



## ENGLAND IS NOW ISOLATED FROM NEW LIGHT RAIL SYSTEMS

Ireland and Scotland, that's Dublin and Edinburgh, are now demonstrating to the world an independence that England once had but lost to a DfT attitude. Now accused of incompetence, it is exposed to a Government reluctance to make changes and the recent tram-train criticism by well known consultants does suggest what many regard as a *laissez-faire* approach by Westminster. It is now three years since the Transport Secretary of the day "pulled-the-plug" on light rail schemes, light rail schemes that had been so carefully designed by experienced consultants.

We mostly know now of the surprising decisions being pushed onto the nation without a full explanation of anything in detail. A public reaction to the congestion charge, whether motorist or bus passenger, tells its own story of being universally unpopular. For reasons still unknown, England is still alone in the Western world for adopting some punitive measures on a "like-it-or-lump-it" basis. Although transport experts have criticised the Marsham Street regime for being out-of-touch, the Department continues to kill-off high quality and well thought out transit schemes and in their place substitute obviously low-cost replacements.

What better example than the recently announced bus rapid transit (BRT) for S E Hampshire (1). Leeds suffered from a similar downgrading in that its Supertram Scheme was replaced by trolley bus proposals. Although nice vehicles to ride in and cost less for the infrastructure, their lower capacity is no match for Supertram. This appears to have made little impression on those pushing the concept. It is of interest to note that Basle in Switzerland finally disposed of its trolley bus services during 2008 (2).

One city (Liverpool) is bucking the DfT's trend towards buses which is being forced onto Leeds and Portsmouth. At the time of writing the DfT has not given in to Liverpool's arguments (3). It will be interesting to see if this Merseyside city succeeds where others have not.

Manchester is very divided and under much pressure from the Government to be a "guinea pig" for the congestion charge. METROLINK opened in 1992 and is already carrying a considerable amount of motorists on a daily basis. An existing LRT system can only consider expansion by planning for "more of the same" and therefore becomes the only English City to be granted some light rail funding. (Blackpool is a first generation tramway and TYNE & WEAR is really a light metro). Part of Manchester's original Big-Bang is being advanced by a grant but the remainder will only go ahead if the public accepts future congestion charging. The money for this will come from the TIF (Transport Innovation Fund) (4).

A review of current transit trends in prominent English speaking countries will help to display very clearly how out-of-step and isolated our DfT has become with its policies.

**AUSTRALIA :** Melbourne's tram system is continually being extended and is now one of the world's largest. Adelaide has just extended through its CBD using a fleet of new trams. Plans are being developed to convert some of its railway routes into tramways. Surfers Paradise has just completed a public inquiry and decided that its new system will be a light rail line.

**CANADA :** Toronto has decided to convert its tramway into a considerably expanded light rail system. Montreal has announced plans to build a 20km LRT network by 2013. Ottawa has just announced a plan to build a Light Rail Line with promised Federal support.

**USA :** New Streetcar and Light Rail Lines (about 100 systems) are being considered for construction in North America.

Just how many bus services will we lose before England decides to change its transport policy ?

### REFERENCES

- 1) LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY - 22nd August to 4th September 2008 -page 23.
- 2) TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT - September 2008 - page 356.
- 3) TRAMWAYS & URBAN TRANSIT - August 2008 - page 298.
- 4) Rik Thomas - LOCAL TRANSPORT TODAY - 5th September to 18th September 2008 - pages 6 and 7.

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