



"MODERN STREET CARS ARE MORE EFFICIENT THAN BUSES" (1)

A new world-wide attitude towards the humble tram is gaining support at a rate probably in excess of that seen at the early part of the 20th century. At this time almost every town or city street had a tram line laid along it. Unfortunately, the demise of the first generation electric tramways was more or less in inverse proportion to a new age of motor car convenience in the form of motorway style roads. This "FREEDOM OF THE ROAD" fashion created an era which favoured the lower-cost bus and, despite its many faults, it was thought suitable for the dwindling number of passengers unable (for whatever reason) to purchase a vehicle.

A few places in the Western World decided to continue with "*clean transit*" and replaced their tram network with trolleybuses. Economics though played a part and although the trolleybuses had a strong public following it did not prevent those holding the purse strings from pushing the UK trolleybus into oblivion.

At the present time, many places throughout the world had discovered that a modernised tram network in an urban type setting is the best solution, best because of its quality and now proven appeal to shoppers and commuters.

A Cincinnati Post reader in Ohio had reckoned that streetcars would block traffic - - - Trolleybuses are a superior solution! This spurred John Schneider into writing a long list of modern streetcar (tram) advantages, a list that even the LRTA could have been proud of. Added to this was a description of the new streetcar system in Portland (Oregon), almost a mirror image transit system to that in Karlsruhe (Germany). Karlsruhe's big interurban trams bring people in from surrounding districts with smaller trams acting in a distributor role.

Another American example of cost almost winning over quality comes from Houston (Texas). Their recent successful opening of a new light rail transit system, successful in that it pleased passengers and residents, was perfect for mobility and restoring viability to the CBD as well as having plans to have more than one route. For cost reasons, these plans were changed to BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) with a promise to change at a later date to LRT. The community and elected officials protested at this and the Metropolitan Transit Authority then took advantage of the Federal Transit Administration evaluation criteria to change these planned extensions back to LRT.

The similarity with events on this side of the "pond" are particularly striking - Leeds was about to start work on its Supertram system when the DfT "pulled the plug" on the scheme and made suggestions that a cheaper trolleybus scheme would do an equivalent job. Many years ago Leeds operated trolleybuses and the public attitude at the time was that, although less costly it was not the right vehicle for Leeds.

The press in Leeds have just reported that Supertram may soon be back on the agenda. Both Houston and Cincinnati have already demonstrated public resentment at the "rubber tyred" schemes that had threatened to become the official way ahead. Not unlike Leeds, Liverpool is also hoping that the new thinking in the DfT may signal a possible change of attitude towards light rail schemes such as Supertram.

1) John Schneider - Cincinnati Post - 22nd June 2007.

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