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Arthur Percival MBE MA DLitt FSA FAHI
The Old Exchange
22 Stone Street, Faversham, Kent. ME13 8PU
01795 533 261
Fax (international +44, UK = 0) 1795 533 261

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Paul Rowen MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Rowen

**INQUIRY :
LIGHT RAIL AND CITY REGIONS : A 21st CENTURY MODE OF TRANSPORT**

- 1) I have read that you are Chairman of this Inquiry and wish to submit written evidence.
- 2) My only interest is that of a public transport user. I have no stake in the light rail industry.
- 3) In similar vein, I am unable to say why the development and implementation of light rail systems takes so much longer, and costs so much more, in the UK than it does in Europe or elsewhere. However I am well aware that it does, and regret very much that this is so.
- 4) To the extent that I cannot help in this direction I am afraid my evidence may not be much help.
- 5) My concern is simply the one evidently shared by the Inquiry – that while so many towns and cities in Europe and elsewhere have well-developed and still developing light rail/tramway systems the UK has lagged behind – desperately.
- 6) In my representations I confine myself to systems in Europe and elsewhere with which I am familiar.
- 7) These are as follows, in ascending order of population served:
Basel, Switzerland (166,209)
Freiburg im Bressgau, Germany (217,547)
Ghent, Belgium (233, 120)
Zurich, Switzerland (361,129)
Nagasaki, Japan (446,007)
Hiroshima, Japan (1,159,391)
- 8) It seems to me to be a reflection of the poverty of official thinking on light rail in the UK that none of the following UK cities, in ascending order of population, have tramway systems, though all had them in the past:
Portsmouth (194,150), where I believe proposals have been rejected by the Government
Northampton (197,322)
Derby (235,029)
Southampton (246,201)
Plymouth (247,297)
Stoke-on-Trent (260,419)

Belfast (274,770)

Bradford (299,310)

Cardiff (302,139)

Hull (302,296)

Coventry (308,313)

Leicester (339,239)

Bristol (430,713), where I believe proposals have been rejected

Leeds (455,123)

Liverpool (455,123) where I believe proposals have been rejected by the Government

Glasgow (610,268) which does however have a single circular tube line

- 9) The successful example of Nottingham (241,654) does suggest that investment in a modern tramway system, even in one of our smaller cities, repays dividends, at least in terms of environmental gain from reduced car usage and traffic congestion.
- 10) The systems I have used (see (7) above) sport mostly state-of-the-art rolling stock, have mostly been extended in recent years, and are popular with the public. Some, like Freiburg's network, penetrate even historic areas without generating environmental disruption. The vehicles are comfortable, swift, and quiet, and generate no emissions. Some of the track is on-street, some on reservation. They are an enviable resource which contributes significantly to the economic efficiency of the towns and cities concerned. Otherwise of course most of them would not have been extended and progressively upgraded.
- 11) A tiny point worth noting is that because trams have their own tracks it is possible to an extent to see in what general direction they are going, even if you do not speak and/or cannot read the local language, be it German, Flemish or Japanese. This is important for visitors, who bring their own economic benefits.
- 12) In general in my view as a user / prospective user the Government (of whatever colour) should certainly undertake rigorous cost/benefit analyses before approving any scheme for a new light rail or tramway system; but should make sure that it does not under-rate, as it appears to do at present, the economic benefits which accrue from these facilities. To my mind the nation's economic efficiency is at present much impaired by the Government's setting too little store by these.
- 13) It may be heretical to say so, but in the short term it seems to me far more important (in terms of economic and environmental benefit) to develop new urban tramway networks in the UK than to build (at huge expense) a new high-speed railway line from London to Scotland.
- 14) I am copying this both to my local Member (Hugh Robertson) and to the Member for the adjacent Canterbury constituency (Julian Brazier), as he is Opposition transport spokesman.
- 15) It would be appreciated if you would be kind enough to acknowledge this submission.

Sincerely

