



LONG DISTANCE TRAMS FOR LEEDS?

The pioneering work in and around Karlsruhe (Germany) to expand modern long distance tramway operation needs to be considered as a major and vital step forward by a European city determined to prove "it can be done". Karlsruhe needs to be congratulated for its tenacity.

Data about Holland's Blue Tram NZH network (C J Wansbeck - TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT pages 100 to 104 - March 2008) is of particular interest because, at 140-km, it was Holland's largest electric tramway network. It could have been just as technically famous as Karlsruhe today had it not been for the Government of the day's attitude towards it (no funding for development). In some respects the Government was only following a well known attitude that the future belonged solely to the private car. This is now recognised as an unfortunate mistake as the system's design criteria was to provide transport to where passengers really wanted to go.

Returning to Karlsruhe, very little comparison can be made with an English city because any attempt here at modernisation was not supported from the powers that be at the time. Although Karlsruhe's transport problems were quite formidable, a "step-by-step" approach appeared to be the best way forward. Whether or not the current tram-train concept was then the ultimate aim is open to conjecture but each successive successful stage brought its own reward and an attitude then developed that money was being wisely spent.

An early decision to convert the narrow gauge inter-urbans to standard gauge enabled regional passengers to reach the CBD without vehicle change which vastly boosted patronage figures. The way was now open to extend the new service not only into the city centre but to continue through and into another rural area. Some conveniently placed non-electrified railway freight lines made this task much easier once the inter-running between two different rail profiles had been overcome.

This highly successful extension was probably the spur towards further developments which did appear to be somewhat beyond Karlsruhe's technical ability as no one so far had discovered how one pantograph could collect (not at the same time) two vastly different voltages. Eventually the breakthrough came and soon spread to other places in Germany.

This remarkable breakthrough eventually reached Holland and to the credit of the Dutch is now being applied to two or more schemes. Probably the more surprising application is to rebuild the former seaside tram routes from Leiden, to Noordwijk (12-km) and to Katwijk (8-km), highly patronised routes that closed in 1960. At Leiden they will join the railway to form a new tram-train route known as the Rijn-Gowwe line. Already in operation is a complex replacement of the railway services with tram-train rolling stock, formerly running into Den Haag railway station and now able to join the local trams services into the CBD.

Britain's only half hearted attempt with joint operation mixed the Tyne & Wear light metro rolling stock with heavy rail. Early plans for Nottingham investigated some form of tram-train operation but unsolved difficulties resulted in separate tracks being provided. The railway service between Leeds and York via Harrogate may be converted to tram-train operation with street extensions at both ends.

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