

'We're in danger of repeating past mistakes'

Below: A *Cunarder* leaving Dalmarnock Depot for Auchenshuggle in the early 1960s. Courtesy of STTS

Jim Harkins of Light Rail (UK) examines the lack of light rail as a transport legacy for Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games transport plans



"Modern tramways, with buses in support, solidly regenerate towns and cities."

Above: Modern light rail vehicles should be the lasting transport legacy for Glasgow from the Commonwealth Games of 2014. Light Rail (UK) Ltd

Looking at transport proposals for Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games, it seems our authorities have not learned from mistakes made six decades ago and more when the Buchanan Report prefaced removal of the well-patronised trams from the city's East End.

In the games, Glasgow has a legacy opportunity similar to that of the 1938 Empire Exhibition, which gave residents an upgraded Subway. Although there are legacy transport goodies listed for the rest of Glasgow – more buses, foot and cycle paths and integrated ticketing – there is little for the East End.

In effect, this is a repeat of Manchester's 2002 games. Bus-based transport policy did the job then, but the legacies are fading bus lanes and a handful of road improvements. Metrolink investment was promised, but will not be fully realised until at least 2012. Political unity is now the order of the day in Manchester, resulting in a £1.4bn bonanza for public transport.

German eye-opener

An estimated 250 000 Glaswegians – alongside visitors – lined the streets during the final tram procession of 4 September 1962. I was there, a 14-year-old tram driver's son from Auchenshuggle, listening to sentiment that the new buses were uncomfortable, awkward and unreliable.

After joining the Army and being posted to industrial West Germany, I saw a nation recovering from the devastating effects of World War Two. I saw how modernised tramways, with buses in support, were solidly regenerating towns and cities. It is apparent how that relationship between fixed steel rail and the economy is repeated around the developed world. I've also witnessed it in the UK; in Manchester, Sheffield, Croydon & Nottingham in particular.

A starter line?

There are ever more tourist/starter tramlines around the world (54 at the last count), some of which have developed into fully-fledged modern light rail systems. Many more are planned. This variation of a very flexible mode is the opposite of 'big project' schemes such as that being expensively (and disruptively) installed in Edinburgh.

In June 2009, Transport Scotland and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport announced ambitious plans to convert many suburban rail lines to light rail, with on-street running into a new terminus at St. Enoch. Lines recommended for conversion include the Cathcart Circle with spurs to Neilston and Newton and importantly to East Kilbride, Cumbernauld and parts of Lanarkshire.

The study also recommends four Bus Rapid Transit corridors with segregated running, one going east to Carmyle/Easterhouse via Parkhead – this alone shows planners are intent on repeating past mistakes. Using light rapid tramcars would give a higher cost benefit over the lifetime of the operation – evidence shows that established tramways can have a working lifespan exceeding 125 years!

Meanwhile, cheap oil and other polluting fuels will run out within the next two decades, leaving negative transport, health and climate legacies. The bus technology to use non-fossil fuel sources is not yet affordable and without massive subsidies will not be well into the future – just ask the Mayor of London!

We should encourage Transport Scotland and others with new thinking to give us a lasting transport legacy. This would create sustainable systems for future generations and show the world that we can provide low cost, green, steel on steel, public transport to let Glasgow flourish again. **TAUT**