

Light Rail (UK)

All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group

House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

"The past we inherit, the future we build"

Trams – Catalysts for Jobs, Renewal & Regeneration



All Party Parliamentary Light Rail Group (APPLRG)

Report of a meeting held at the House of Commons on Wednesday 14th October 2014 at 16:00

Chairman: John Leech MP (Chairman APPLRG)

Speakers:

Reg Harman (Interfaces)

Nicholas Falk (URBED)

Paul Rowen (Passenger Focus)

The Chairman apologised for the change of rooms and for the restriction of the meeting to one hour instead of the scheduled two. Roger Harrison, Chairman of Tramlink Nottingham Ltd, who was to be one of the speakers today, was unable to be here.

Nicholas Falk (URBED)

I helped the late Professor Peter Hall produce a book called *Good cities, better lives* in which we tried to draw lessons from Europe, using France as the model for producing integrated transport, not just high speed rail between cities but building tramways in cities.

What was it that made France so much more successful in building tramways than the UK? I have tried to summarise the lessons from a few cities, focussing particularly on the organisational and financial aspects. Reg will then take that forward by talking about Grenoble and how they have built five tram lines in thirty years. Grenoble is very similar both in size and role to Oxford and when we won the Wolfson Economic Essay Prize with our garden city proposal we tested the ideas in relation to Oxford. We were encouraged by the fact that the leader of Oxfordshire County has accepted the need to grow the county by about 100,000 homes and he has proposed connecting to Oxford with a tram from North Oxford to St Giles. This is important because we tend not to think of trams in the UK for cities of less than 200,000 and what we were able to show in this report was how to fund that through the uplift in land values through development.

We are obsessed with the idea of green belts for containment, whereas much of the rest of Europe thinks in terms of green fingers, allowing towns to grow naturally. Our argument is that, if you could concentrate that growth where transit systems are, you would get better results. Smarter growth is about cutting travel times to work, making living much more attractive, boosting work and incomes

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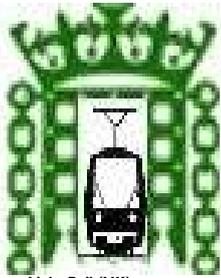
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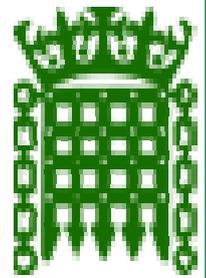
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and improving air quality. If you look at the statistics over the last thirty years, France has 23 tram systems, five times as many as the UK and ten times the route mileage. Germany and many other countries show a similar picture. Lille is an old industrial city, comparable with Leeds and Bradford, where the transport system has been modernised: the TGV; upgrading the tram lines to Tourcoing and Roubaix; and the driverless metro. In all, an integrated system which has made a despised city now a good place to live. They have a mayor but he does not have total power to do what he likes, he had to persuade 85 communes to work together.

How do you achieve that kind of leadership?

Montpellier is totally different. It is the fastest-growing city in France, an ancient university city but a now a rapidly growing high-tech city with a pedestrianised centre. How do they do this? There is a process of investing in the urban common wealth which starts with encouraging people to come and study who then stay because housing is affordable; more housing is being built than in the UK. An example is the Rive Gauche in Paris where a development over the railway at the Gare d'Austerlitz is three times the size of the Kings Cross development in London. The city then benefits from the rising land values rather than allowing the developers to reap all the profit. They can do this because they get funding from both the savings bank and the Caisse des Depots, a body which we just do not have in the UK, but is the equivalent of Germany's KfW and The Netherland's BNG. Most countries have a state investment bank that is able to put long-term low-cost money into development. There is also a logical planning system, going from agreements between the government and the cities through to the permissions to take over land where necessary. In the process, funding is provided for feasibility studies and for upgrading transit systems once agreement has been reached on the spatial framework for the city region.

The city mayors are crucial to drive these developments through with integrated strategic plans. They get support from business and other sectors and work through joint venture companies rather than just leaving it to the private sector.

In conclusion, three principles are needed, which we are trying to test in Oxford. Focus on city regions and transport corridors, look at the bigger picture and a long-term perspective look at the environmental and social benefits not just the economic. This is what the French do. They use different approaches for regeneration growth areas rather than treating everywhere the same. In terms of the plans for Oxford, there is a city in France which is uncannily similar to Oxford – Grenoble

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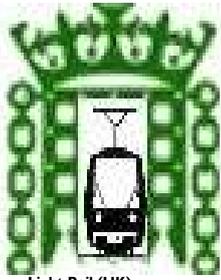
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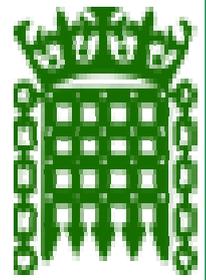
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Reg Harman (Interfaces)

Grenoble is an attractive city with a network of five tram lines. Reintroduction of trams was discussed from the 1970s. In 1975 the then Minister of Transport approached eight French cities with a view to the development of fixed-track transport systems. Grenoble's tramway project was launched in 1983. There was considerable opposition precipitating a referendum which gave approval to the scheme by 53% to 47%. The first line opened in 1987 and since then further lines have opened at regular intervals. The tramway developed in tandem with improvements in the road system but whereas the road system was designed to take traffic round the city the tramway went to the centre. The tramway links the city with the surrounding communes as well as linking residential, retail, office, hospital and university developments and the main railway station. Grenoble has a population of 157,000 and is a centre for IT, biotechnology and energy technology with internationally renowned research facilities and universities.

Transport plans have been produced in 2000, 2008 and in hand for 2015, each of which has resulted in tramway extension. The wider city region is the Communauté d'Agglomération Grenoble Alpes Métropole (La Metro) consisting of 49 Communes with a population of 437,000. Public transport is supervised by the Syndicat mixte des transports en commun (SMTC) de l'agglomération grenobloise and operated by the Société d'économie mixte des transports publics de l'agglomération grenobloise (SEMITAG). The latter is owned by a public body (SMTC with 64.80 %), a private company (Transdev with 26.85 %), two financial organisations (7.35 %) and the Grenoble Chamber of Commerce (1.00 %).

Turning now to Oxford; the City of Oxford has a population of 152,000, is a centre for IT, high tech and automotive industries and also has internationally reputed research and universities. The wider Oxfordshire LEP area has a population of 666,000 and comprises the City of Oxford and four other districts.

The city is at the heart of the wider area and there are various outlying centres of residential and economic importance. Development is somewhat constrained by the two rivers and their flood plains and the way forward is seen through the "snowflake" pattern concentrating on specific edge-of-city redevelopments. Further out are the major expansion areas at Witney, Didcot, Abingdon, Harwell and Bicester.

Oxford has its share of travel issues with a lot of congestion. It has a reasonable network of conventional buses but buses have their limitations, they are held up by traffic congestion and also cause pollution. Potential transit corridors are in the process of being identified.

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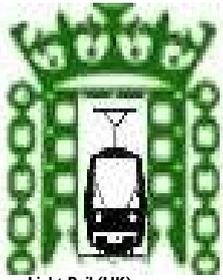
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Experience in Grenoble has shown that this is a continuing process with the transport network continually evolving.

John Leech. Has the growth of the economy been as a direct result of the development of the tram or was the tram system introduced in response to economic growth?

Reg Harman. The light rail systems have been very important to the city being able to grow and have been developed as a joint activity – tramway projects and strategy.

John Leech. In the case of Oxford, you are saying the Witney and the other places have to grow significantly and you are offering a solution to how this can happen without impacting on overall travel times.

Nicholas Falk. The important thing about Grenoble is that not only do people wish to study and stay on but major companies, including all the big electrical companies, are based there. Not just because they are easy to get to but because of the superb quality of life. You can be home in twenty minutes; in Oxford you can be spending two or more hours a day commuting. We are not proposing that all the growth should be in the country towns, Witney, Bicester or Didcot. We are proposing that there should be a high-quality suburban railway using the forthcoming electrified line as well as the new link to Marylebone, which will include a new Oxford Parkway station. Then focus development around these nodal points and then build a tram to link up North Oxford and Kiddington to the centre of Oxford. If all the growth is at the periphery then people will use their cars to go to work in central Oxford and the congestion, already bad, will become appalling. By developing close to the centre we can not only make it possible for people to use public transport but also make it much easier to cycle. Cycling is big in Oxford but is not currently very safe.

John Leech. How was Grenoble funded?

Nicholas Falk. By raising the money locally, through the local savings bank, and the Versement Transport is a very important source of money in France, a payroll charge on all employers of over ten people. That accounted for about one third of the funding.

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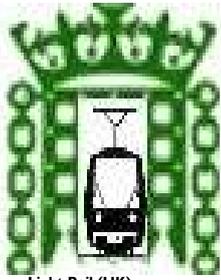
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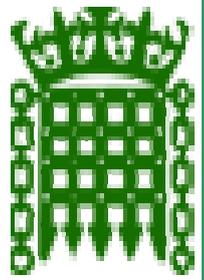
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Reg Harman. In France, a project plan, before it can be finally signed off, has to carry its funding. A lot of this may well be public funding, including semi-public banks, and this all comes together to provide the capital investment and the project can go ahead. It is also part of a continuing plan of infrastructure development, which provides a stable process for investment.

Nicholas Falk. Then the land is being acquired, often at low prices, but its value increases with the development. Benefiting from this is a big factor in the economics of transport development. So the system does not require huge public subsidy. It would answer a basic problem that we have in the UK, which is how to fund local infrastructure. Linking to housing growth should certainly work in the Southeast but possibly also elsewhere. Our original proposals put to the Wolfson Foundation were based around York. We think that there are around forty cities in the UK where this principle could be applied

Bernard Gambrell (Freelance Consultant). The role of French mayors is extremely important. Pierre Mauroy, as mayor of Lille, was instrumental in persuading the government to bring the Eurostar station into the centre of Lille, which made a huge difference to the city. The development of garden cities between Oxford and Cambridge is likely to have an effect and the opportunity of reopening of the Cowley branch, for example, linked to a line on the opposite side of Oxford might be beneficial.

Nicholas Falk. I would not understate the role of the French mayors, who often come from outside the cities. Pierre Mauroy said that to be mayor of Lille was more important than his subsequent position as Prime Minister of France. We have been centralising in the UK for far too long and recent events in Scotland have made it inevitable that this will change. It is not just freeing cities but freeing cities that do something. In France there is a real commitment to plans which make cities better and they join things up. They don't build trams then pull down the houses as in Sheffield. They link development and transport and that is what I mean by smarter growth. It is easily said but difficult to do and we cannot do it under the current system. We have to devolve and find ways of tapping private finance, not just rely on government grants.

Giles Bailey (Stratageeb Ltd.). Is there something particular about trams in developments in France?

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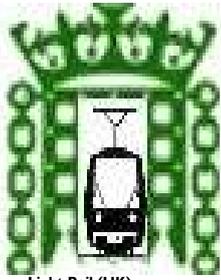
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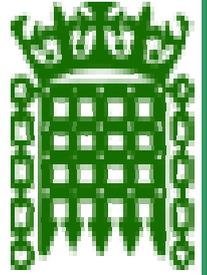
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Nicholas Falk. There is a real sense of pride in cities. Paris is seen as part of the national heritage. The same thing applies to all other European cities, they see the city as something one is proud to own and one invests in order to keep it working well. We have for centuries turned our back on cities because all the people with wealth wanted to live in the country but this is changing and people are moving back and many people would feel better about a city if they saw trams. This is evident in, for example, Nottingham and Manchester.

Reg Harman. A century or more ago, the big cities like Manchester and Birmingham had leaders who invested in taking the cities forward. This was important to businessmen, manufacturers and the people. It is this attitude that has declined. The flight to the country, however, goes back to the twelfth or thirteenth century, so is a very deep mind-set, but one which can be overcome.

Nicholas Falk. If sustainability means anything, we have to make our cities work better.

John Leech introduced Paul Rowen from Passenger Focus.

Paul Rowen.

I am here to talk about Passenger Focus and the Tram Passenger Survey which we conducted last year. We are currently carrying out the second one. I am a Board member of Passenger Focus and we also have here Keith Bailey who worked on the survey and who put these slides together.

Passenger Focus is funded by the Department of Transport but is there to represent passengers on the different modes of public transport. That remit is soon to be increased, assuming that the Infrastructure Bill goes through Parliament, when we will take on road users. We believe in evidence-based research and everything that we produce is obtained by going direct to passengers and asking them their views of journeys. We do not, as some other organisations do, ask people who went on a train twenty-five years ago what their view of trains are, we take passengers as they are on a journey and ask them their views of that particular journey. We have been doing the national rail passenger survey for the last nineteen years. That samples something like 60,000 people twice a year, Four years ago we started the bus passenger survey, which covers about 30,000 passenger journeys, and last year we launched our Tram Passenger Survey, which was conducted between October and December and we are currently doing the same fieldwork on the networks this year for the second Tram Passenger Survey.

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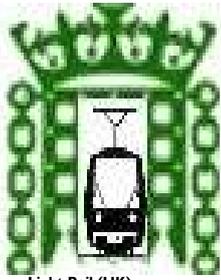
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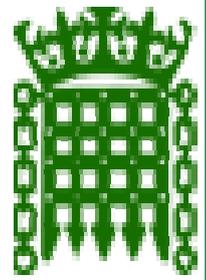
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Our DfT funding is limited and a lot of the extra money comes from the operators themselves who value the research that we do. It is this which has enabled us to do the Tram Passenger Survey. The five systems that signed up for the survey are Blackpool, Manchester Metrolink, Midland Metro, Nottingham and Sheffield Supertram. Croydon is not there, as Transport for London prefers to do its own research, comparing different modes within London, nor was Tyne and Wear Metro involved. Of the five participating systems, all bar one are currently in the process of expanding their networks. Manchester Metrolink has announced the opening of the Airport extension on 3 November, bringing their network up to 47 miles, and there are extensions at Nottingham, Blackpool and Midland Metro. The numbers travelling on the trams in 2012-13 ranges from 3.7 million at Blackpool to over 25 million in Manchester. A substantial number of public transport journeys in those areas are now by tram. In Blackpool a lot of the passengers are using the tram for leisure whereas trams in Manchester or Midland Metro are predominantly used for commuting and many of these are people who previously commuted by car, reducing the overcrowding on the roads. In total the sample was about 6,500 people. In the past, surveys have been written but with the Tram Survey passengers were given the option of completing the survey online. They are people who are actually undertaking journeys. With the exception of Blackpool, the majority of the passengers are fare payers as opposed to concessionary travellers.

Overall satisfaction of people on tram journeys was 90%, higher than either bus or train. In all surveys there are differences in satisfaction between different operators. Blackpool was top with Manchester a lot lower at 84%. One reason for Manchester's lower figure is the rapid expansion of the network which has caused some disruption.

Value for money covers a whole range of factors such as cleanliness of the vehicles, staff attitudes etc. Trams scored higher than trains as regards value for money, reflecting high train fares, overcrowding etc. Splitting the figure by network, Blackpool is again on top. The lower figure for Metrolink, 47%, is probably largely related to issues with the commissioning of the new traffic management system and the expansion. For availability of seating, bus comes out top; trams here are probably becoming victims of their own success. On the Rochdale route, for example, Metrolink often have to put on double trams and even then there is not enough capacity. Midland Metro, which is serving mainly commuters, has a lot of overcrowding at peak times and is now taking delivery of higher capacity trams. Tram scores much higher than bus for punctuality.

The bus figures vary from city to city. In Bristol, for example, which has many bottlenecks, there is huge dissatisfaction with the punctuality of the buses. Among the tramway systems, NET is top for punctuality and overall it is a good picture.

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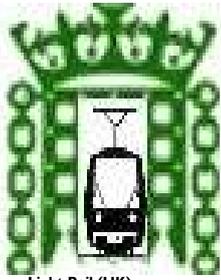
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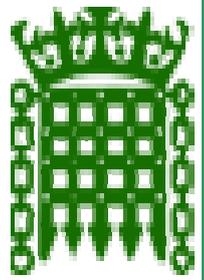
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Why do people use the tram rather than anything else? The top answer is “because it is the best way to get there”. The second is “more convenient than the car” and those who have used tram networks on the Continent will know that it is a much more convenient way of getting about. Another answer was “quicker than other transport”. These are some of the reasons why people use the tram.

We are now doing the second wave of the Tram Survey which will be published in the Spring and will include Edinburgh.

John Leech. Is there much difference between the networks in terms of the answers to why use the tram?

Keith Bailey (Passenger Focus). Generally there was no great difference. Manchester scores better on accessibility as a result of being a network rather than a single line. Otherwise they were all pretty much the same

John Leech. Given that Manchester took a hit in the process of expansion, will the same apply to those other systems that are currently expanding or have lessons been learned?

Paul Rowen. I visited Nottingham in July and thought that the work is going more smoothly than in Manchester, although their expansion is nowhere near as big. I do not know about Birmingham. In Manchester the sheer size of the expansion was a problem and trying to run a network while everything is being changed.

Keith Bailey. We are expecting Manchester’s scores to go down this time as there is more upheaval in the city centre. In Birmingham, the extensions are on the ends of the line, so there is not as much impact on the travelling public on the existing line as there will be in Manchester with the second city crossing.

Paul Rowen. For example, if you go from Piccadilly to Victoria, you have to get off twice you cannot catch a tram that goes straight across the city centre

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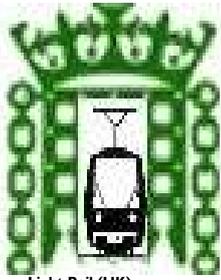
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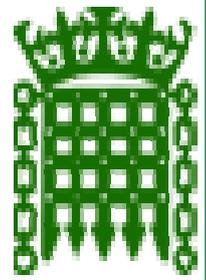
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Jim Harkins. Going back to Reg's presentation, the French model you showed made things look simple. We touched on the problems of fragmentation. Where would you start for Oxford?

Nicholas Falk. Many cities are very constrained by their boundaries. It might be simpler to go to the Boundary Commission and ask for them to be extended but the whole process of extending boundaries sets everybody against each other. So the starting point must be to say we are facing a common threat, let us see if we can get local authorities to work together. So the county, in the case of Oxford, is going to be launching a growth strategy. It has got the districts to buy into that and it will be looking at a series of scenarios, which is exactly what Cambridge did some twenty years ago. Cambridge has the advantage in that the university is much stronger and a lot of growth in Cambridge is on land owned by the University, which is not the case in Oxford. The strategy I am taking is not only to work with local authorities but to get the University to buy in, starting with university professors in fields like the environment, transport etc. We are having an event on transport options for Oxfordshire on November 13th at Keble College. David Rudlin is the first speaker, he is quite well-known and he is saying we have got to grow Oxford and he is supporting what we are talking about. We are also getting someone from the Council for the Protection of Rural England to discuss how one can begin to get agreement between the Town and Country Planning Association and the CPRE about thinking positively about the green belt and reviewing its boundaries where it is constraining cities from growing in more sustainable ways. Whether we make progress remains to be seen but I keep saying that we face a common threat of congestion, losing whatever economic advantages we have, and we have precious few in this country.

If we do not make the most of these advantages as the French and Germans do then we will lose out. We can say we guarantee that through a social contract that if you grow Oxford in the right locations then we will protect the rural villages from development. All of them are saying that villages are being besieged by proposals on every green field around them. It would be easier with proper leadership but it seems in this country, with exceptions, that politicians prefer to follow rather than lead. But let us hope they will seize the opportunity to meet the challenge of seeing Oxford lose its position in the world university league. But do come with ideas as we do not know the answers and we cannot afford to screw it up

John Reeds (Smart Growth UK). What is the population density of Oxford compared with Grenoble?

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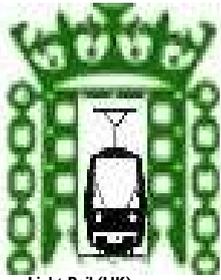
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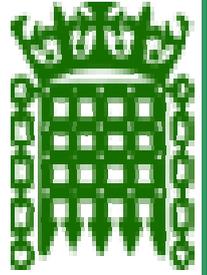
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Nicholas Falk. I am not sure of the figures. There are no doubt more people in Grenoble living in blocks of flats, but if you look at what is being built in Oxford there are going to be more flats. I think it is possible to intensify development in certain areas, plus there are hospitals, universities a whole lot of trip generators one can use to make a system viable. How many people here think it would be viable to have a tram link in Oxford? [Show of hands] So there is a majority who think that it is worth looking at. So let us look at it – we love saying no. We should say what sort of city should Oxford become to compete in the world and then how do we get there? How do we accommodate all those researchers that a university needs in order to be competitive?

John Leech thanked the speakers and the meeting closed at 17.05.

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