



PUTTING TRAMS BACK ON THE FRONT PAGE (1)

For whatever reason, Alistair Darling, then Transport Secretary, stopped all Supertram/Light Rail construction throughout England in 2005. Intentionally or otherwise, this action turned the country into an automobile paradise with a considerable amount of funding now being found to help road development and as a consequence people without cars were being conveniently overlooked.

Transport difficulties soon became apparent as those without their own vehicle tended to be pushed into a second class citizenship status. As their normal bus route started to lose passengers, a difference of emphasis removed any possibility of busy bus routes being considered as candidates for any future conversion to integrated bus and tram services. A process accelerated by the Government's attitude of false economy and relying solely on low cost solutions for urban transit projects. Whether or not this actually started the downward spiral of our bus routes is difficult to ascertain but it certainly contributed.

Not long ago, our then Deputy Prime Minister (John Prescott) had visions of 25 light rail schemes being built in a single decade in Britain. Unfortunately, although all were built, none were in the UK but in Europe (2).

There was obviously some devious activities by the DfT which led to a *volte face* attitude at Westminster and picked-up by the National Audit Office. A request by a Leeds Newspaper for its release under the **Freedom Of Information Act** was turned down (3). With Nottingham being regarded as a resounding success, it more or less left the Government open to accusations of biased thinking. "*Trams are not toy train sets. They are a vital part of cities*" was the closing remark at the LRT Conference by Scott McIntosh which went some way towards displaying anger at the Government's transport policy.

Just how serious was the Government's threat to withhold funds was revealed by Mr Purdy of METROLINK. The public in Manchester was being asked to agree to congestion charging when the nation as a whole had already voiced a strong opinion against it. There is no plan "B" which more or less suggests that if improvements to METROLINK are so important to reducing traffic congestion, the necessary funding should come from Westminster.

REFERENCES

- 1) "Alistair Darling succeeded in getting transport off the front pages. We need to put it back" - Scott McDonald - Senior Consultant with Mott MacDonald - TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT - September 2008 page 339.
- 2) Geoff Inskip - Chief Executive of Centro - LRT Forum conference - TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT - September 2008 -page 338.
- 3) "Fury at Supertram Report kept secret" - Paul Robinson -YORKSHIRE EVENING POST - 24th January 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@lрта.org

For more details about Light Rail please contact

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

Email: development@lрта.org

Visit our Website www.lрта.org