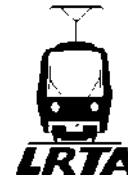


BETTER PUBLIC TRANSPORT IMPROVES ACCESS FOR ALL (1)



NEW APPROACH TO APPRAISAL (NATA) introduces a current review by DfT on wider economic benefits and impacts for transit schemes. At long last some help to correct misleading performance tables that the Government has made use of to make important decisions on transit schemes. An almost quick-fix approach to ensuring some economic returns regardless of poor quality in the eyes of the passenger. This low-cost method is now being challenged mostly on an accessibility factor. Many have realised that it should have been brought into the equation at decision time.

Anyone making a journey by car along a suburban road or on a motorway needs a device to accomplish the trip and the perception of cost by the driver does not include the full social cost of the journey. For instance, the Eddington report on transport and economic competitiveness, which included a table on various transport investments, gave what could be regarded as predictable results: road investments are preferred to any form of rail investments. Rail based travel provides a different level of accessibility and its "good value for money" is often taken for granted. Heavy-rail passengers can be taken from city centre to city centre with no worry about a "fringe" park and ride arrangement. Urban rail transit with modern Supertrams also has many environmental advantages which in the past have not been included in feasibility studies. Even worse, they are not regarded as having a value that can be included in the final costing exercise. The long life of a tram compared with a bus must surely be taken into consideration at decision time. Its capacity, which is about 3½ time that of a bus, does not appear to have been of importance. This fact is more important than many people realise because, being more attractive to would-be passengers, a new tram service would soon reach capacity and need an increase in frequency. This is the usual reaction to new services in Europe and USA, something not experienced to the same extent with a new bus service.

Most of the above points have a value which should help to play an important role in the future as NATA works its way through the system. The Transport Secretary's 2005 remarks about trams will surely need to be adjusted in future to "***Trams Are Good Value For Money***".

A high-level change in attitude will introduces for the first time in many of our towns and cities a choice of mode by the passenger, either a car ride or a quality transit system. If NATA does eventually happen it should cover the whole country and certainly help the introduction of tram-trains by our sceptical Government.

REFERENCES

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