



SUPERTRAM - WHAT THE PUBLIC THINK

INTRODUCTION

In discussion document No. 36 - LEEDS SUPERTRAM: WHAT THE PAPERS SAY! - We gave readers some idea of press reaction to the Transport Secretary's "well leaked" fatal blow to the long standing Supertram project. Just what the nation thinks about light rail in general and Leeds Supertram in particular has taken a little longer to percolate through the system but feelings are just as strong. This document will attempt to put on record the hurt caused by the Government's total disregard for the substantial local "spend" on development planning, the dismissal of known benefits that will now be lost and the imposition of a lower cost tram look-alike with qualities yet to be proven.

SUPERTRAM DISAPPEARING INTO A BLACK HOLE

"Transport is both a policy and action black hole"

Extra cash is being wasted on a spectacularly ineffective and inefficient privatised rail system which leaves less to spend on other public transport. Despite unfettered bus competition and a changeable transport policy by Central Government, private capital is being illogically asked to take the revenue risk for trams.

If regulation is good enough for London why isn't it good enough for Manchester? Outside London buses are clearly struggling which provokes a question as to why changes cannot be made to make tram schemes happen instead of thinking up ten reasons why they cannot.

With so little capital being available for urban tram schemes, it is not difficult to understand why Supertram projects have little chance of operating to their full capabilities (1).

BUS RE-REGULATION UPHEAVAL

Buses are thought of as another business to be fostered for the benefit of its shareholders. When advice is sought, consultants close to the operators are employed partly because civil servants or transport ministers are thought to lack expertise in the industry. A final insult is the attitude of BUS USERS UK, a national user group devoted to buses and against re-regulation, because it would cause to much upheaval.

With both the lowest subsidy and the only deregulated systems in Europe, is everyone else getting it wrong with only Britain (not London) getting it right? (2).

A SHOWCASE BUS SYSTEM

The Transport Secretary is on record as encouraging Leeds to seize the chance to develop the first of its kind, *a showcase bus system* that could lead the way for other cities. Why not instead develop a first of its kind, *a showcase light rail system* ? The DfT seems to have difficulty grasping the basic fact that buses use three times more energy than trams to do the same job.

Carmen Haus-Klau is on record as pointing out that most cities that rely on bus transport are experiencing declining public transport use whereas most cities that have LRT or trams are experiencing increasing public transport use (3).

PUTTING TRANSPORT IN ITS PLACE

There is a growing understanding that transport has a role beyond that of simply providing mobility. It is generally acknowledged that the nature of a transport system tends to influence a much wider economic and social development and that when well designed has the ability to deliver a more sustainable and cohesive urban form.

A report from the reformed *Urban Task Force*, led by Lord Rogers, draws attention to the importance of transport in achieving the Government's goal of an urban renaissance. Criticism is levelled at the DfT for seeming disinterested in this element of transport policy, its reluctance to fund light rail systems and its foot dragging approach to bus regulation (4).

The *Urban Task Force* has noted also that decisions made, apparently in isolation, by DfT on urban transit is undermining attempts to revitalise English cities. The evidence is that the DfT is dominated by highway engineers and is simply not part of the Government's regeneration agenda (5).

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CONCLUSION

Leeds appears to have been coerced into accepting a new transport strategy, certainly not conducive to its planned development agenda. Whether or not this new direction will lead to a downward transit spiral is open to speculation but, if the contents of this document are accurate, the Transport Secretary could find difficulty justifying his actions.

The contents of this discussion document are the views of the authors given in the REFERENCES SECTION and not necessarily the views of the LRTA.

REFERENCES

- 1) From the pen of Peter Black - Letters to the editor - LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY (LTT) - page 14 - 24th November 2005.
- 2) From the pen of Arthur Holman-Elsy - Letters to the Editor -LTT - pages 14 & 15 - 24th November 2005.
- 3) From the pen of James Skinner - Letters to the Editor - LTT -pages 15 & 16 - 24th November 2005.
- 4) Editorial Column - LTT - page 15 - 24th November 2005.
- 5) LTT - page 5 - 24th November 2005.

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