



URBAN TRANSIT : WHAT CHANCE A REVERSAL OF POLICY?

Although looking back at transit changes for 50 years or more can be an interesting experience, it can also be somewhat depressing, to discover just how split the nation is, **those with cars and those that haven't**. Families with one or more cars have a freedom that is currently under threat whilst those regularly using urban public transport are mostly having to discipline their daily travel routine to adjust to an exponentially declining bus timetable.

The logic of continually expanding the road network and introducing a congestion charge whilst neglecting the modernisation of urban transit (i.e. tramway light rail) is beyond understanding.

This review has been designed to help those not old enough to have experienced the long gone tramway era then universal in our towns and cities, systems that carried all "comers" cheaply and frequently. We would also like to suggest that today's congestion would ease considerably if a Manchester or Croydon type light rail system was built in the places that could justify that type of investment. It is also a well known fact that any decision made in haste doesn't always deliver what was hoped for, especially in the long term. ("**Light rail is called a key catalyst**" - Cotton Delo - (Journal chief staff writer) - The Jersey Journal USA - April 30th 2007).

This current road toll problem and threatened congestion charge could, 50 or so years earlier, appear to fit a well known saying "**If it ain't broke, don't fix it**". Modernised trams, if they had been allowed to continue running, would have reduced considerably the causes of congestion.

A few examples from the past would show how transport economics were quietly forgotten, especially when long-term tramway equipment was unceremoniously discarded. (See appendix one) Also unfair, was the comparative performances of the older trams compared with modern buses. It should be mentioned here that a fleet of pre-war trams in Leeds (designed for the Middleton route) could easily outperform buses of the same vintage.

Passengers never having ridden on a 2nd generation Supertram could be forgiven for doubting their claimed performances. We strongly suggest a visit to at least four of the five light rail/Supertram systems because the advantages and benefits that we often quote will become immediately obvious.

Midland Metro, the one omitted is currently far from complete mainly because it suffered from Government spending restrictions. Nevertheless, it does show all the signs of a successful upgrade and when complete could become a British show-piece tramway system.

A general type question that should now be asked, will its many advantages be enough to tempt motorists out of their cars? Fortunately there is enough evidence to conclusively show that this would happen. 25% extra patronage has been claimed, a figure sufficient to justify building new systems.

A major obstacle in Britain to the carrying of a higher proportion of tram passengers is a shortage of rolling stock, soon to be overcome in Manchester with an order now placed for more vehicles. Sheffield, with a well engineered system, is well on the way to overcoming de-regulated bus competition but sadly in need of more trams. Croydon, like Manchester, cannot provide the service it would like because it needs more trams in its fleet.

The last half century in Britain, with Blackpool the only tram system to have survived, has not been technically wasted. During this period, our railway workshops in York and Derby built a fleet of trams for Strasbourg (described when built as the most advanced trams in the World). Southport ordered and is now operating a modern looking, technically advanced, tram on its pier and TRAMPOWER LTD pioneered a low-cost tram and used Blackpool's tracks for testing purposes. As a nation, we do have the technical know-how but lack the funds and political will.

Much of our early post-war industry suffered somewhat from so many second-hand trams being available at low prices. Fortunately, the current tram replacement programme in Germany is not seriously affecting the industry because of an urgent need to replace worn-out tram fleets in Eastern Europe from Germany's 2nd-hand market

The signs of a potential tramway revival in England were dashed in 2005 when the Transport Secretary stopped fully all Supertram development. The current policy of trading transit funds for congestion charging concessions at local level sounds bizarre, not only to transit passengers but also to motorists who have already made their attitude clear to the Government.

APPENDIX No 1. DISCARDING ALMOST NEW TRAMS

Aberdeen	20 trams built in 1949	system closed 1958
Edinburgh	Continuous build until	1950 - system closed 1956
Glasgow	Continuous build	almost to end in 1962
Leeds	Two experimental trams in 1953	closed in 1959
Sheffield	35 new trams from 1950	system closed in 1960

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