



TRAM-TRAIN TECHNOLOGY SEARCHING FOR A PROBLEM

A programme on BBC 1 giving a nostalgic look at the former local railway route from York to Beverley (1) interviewed locals along the former route to see if they wanted it put back. It brought out many strong viewpoints, some for and some against. Unfortunately the line closed at a difficult period when British Rail was approximately midway through its policy change to diesel power.

Those unfortunate enough to own a house on the former route realised that if pressure to put the line back gained momentum, their house could be in the way. As a whole, it highlighted the many problems that could be encountered with a successful YES campaign. For reasons, not very clear to the general public, the difficulties of introducing the tram-train concept in this country are thought to be fairly substantial but made more so because of our reluctance to look at the successes in Europe.

The York to Beverley route with tram-train technology should be a resounding success because existing systems in Europe have already proved its better performance than what went before it and also an ability to circumnavigate obstacles on the former track bed as well as going to pick-up points nearer passenger demand. Added to all this is its sharper acceleration and improved braking power which would probably remove a need for railway type signalling and the expense that goes with it. Much of this is already practised on Metrolink in Manchester. Lower operating costs could increase frequency and with it an improved passenger demand.

The tram-train power requirements would be electrification at tramway voltage at each end of the route with an on-board diesel engine being used on the middle section. This would ensure "clean" operation as it passed through the streets of York and also suitable for an extension as a tram into Hull city centre.

At this stage of the Discussion Document, a brief look at Germany's better known tram-train projects could be very helpful. The main-line electric railway services into Saarbrücken Station (Hbf) had a similar problem to Leeds in that a passenger had a short walk to reach the shopping centre. Saarbrücken did something about it and provided a tram-train service over railway tracks at railway voltage to a convenient point where it could branch off as a tram at tramway voltage and pass through the streets of the CBD. It was such a success that at peak periods it was necessary to couple two three unit articulated units together. Leeds had a similar proposal but could not satisfy Central Government requirements.

Karlsruhe did something very similar some years earlier but on a much larger scale and its success can be judged by the high passenger demand for extensions.

REFERENCES

- 1) "DOWN THE LINE" - Was Beeching right in closing the York to Beverley Railway Line?
- BBC - 26/10/08.

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