



ROAD RAGE, AND NOT A TRAM IN SIGHT

Early in 2008, the BBC broadcast a one hour programme bravely pointing out to viewers that for most people life in Britain had become dangerous and certainly somewhat miserable. Many are now unable to escape this miserable way of life because England alone in the world just cannot (or will not) support a choice of travel on urban type journey's. Good quality transit and a peace of mind journey is a good alternative to car travel. Because road space was now in such short supply, vividly illustrated in the programme by lines of parked cars and demonstrating so clearly just how a four lane highway can be reduced to two. Proof, if any was needed, that quite simply, **supply cannot meet demand**.

The named culprits were the 4X4 drivers searching for a bit of kerbside road space to drop off their children at school. It would appear that this daily ritual was responsible for a high percentage of road rage.

Although cyclists generally were suffering a high casualty rate from left turning vehicles, they themselves could be partly blamed for taking unnecessary risks such as riding into spaces totally unfit for them. Examples were also shown of cyclists causing accidents by "jumping" traffic lights at red. Cyclists though were far from happy with today's traffic conditions which tended to give them very limited road space. A protest demonstration by cyclists was clearly shown of a mass ride without any clothes on.

Probably the most sympathetic footage was reserved for an elderly gentleman who simply wanted to cross the road. His only safe way was to walk in a direction away from his ultimate destination and, with a possible 15 minute wait for a bus, partake a one-stop ride to a less dangerous crossing. This sort of one stop safety ride could only happen in Britain where anyone able to drive is encouraged to do so. Those without this facility have a very limited choice which includes a bus ride with its restricted time-table.

Road rage, as we know it, is probably an unknown phenomena in Europe because space is more efficiently shared between the competing modes. By attracting high capacity vehicles (trams) into urban areas, anyone noticed walking will be exercising a freedom of "choice".

This BBC programme went some way towards highlighting just how isolated Britain has become in recent years. Fortunately, many countries did not follow our tram scrapping policy but those that did (France, Spain and USA) have since made the change back to a mixture of trams and buses, each doing what it does best.

At this stage we ought to ask ourselves a few questions about the motives for supplying only lower quality transit for those without cars. The recently released National Audit Office (NAO) report into the role conducted in 2005 by the DfT does very strongly call into question some of the reasoning for "killing-off" all Supertram projects in the UK then seeking Government funding.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) has a wide range of variations and the bus operators themselves appear to have convinced themselves that with a low infrastructure cost it will provide all that the Supertram could provide. Just how thorough were the DfT evaluation tests? Figure two on page six of the NAO report gave a cost ratio for Supertram of 2.4 : 1 which was compared with a variable BRT figure of 2.3 : 1 to 3.6 : 1. This latter figure was contested by Leeds because BRT was known to attract fewer passengers than light rail.

This Discussion Document would like to draw attention to the serious cut-back in bus patronage figures outside London and especially Leeds where a guided-bus system has operated for many years. A comparison between Nottingham's NET tram service and Leeds guided-bus will help one to understand why the promoters of Leeds Supertram contested the so called efficiency ratio produced by the DfT.

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