



LIGHT RAIL - "TECHNOLOGY WILL ALWAYS GET US OFF THE HOOK IN THE NICK OF TIME" (1)

This review poses the question, will technology alone improve our backward approach to urban transit? Although the above title originally came from the lips of the US President, it has more recently been quoted by Ken Livingstone (Mayor of London) to defend Britain's future lifestyles: "*Clean cars will cancel climate change*". A view not necessarily shared by Ruth Kelly (our present Secretary of State for Transport) if the rail White Paper is anything to go by. Ruth Kelly is on record as saying that there is no need to plan ahead as our future is uncertain and we always get it wrong.

How true! the few places in the UK that have been brave enough to accept consultants advice and actually plan ahead with a Supertram light rail proposal have suffered rather badly from an earlier Government attitude, "*Not value for money*".

The DfT's love affair with trolley buses is surely falling into this "*getting it wrong*" category and if the nation does really wish to provide both a quality urban transit system and a potential to counter climate change, we will have little choice but to consider putting some tram lines back into our streets.

The tendency to push free off-peak bus travel for elderly residents does suggest a somewhat slanted attitude by the Government. In school days we were taught that "*there was no such thing as a free lunch*" and in transit terms that free bus ride squeezes a competitor transit mode into a sacrificial lamb status so as to balance the books. Robbing Peter to pay Paul is a sure way to lower standards and possibly push Supertram out through the proverbial back door. A much fairer way would be to give the urban section of a Supertram's route free fare status also.

Certain other questionable decisions in the Government's cost-benefit equations have been attacked by the press because of their favourable spending approach to *Road only* schemes. Even more unfair is the accounting of road tax revenues as a roads benefit with the time saved by motorists given a higher value than other road users. What should be questioned is the alleged higher local contribution of 25% for light rail schemes when only 10% is needed for other projects.

These facts, when revealed to the DfT, did not go down well and Ruth Kelly is on record as saying : "We need to fundamentally change our entire transport appraisal system.

Motoring clubs think very differently and the Foundation Executive Director (Edmund King) has pointed out that four/fifths of journey's are made by road. Better transport must mean better roads! This theory is compounded because new roads generate more traffic.

The French think very differently from us and have led the way in many *In the nick of time projects* which have speeded up many recognised transport schedules as well as helping to combat the world's climatic change. According to the French (Rik Thomas -LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY - page 10 -11, 24th October 2007) our English approach fails because of an inability to manage big infrastructure schemes. We certainly seemed to have failed with light rail projects. Could we do better with CROSSRAIL?

- 1) Mike Crowhurst Quoting George Bush's School of Futurology - LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY - page 17 - 11th to 24th October 2007

After this Review had been prepared, two interesting transit articles appeared on consecutive days in the local evening newspaper in Leeds.(YORKSHIRE EVENING POST - 15 and 16th November 2007).

A Whitehall Watchdog has Criticised the Department for Transport's role In The Leeds Supertram fiasco. (15th November 2007)

Row over First's Supertram role. (16th November 2007).

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