



TROLLEY BUSES - A SECOND TIME AROUND IN LEEDS

"Senior Councillors in Leeds have welcomed support for a plan that can see modern eco-friendly trolley buses running on the city's roads by 2011" (David Marsh - Yorkshire Evening Post - 19th June 2007). There is little doubt that a return to trolley bus days has aroused much interest in and around Leeds, some for and some against and a fair number either way.

A "heavy weight" opinion has come from the previous Tory Transport Spokesman (Mr Chris Grayling MP - Tramways and Urban Transit page 295 - August 2007) : "I am a great believer that our cities are going to need European-style modern public transport systems to get people around. I think the Government frankly let down Leeds".

Somewhat of a surprise was the interest being taken in America and a typical view appearing in print was: The Brits still haven't advanced beyond the stage of knowing that buses are cheaper because they don't need track yet haven't been able to figure out that it is because a decent part of the track cost just gets unloaded onto the budget of the Streets Department, after all, a free right of way is cheaper than one you need to build.

The Yorkshire and Humber Regional Transport Board has indicated its approval of the trolley bus proposals by offering a grant of £150-m towards the first phase of the Leeds network which is expected to cost £300-m.

METRO (the local transport authority) acknowledges that car drivers will be more readily prepared to switch to a trolley bus than a conventional bus because the overhead lines give a sense of permanence. Journeys though will not be quite as fast as they would have been by tram.

A well known transport journal has reported that the proposed trolley bus scheme has not generally been met with enthusiasm and commented on questions as to why the Central Government is forcing a trolley bus system onto Leeds (Local Transport Today - 5th to 18th July 2007).

For the record, Leeds was a pioneer in trolley bus operation (from 1911). Initially, from the city centre to Farnley and also with two feeder routes from the tram terminus at Guiseley. The stone built depot still exists at Guiseley and fed the two routes to Otley and Burley-in-Wharfedale. All trolley bus operation had ceased by 1928. The 17 years of operation saw much wrangling between Leeds Corporation and the various councils over such things as fares, level of services and shelters etc. The vehicles themselves operated on solid rubber tyres, carried 28 passengers who paid a fare when boarding. Britain's last commercial trolley bus operation was in Bradford which ceased in 1972.

As a footnote it should be added that a party of officials have gone to Germany to investigate a possible future use of tram/trains through the streets of Leeds.

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