



## WE CANNOT BUILD OUR WAY OUT OF CONGESTION (1)

The old ideas of PREDICT AND PROVIDE were at one time the accepted method for dealing with anticipated future traffic congestion. By providing adequate highway capacity and then adding promises that it would help the environment by eliminating car and lorry queues was, as we now know, a sure way of inducing additional traffic. At that time the SACTRA REPORT of 1994 seemed somewhat unnecessary and probably accidentally found its way into a DfT pigeon-hole and subsequently forgotten. Europe faced similar congestion problems but dealt with them in a different way. Their higher transport spending permitted a more balanced approach such that all modes received a fair share of available funding (railways, tramways, roads and inland waterway freight). England alone will no doubt have surprised Europe when in 2005 it "pulled the plug" on all light rail development but continued with a very large "spend" on road widening projects. This decision failed to recognise Dublin's recent successes and Edinburgh's moves to build a new Supertram system.

The National Audit Office (NAO) has since labelled the DfT as wrong in its attitude towards light rail and the new Transport Secretary appears to be "slimming down" somewhat on the departments excesses. A well respected professor (Phil Goodwin) has continually reminded the nation that it is a matter of arithmetic and not politics that should determine our future strategy and its associated problems.

Very recently the road widening programme was threatened with a cancellation (2) which represents a massive potential saving in transport funding, £20-m per km if a motorway lane is added which compares with £6-m per km if hard shoulder operation is adopted. This type of accounting probably adds credence to the reason for most places in Europe adopting a more balanced transport policy. Regarding the cost/benefit calculations and the DfT's attitude in general: healthy applications submitted for funding were treated with a barrage of technical questions which were not only time consuming but costly to deal with.

Forming an opinion after reading the NAO REPORT, one could be forgiven for thinking that a spurious regime was then active within the DfT. The principal objection by the then Transport Secretary (not value for money) needs some form of challenge because the Government's preferred substitute is well known as lower in capital cost but also equally well known as less attractive to the motorist. Some interesting research studies were recently printed in a transport journal. These compared car ownership with modal choice and quality. The research was by Carmen Hass-Klau, Wuppertal University and printed in LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY (3). Quote: *"The strongest car reducing effect was seen around underground stations followed by light rail or tram ..... bus lane corridors showed the weakest. Frequent and comfortable public transport that is well designed and integrated into the urban environment has a real chance of being able to develop more equitable and sustainable living with low car dependency."*

### REFERENCES

- 1) LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY (LTT) - Comment Viewpoint - page 14 -8th to 21st February 2008.
- 2) Mark Hookham (Political Editor) - YORKSHIRE EVENING POST - 4th March 2008.
- 3) Carmen Hass-Klau - LTT - Page 20 - 22nd to 6th March 2008.

Prepared by F A Andrews LRTA Assistant Publicity Officer

For LRTA Membership details contact:

LRTA Subscriptions,  
38 Wolseley Road,  
SALE M33 7AU

Email: [membership@lrta.org](mailto:membership@lrta.org)

For more details about Light Rail please contact

LRTA Development Officer,  
7 Crofton Avenue,  
Horfield,  
Bristol BS7 0BP

Email: [development@lrta.org](mailto:development@lrta.org)

Visit our Website [www.lrta.org](http://www.lrta.org)