



LIGHT RAIL - DEVELOPMENTS DOWN UNDER

Australia, originally with large and efficient tramway systems in most of its State Capitals, followed the dubious example set by Britain just after WW II. The replacement programme was obviously very costly and the speed with which the new buses appeared on the streets was "breathtaking". Although Sydney and Adelaide lost no time in destroying their systems, Melbourne and Brisbane were far from convinced that a change to buses would improve their transit systems.

This soon however changed in Brisbane when a newly elected Lord Mayor declared himself as opposed to the tram system. Things soon started to go his way when one of the three depots caught fire and was burned to the ground taking with it about a third of the tram fleet. This tragic event made the system vulnerable to complete closure when Victoria Bridge, the only tram crossing of the Brisbane River, needed to be replaced. After much discussion the bridge was built without any tram tracks and the fate of the system became sealed.

The situation with Melbourne was somewhat different with a management that continued to build extensions as well as new trams. Melbourne now ranks as one of the largest tram systems in the world.

Whilst Brisbane was following a tram elimination policy, a glimmer of hope appeared in Adelaide with its one and only interurban line to Glenelg retained and then considered for an extension. This was not to be though as a guided bus route (O-bahn) was substituted instead.

Melbourne never wavered from its pro-tram attitude and probably the "living proof" of its success played an important role in a decision by Sydney to convert a disused freight railway line to light rail operation. Although regarded as successful by the public, Sydney kept its operation at "arms length" regarding integration with its bus system.

Up to the present time, Brisbane has continued to pour funding into its bus system and, despite several attempts to re-introduce trams, all were aborted at a late stage in the tendering process.

Despite all of this, Adelaide was probably inspired by Melbourne in an adjacent Australian State. The first sign of a *volte face* approach came with the replacement of the vintage 1929 interurban cars on the Glenelg line with modern Flexity articulated trams. This 1929 purchase was obviously a good buy, especially when considered alongside the bus replacement programme that would have been needed over this same period of time. To emphasise the Glenelg success story and the public response to it, the honour by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects offering their 2008 prize to the city, gives some idea of the nation's gratitude. In effect, this initial modernisation became a catalyst for a major change to this city's transport policy and the 5'-3" gauge railway will be changed to standard gauge to accept trams as thought necessary.

Most of the railway lines will be electrified at 25kv which will require 15 dual voltage trams. These will be unable to enter Adelaide railway station because low-floor trams are not compatible with the station's track layout. The Glenelg line is being planned as a through route to Port Adelaide and the recent line has become so popular that extra Flexity trams are to be ordered to cater for the high demand.

Could this major tramway update be a catalyst also for England to change to a more friendly attitude with its transit policy?

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