



Light Rail (UK)

All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group

House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
Ref: LR Apping Winter 09 v1

Light Rail & Trams, Affordable & Sustainable Transport



**Tuesday 20th January 2009,
Committee Room 19,
House of Commons,**

Light Rail and Trams for the Capital A contrasting look at the light rail scene up and down the United Kingdom

Meeting Overview

The previous meeting of the Group (4th November 2008) had discussed London's Cross-River tramway project in some detail, and the meeting had taken place on the eve of an announcement by the Mayor of London that this project had been scrapped as part of his review of his predecessor's capital projects. The reason given for this decision was that the project had no funding in place, whereas projects already funded would be continued. The present Group meeting had consequently been arranged in order to discuss the decision with the Mayor and to point out to him the damage that would result from the cancellation. In the event, Mr Johnson was unable to attend, but Mr Kulveer Ranger, attended as his representative; he was the Mayor's Director for Transport Policy.

The meeting, attended by about 50 persons, was chaired by Stephen Hammond MP (Wimbledon), but with Paul Rowen MP (Chairman of the Group) in attendance. It commenced at 18.03 hours, with Mr Hammond introducing three speakers, the fourth arriving shortly after the meeting had got under way.

United Kingdom.

Theresa Villiers MP (Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, Conservative MP for Chipping Barnet)

The green sustainable role for Light Rail and Trams in a Conservative United Kingdom.

She opened her comments by congratulating the Group on its achievements, and its standing within the transport industry. The Conservatives had made a commitment on the expansion of heavy rail services, but, she said, this did not preclude expansion for light rail.

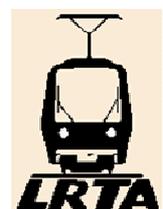
She referred to John Prescott's Promise in 2000 of 25 new light rail schemes, of which only five had taken place (four commenced under a Tory government). She referred to the schemes abandoned in recent years under Labour, and described as "incompetent" its earlier encouragement of a number of projects, on

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which many millions of pounds were then spent, only to have the rug pulled from under them later on. She was particularly acid about the denial of funding to Manchester, after it had been promised, and referred to Mr Geoff. Hoon's comment of "no plan B" – no Transport Innovation Fund money would be available, as this was linked to Congestion Charging arrangements being in force (recently overwhelmingly rejected by local referenda). She regretted that Manchester had been left in limbo, and urged the Government to cut the link with congestion charging, and fund those parts of the Metrolink projects that were viable.

She was also unhappy with the painfully slow and complex procedures for promoting light rail projects and with the government demands for watertight performance guarantees beforehand. She referred to the Passenger Transport Executive Group's comparison and contrast of UK methods with those obtaining abroad.

Finally, she outlined the Conservative approach in these matters. The decision-making process would be speeded up, TIF funding rules would be relaxed, and the marking down of fuel tax income as a result of better public transport would be reviewed. The Conservatives had a history of supporting light rail, and would continue this where appropriate. She agreed the Mayor's suppression of the Cross-River scheme, as it was not funded, had no indication of government funding in the future, and the TfL finances were under stress from the Metronet failure. The decision had been pragmatic, and put a stop to further expenditure which would inevitably be lost on consultants and further planning.

Edinburgh

Mike Connelly (TIE Stakeholder Relationship Manager)

then pursued the theme of the meeting, and spoke about the situation in Edinburgh, capital of Scotland. He introduced Colin McLaughlin, the HR & Corporate Affairs Manager of TIE [TIE is the arm of Edinburgh City Council, set up to handle the tramway schemes] – "a double act". However, the PowerPoint presentation refused to function and "ad lib" became the order of the day.

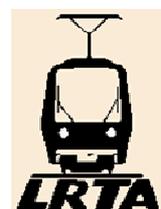
A brief narration of the current situation (projected opening, July 2011) indicated that the mock-up vehicle was about to be displayed in Princes Street. The City Council had formed a number of bodies to undertake various aspects of the tramway schemes, which would cost £512m for line 1A and £87m for line 1B, there currently being a shortfall in the funding sources (Scottish government and City),. Re-siting of utilities had been almost completed, and infrastructure construction was imminent – actual trams would follow from CAF (in Spain) – the operator would be the much-experienced Transdev (buses would be operated by Lothian buses). Mention was made briefly of the problems and challenges of putting a £500m tramway through a World Heritage City, and its impact on the population and on the city's business community

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However, such was the lead-time in tramway planning, TIE were already looking to the more distant future. Transport was the purview of the Scottish Parliament (apart from cross-border heavy rail), and an approach had already been made to Westminster for advanced funding for existing major projects. Edinburgh wanted to be in a strong position once the recession wound down, and recognised that, as a capital city and commercial centre (as well as a centre for culture and the arts), it needed to be well placed to develop its facilities and infrastructure to ensure future expansion. Provision of a substantial tramway system was a central part of its strategy, both financial and in terms of land use.

Manchester

Councillor Matthew Colledge,
Chairman of the Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority,

concentrated on the expansion of trams and TramTrains in “England’s Northwest Capital” [jestingly hoping to be the capital of all of the North]. He claimed that the Metrolink tramway had doubled its annual passenger carrying (to 20m) in ten years, and planned to double its mileage to 42, despite the post-referendum setback [the referendum had resoundingly rejected congestion charging for central Manchester, but it had also been the basis of TIF funding for tramway expansion]. He said the light rail system was popular, and was “owned” by the local inhabitants as “their” tramway. There was, in addition, something of an under-used suburban rail network. The reason for under-use was probably a traditional public perception of heavy rail, with a rather lower profile than that of light rail. The current Metrolink system had partly used obsolete or abandoned rail formations, but, following the completion of the Rochdale and Oldham tramways, this source of routes would dry up, and TramTrains would become a distinct possibility.

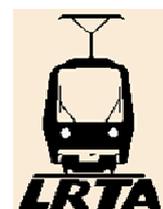
The decision on a trial TramTrain in the Huddersfield area had generated much disappointment, and that project was looking increasingly impracticable. Manchester offered a much greater potential for TramTrains, the authorities were wanting see the experiment take place in the area, and were now exploring the possibility of putting forward their own project.

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London

Kulveer Ranger

(Director for Transport Policy, London)

represented the Mayor- where trams and light rail are in the Mayor's green and sustainable transport policy for London.. He welcomed the progress in Edinburgh, but was present to speak about London. "The Way to Go" (penned by the Mayor himself, and published in November 2008 just after the previous Group meeting) had set out to look at the role of transport in the capital. He claimed that both he and Boris were, secretly, passionate about trams, which had been an integral part of the London until 1952, but schemes were hugely expensive, a fact which thus prescribed caution. He said that the West London scheme, promoted by the previous Mayor, had lacked appetite, and had encountered much local hostility, which had eventually killed it off; moreover, there was no funding in place. Funding was needed if a project was to be "sold" to the community.

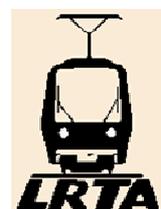
London's new strategy was to incorporate transport (including tramways) into land-use planning and development. It was projected that during the next 20 years the population of London would increase by 800,000, with more than that number of new jobs available, many in the Docklands area. Initial planning frameworks would be published in the coming Spring, including tramways. Mr Ranger affirmed the authorities' view that tramways were both sustainable and "green", and that policies to alleviate congestion and pollution were needed. These were part of the "smoothing traffic flows" concept, promoting modal change in getting people out of cars and into public transport and especially onto cycles. He said that demand and capacity had to be managed carefully, particularly in view of developments already under way (such as the Olympics), and planning in the short and medium terms was vital to keep London on the move.

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Question Time

-- The Chairman then opened the meeting to questions from those attending, and Mr Cockle (Leewood Projects), speaking directly to Miss Villiers, said that, despite her assertions to the contrary, there was considerable opposition to tramways amongst Tory councillors to tramways; he cited particularly, Nottingham, where a successful and highly effective tramway line had been operating for several years, despite Tory opposition. Her response was that it was a case of the right tramway in the right place (not so with West London Tram), a contention supported by Mr Ranger.

[At this juncture (18.56 hours), the Division Bell rang and those MPs in the room left the meeting, and did not return. The Chairmanship was then assumed by Mr Harkins, whose organisation was providing the Secretariat facilities for the All-Party Group]

Mr Cockle then re-addressed his question to Mr Ranger, who added that some schemes had been approached more on political lines than through transport considerations. Referring to London, he averred that the Mayor's administration was setting up local transport strategies, promoted locally by groups of boroughs (rather than singly), and this would feed in to TfL.

-- The Chairman of Merseyside PTE Councillor Mark Dowd, said he was disappointed when the government scrapped the Liverpool scheme, and more disappointed when he discovered the senior city officers had been advising the government that the project was not wanted – the result was the destruction of 5 years and £70m of work (a similar situation had also obtained in Leeds). He also felt sore about the long procession of government Secretaries of State and Ministers who handled transport, and declared that without this project Liverpool had lost some of its competitive ability.

-- Mr Colledge wanted to see a fundamental change in the UK's approach and methodology, a matter which would require a cross-party effort. Mr Jones (Northwest Rail Campaign) referred to Miss Villiers' proposal for a Tory review of TIF rules, and wanted to see a Tory government ring-fence future TIF funding for light rail across the country

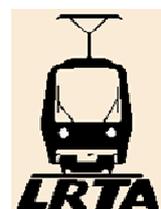
-- A representative from the Campaign for Better transport then draw the attention of those present to a new set of proposals for the use of some freight lines and old track beds in northwest London to create certain new rail-based routes (Barnet, Cricklewood, Colindale) – feasibility and cost studies needed to be carried out – in commenting on Mr Ranger's "borough group" thoughts, they had found some boroughs more co-operative than others; Mr Ranger offered direct assistance if an approach was made to him. Mr Harkins, then raised the possibility of low cost tramways such as that of Ultra-Light Rail (ULR), and introduced Mr John Parry, whose company was about to commence a regular ULR service on the Stourbridge branch line, a service he described as "affordable". Mr Parry saw a certain element of luxury costing in standard light rail projects, with no-one apparently asking whether everything which was included was really necessary – he believed that TramTrains would become an important feature of rail transport in the future.

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Mr Peter Fox, (of Today's Railways) suggested not to worry about the Huddersfield TramTrain experiment, which he felt was rapidly going nowhere, as it was logistically impractical, and urged Manchester to press on with their on TramTrain ideas. He added that many European TramTrains were dual-powered, without the need for continuous catenary. Mr McLaughlin pointed out that the Edinburgh area also had certain freight-only lines.

-- Mr Harkins, outside his role as Chairman of the meeting and as MD of Light Rail (UK) Ltd, pointed out that the next Government, of whatever hue, would face large EU fines over the UK's failure to reach air quality (not just CO₂) – the level of fine would be enough to build a tramline a year. Mr Ranger agreed, and said London had submitted a number of schemes for government funding, but in the interim were changing buses to hybrid mode, preparing a cycling revolution (with cycle highways) and setting up electric car schemes.

Mr Skinner was interested in the Light Rail Innovation Awards, and asserted that the UK lacked innovation in light rail – there was no “open tendering” facility whereby organisations could offer solutions and suggestions rather than simply comply with a predetermined tender specification.

-- Mr Scott McIntosh (Edinburgh) applauded Mr Parry's comments and pointed out that London Transport had, years previously, looked at ULT for the Bromley North branch, but the project had withered. He doubted the value of dual-mode buses, and claimed that the UK government always made decisions late, added on expensive extras, and delayed the ultimate outcome, which was then found to have become too expensive.

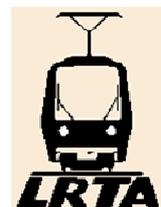
-- Mr Ranger then had to leave, and was thanked by the Chairman for attending and making a positive contribution to the meeting. Mr Harkins asked for a developer's point of view, and this was provided by Mr Peter Frost (Kilbride Group). He saw investment in transport as a necessity concurrent with development, but asserted that developers often encountered a lack of reliable information about light rail costs, requirements and results – there was no central reliable source to which developers could turn. Mr Colledge responded that there was always a wide disparity of cost as between different schemes, due to local circumstances, factors and requirements. Mr McIntosh put forward the Light Rapid Transit Forum as a possible source [lrtf.org.uk].

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-- Mr Jim Dobbin introduced himself as MP for Heywood & Middleton, and said that parts of his constituency were bereft of adequate transport facilities, whilst others suffered from a surfeit of HGVs. He was looking for positive information, and Mr Harkins said that TramTrain freight was in use in other parts of the world, although probably too "giddy" for the Dept. for Transport to handle [editor's note –the February issue of Tramways & Urban Transit contains an article on Light Rail for Freight by Mr Neil Anderson, who had addressed the All-Party Group on this subject at its meeting of 4th March 2008]

The Chairman then closed the meeting at 19.45 hours, and announced that the next meeting would take place on 23rd March, on the subject of TramTrain Plus

Jim Harkins FCILT
Secretariat
Applrg

NAK 23.1.09

[Secretariat Note: From a list of 46 European capital cities (source: pubquizhelp.com), not including Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, 24 operate a well-established tramway, the majority also with a Metro system, seven have opened new tramway systems during the past 20 years, one is under construction, and a further city (Luxembourg) has only a tramway museum but is planning a new light rail system. (Source: Irta.org)]

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