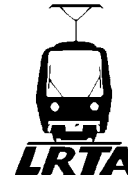


## CONGESTION WITHOUT SUPERTRAM : DON'T FOLLOW LEEDS



During a business visit to Yorkshire by the Vice Governor of China's ZHEJIANG Province, our (then) Deputy Prime Minister advised him to try and avoid building his cities like Leeds. (Don't follow Leeds! - Paul Robinson - Yorkshire Evening Post 21st May 2007).

China, credited with the fastest growing economy in the world, was advised to make public transport, not the car, the driving force behind their flourishing urban centres. Further free advice, when put into its correct context, tended to highlight what could be called a transit split, a split which basically starved the steel on steel light rail concept of the necessary funds in favour of rubber tyres on bitumen.

Mixed messages, more or less admitting we got it wrong, must have confused our Chinese visitor and convinced him that a series of costly blunders were compounded by further blunders, such as motorways built in the wrong places~ What seems like a mistake of mammoth proportions some 40 years later was Leeds declaring itself "*The motorway city of the 70s*".

Transit advice at that particular time had been so badly neglected with no *Ring-Fencing* type funds available to cover problems as the trams disappeared. With that background, any advice to China will tend to have a "hollow ring" to it. Coming from a politician who in 2004 declared himself a "future King of Yorkshire" would in any case have attracted a certain amount of caution, especially when road schemes at present are still going ahead. Light rail, with similar inflationary costs, is not. Mr Prescott (now retired) may have been right all along but (at the time of writing), Britain had not given light rail a clear endorsement. Could this be a case of the right hand not know what the left is doing? One thing is certain though, transit expansion plans and road widening schemes remain at opposite ends of the transport spectrum.

The road building programme of 40 years or more ago looks now to be more of a "knee jerk reaction" and with road demands then exceeding supply and with other options not being taken seriously, most available funds went on motorway development. Although most of the population now knows that "transit" has a vital part to play in serving the nation's urban transport needs, it has yet to enter the equation. Once that well known genie had escaped from that equally famous bottle, the chances of getting it back were close to zero.

Britain is almost alone in the world without a back-up choice for its urban travellers and so may soon have to face "motorist anger" alone when and if the congestion charge is applied.

The Government has had proof since 1992 (Metrolink in Manchester) that the motorist can be attracted to light rail transit and it was not by chance that the other four similar systems produced almost identical results. Despite the knowledge of this "magnetic" appeal, the Treasury purse strings have been kept firmly closed for any new systems.

What should our Chinese visitor have been told?

He would probably know that Leeds is currently being pushed in a somewhat dubious direction with higher costs to operate major bus or BRT schemes on a long term basis.

It would be somewhat ironic if a representative from Leeds paid a courtesy visit to China in the not too distant future and was given advice that a Supertram scheme was the correct way forward.

Prepared by F A Andrews. LRTA Assistant Publicity Officer

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