to 40 - 50% from car to public transport is needed to accommodate growth in the corridor unless of course road capacity is increased. A target of 55 000 jobs and 40 000 houses in the Thames Gateway and South Essex (TGSE) area with existing travel behaviour and road infrastructure is unsustainable. Any doubts about this were further strengthened in a study for TGSE by Hyder Consulting which took the potential road chaos prediction a stage further by suggesting that even with major road and rail investment, it would not be sufficient to meet the growth targets without a significant modal shift.

WILL CONGESTION CHARGING HELP TO SOLVE TRANSIT PROBLEMS ?

As the title of this document has suggested, funds for transit schemes only seem to become available after traffic congestion has reached crisis level. This appears to apply equally to suburban as well as city centre locations. In London for instance the "jury" is still out and strongly debating the merits of which direction to take.

Without doubt tramways are expensive to provide but their many hidden benefits have the potential to justify some of the tram schemes presently being looked at in London. Many who object to congestion charging would almost certainly approve of tramway infrastructure funding and the successes in say Paris could probably act as a reliable "barometer" of public opinion.

EUROPE, NOW INTERESTED IN LONDON'S CONGESTION CHARGE

This development is somewhat of a surprise and conflicts with our opinion of Europe's transit and traffic problems. Nevertheless, French politicians are seeking some "know-how" on our collecting techniques (3).

The new tram projects in Paris have been very successful but to continue with this policy France may need to sort out some financing problems. This could help to explain the French interest in raising funds but could also demonstrate to Britain in general and London in particular the French determination to use the tramway concept to solve traffic problems. The long suffering Londoner is restricted in choice, the Tube is excellent for interurban type journeys but unsuitable for local use. "You can walk almost as far as you can travel" (4).

LONDON'S TRAM SCHEMES, PROPOSED BUT NOT FUNDED

Pride of place must go to Cross River Transit which, with a forecast of 72-m passengers per year, is expected to improve pedestrian movement within the charging zone. Actually a trunk line, with branches it totals 16-km and basically north to south across the Thames. Of special interest is a feasibility study recommending an extension into the City of London from the Cross River Transit to Shoreditch and possibly to Stratford which could help the Capital's Olympic bid and is estimated to carry 64-m passengers per year.

More advanced is the West London tram, from Uxbridge to Shepherds Bush, is expected to carry 44-m passengers per year which is currently in its consultation phase.

CONCLUSION

The danger of continuous delay with tramway projects is promoters deciding to abort and give up the struggle, for instance Bristol. A tramway scheme is a vital component in providing an antidote to traffic congestion and finding funds now could obviate expensive action later "when things go wrong".

REFERENCES

- 1) Scott Dickinson in LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY (P.3) 1st July 2004.
- 2) The London Southend Movement Study (LOTS) - LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY (P.3) 1st July 2004.
- 3) Envious European Politicians seek to learn from the success of London's congestion charge - LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY (P.5) 1st July 2004.
- 4) TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT (P.286) August 2004.

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