



TRAM TECHNOLOGY TO THE RESCUE

Despite much leaked advanced publicity from many quarters about the possibility of Leeds getting some form of street operation with tram-trains, the announcement when it came was not good news for Leeds. This city had already paid a heavy price for failing to satisfy the Supertram funding conditions coming out of Westminster. The true stumbling block has never been revealed to the public but what is not beyond doubt is the difference in priority between local politicians and the DfT requirements, almost a perfect "Chicken and Egg" situation.

The Government has been very specific about its priorities which basically called for an up-front congestion charge to be applied and then followed by some funding for Supertram. Leeds has never wavered from its condition that a congestion charge could only be considered after Supertram was in place. From such strongly held views it is not hard to visualise a looming first class stalemate situation. It is sad that overseas experiences were not taken into account with 20 to 25% of motorists attracted to the new tram system and many redundant bus services eliminated which could considerably weaken the case for the congestion charge.

The high quality bus system now demanded by the Government is claimed to be lower in cost and almost as efficient as Supertram. Although not high on the Urban Transit Spectrum it would still have a place in an integrated transit system, either as a feeder to Supertram or on lightly patronised routes.

This Discussion Document has attempted to accurately present a true picture of the many years of hard work leading up to the present time. Whether or not the leaked publicity for a tram-train from York to Leeds with street extensions at both ends was actually some form of bait to break the stalemate is now open to speculation. The Government though appears to have run out of patience and decided to replace some worn out suburban railway stock with a much higher quality tram design on a 100% railway line (1). This could actually lose still more time because no accurate testing time has been set for a tram line. It is a pity that so much aborted time was spent on experiments with the guided bus in Leeds, rejected by most people because the money spent does not seem justified by the claimed advantages.

What is somewhat confusing in the Leeds and Bradford area is an item in a Bradford newspaper (2) which reported that transport chiefs are set to be updated on plans to introduce tram-trains in the Bradford district and across the wider Leeds Region.

Two particularly interesting tram-train services were recently opened in Germany and tend to demonstrate just how "sluggishly" slow our Government transport experts will appear to the rest of the world. Kassel, with spare tracks and platforms in its main terminal railway station decided to make a short underground connection with its town tramway system and offer through services to the public. This would be full electric operation with two very different voltages. Also on this system's network is an electro-diesel tram service, in its outer suburbs.

Nordhausen, also in Germany, connected its metre gauge electric tramway to a steam operated railway and now offers a through service (3). This same T&UT (Ref 3) shows a photograph of a train-train on the new Randstad system in The Netherlands. It now inter-runs with the Rotterdam Metro and is shown using a dual height platform which allows this stock to pass through Den Haag's CBD on tram tracks.

REFERENCES

- 1) Tram-train plan for Penistone line - Peter Fox - TODAY'S RAILWAYS - Platform 5 Publishing Ltd - May 2008.
- 2) Airport Rail Link £25-m - TELEGRAPH AND ARGUS - 14th May 2008.
- 3) Combining Heritage and Light Rail - Casper Lucas - TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT - Page 178 to 182 - May 2008.

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