

YET TWO MORE UK CITIES (BELFAST AND BRISTOL) OPTS FOR BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT).

British cities seem to have developed a love affair with BRT in recent years and the question is why?

It seems that the primary reason is purely down to installation costs. No consideration has been taken of long-term goals such as: Energy Security, Global Warming, Local Air Quality and Modal shift.

But what exactly is BRT? Well BRT was developed in South America in order to move massive numbers of passengers at a perceived cost that is less than rail-based alternatives.

So let's take a look at some photos of overseas BRT systems:

The Bogotá system (below left) in South America uses double articulated bendy buses and state-of-the-art stations.



(Below right) the proposed system in Gangzhou China: Why are these systems classed as successful? Well, they are in countries where a large percentage of the population has no other choice other than public transport. Capacity figures are based on 6 or even 8 passengers standing per sq meter.



This is in comparison to the accepted norm of 4 passengers standing per sq meter for Light Rail and Tram systems. So yet again, we find that the different systems are not compared on an equal playing field, which could explain, why BRT is seen as lower cost than Light Rail.

BRT IN THE UK – WHAT IS THE PUBLIC GETTING?



We take a look at the largest system "Fastrack Busways" operating in the area of Northern Kent between Dartford and Gravesend and serving the Bluewater Shopping Centre and the Eurostar Station at Ebbsfleet.



The following extract is taken from a description of the "Fastrack" system:

Fastrack will have rubber tyred vehicles that will run on a normal road surface – no rails or special guidance system is required.

The key to Fastrack's success is the high proportion of new busways being built on which only Fastrack vehicles will be allowed to run. In this respect, it is akin to the track that a light rail or tram system would run on. A core network of some 40km is planned. Overall, half of all Fastrack routes will operate on dedicated 'track' where no other vehicles will operate, with a further 25% on specially reserved lanes alongside traffic on existing roads.



WHAT CAN ULTRA LIGHT RAIL (ULR) OFFER?

First let's look at the above statement "In this respect it is akin to the track that a light rail or tram system would run on" this should be challenged as it is, of course, totally untrue.



Just compare the tram track on the left with the busway above; which one would you prefer to see in your town or city? Not only does it provide a quiet ride but it actively helps reduce toxic emissions in the air... unlike the busway where the continued use of diesel buses contributes to emissions and local pollution.

Then there is ride quality; an unguided bus just cannot provide the same quality of ride, safety, or social inclusion (through same level access) that a tram can provide.

In the case of modal shift, some BRT systems claim to have achieved a 10% switch from car to public transport, whilst the accepted figure for tram systems is between 20% and 30% modal shift.



There is also the matter of energy efficiency and it is a proven fact that with one unit of energy, a bus will travel one unit of distance, whilst the same size tram will cover 2 additional units of distance.

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ULR tram systems offer trams from 50 passenger to 300 passenger capacities with a base system of ULR trams, stops and a depot starting from as little as 4m Euros per system km. The UK is thus settling for a second-rate transport system based on the recommendations of consultants who are pandering to the requirements of the DfT. Shouldn't the DfT be thinking about what is best for the public and/or the planet???

It is interesting to note that in the case of Bristol, the cost of buses was excluded from the BRT proposal. Whilst this may have seemed cheaper on paper, the Client isn't privy to the full picture and the hidden costs involved in making this their first choice.

ULR tram systems can be powered by 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY PRODUCED LOCALLY, thus reducing the need to import oil, gas and coal and securing the UK public transport sector which is vital for social and economic growth in the longer term.