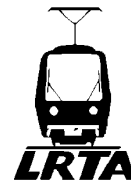


## BUS RESURGENCE THAT EVENTUALLY FAILS



Only after a pre-amble to the bus/tram controversy will the public realise that "doing it on the cheap" is likely to lower the quality standards of CBD travel in the future.

What appeared as a start to a serious set-back in tramway modernisation was the pre-war (WW II) change-over in many parts of the world to bus operation. In this particular case it was principally an unequal struggle because state-of-the-art technology was replacing many really obsolete tram systems, occasionally helped in the UK by enemy action. One notable example came from Bristol where a fleet of open-top trams was replaced by modern buses.

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the few places with faith in continued modern tram operation had their ambitions undermined by political interference, made easy by the exponential cost of modernisation combined with a decay in tramway development

A very similar streetcar (tram) run-down in USA was also under way about the same time as here but the causes were rather different. Capping of transit fares weakened the financial situation of the operators leaving little money available for renewal so control of transit systems passed to a pro-bus nation-wide conglomerate which caused orders for new streetcars (trams) to be switched to buses. Although this tramway decline was close to a total elimination, the situation was very different on the European mainland where tramway modernisation and creation of new systems was instrumental in keeping the bus in its correct role, either on less busy routes or as a feeder to a rail system.

Another simple technique, (the kerb guided bus) appeared to have the potential to give the bus concept a new superiority over tram operation. To gain some operational experience the German city of Essen permitted one of its tramway routes to be converted to O-bahn. Much money was forthcoming in first finding operational problems and then overcoming them. The vehicles used looked very much like trolley buses, driven by electric power when on street operation or in subway and on diesel power when on segregated track. A serious draw-back was after snow, uneven coatings of ice forced the buses to make diversions.

Adelaide, not suffering from ice covered surfaces, changed its plans for an interurban tram extension to a completely new 0-bahn bus corridor. It is of interest to note that when the 1929 interurban trams in Adelaide needed replacement, modern LRVs were purchased and will soon be running over an extended tram route through the CBD.

Although the two kerb guided bus corridors in Leeds have been met with a cool reception from the business community, the operators continue to claim added passengers. The guided section are not easily spotted by the passengers themselves and any advantage from the short lengths of segregation are often lost choosing the correct bus stop because not all buses use the guided section.

Despite the guided bus experience gained in Leeds, METRO and the City Council chose Supertram as the best way forward. Much effort and public money has already been expended on design etc. and it came as a shock when the DfT (Transport Secretary Alistair Darling) "pulled the Plug" on the project late in 2005. Leeds may yet receive a grant towards a bus scheme instead providing they pick the right technology. At the time of writing, negotiations are underlay for a guided bus system over much of the route originally proposed for Supertram.

Only a month ago, the principal bus operator in Leeds introduced a state-of-the-art" bus presumably hoping it would replace Supertram. Known as "ftr" (stands for future), it so far has not been well received by the press and the public.

Information so far released in the press about a future system indicates a bus, electrically operated from an overhead cable, rubber tyred suspension and a centre rail to give guidance and presumably act as return path for the traction power. This has a certain resemblance to what Liverpool proposed before a rejection of the more recent tram scheme, also axed.

Although not officially revealed at the time of writing, information so far given points to the tram-like buses currently operating in Clermont-Ferrand, Caen and Nancy which so far have had an unfortunate initial running-in period.

Only time will tell if the centre rail type guided bus system will provide an adequate alternative to Supertram. What is becoming clear is that to appeal to motorists and to approach the **first class** operating qualities known to exist with Supertram the costs will also approach that of the tram. Even if the initial costs might be somewhat lower this would be balanced by increased operating and maintenance costs and so may cost more in the long term.

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