

TramForward

Campaigning for Light Rail

PRESS RELEASE FROM Belfast *TramForward*

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Guided buses appear cheaper, but bring additional risks and fewer benefits

Light rail campaign *TramForward* has welcomed the recognition of the need for quality rapid transit for Belfast identified by consultants Atkins. However, *TramForward* is not persuaded that the published financial comparisons between guided bus and light rail are entirely valid.

A rail-based rapid transit system (tramway) uses vehicles with a capacity of 250-300 passengers as against a maximum of 100 in a guided bus. The running costs per passenger are likely to be comparable across both modes. Trams, although initially more expensive, have a life expectancy of 30-40 years as compared to 8-10 years for a guided bus. As a result, long-term replacement costs are likely to be similar across both modes. But, crucially, trams have repeatedly shown much higher effectiveness in reducing car use and congestion.

"In choosing between a guided bus system or a tramway, it is worth remembering that there are fewer than 25 guided bus systems in the world as against 500+ tramway systems," said Northern Ireland area officer Mike Maybin. "For example Edinburgh currently has an experimental guided bus system in a suburb, but - when making a decision between it and a tramway - opted for the latter."

TramForward points out that the number of guided bus manufacturers is very small, so any spare parts and technical support are equally dependent on a few firms that may or may not be in business in ten or twenty years' time. On the other hand, tramway technology is tried, tested and widely available from many manufacturers. Furthermore, trams running on rails need less energy than rubber-tyred buses - an important environmental and economic consideration, especially with fuel prices currently rising - and can easily benefit from renewable electricity generation.

"A modern rail based light rapid transit system would be better for Belfast in the long term," concluded Mr Maybin.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. TramForward is the campaigning arm of the Light Rail Transit Association.
2. The Light Rail Transit Association is the world's leading organisation campaigning for better public transport through light rail, tramway and metro systems in our towns and cities for 70 years. It also supports the revitalisation of suburban and rural transport through the application of light rail.
3. The LRTA acts through its network of local branches, which campaign for better transport in their localities.
4. Membership of the LRTA costs under 12p a day. To join, visit www.lrta.org or write to the Membership Secretary, LRTA, 38 Wolseley Road, Sale, Greater Manchester, M33 7AU. Members of the LRTA receive the monthly magazine *Tramways & Urban Transit* - written and read by experts in the field - and gain other benefits including discounts on videos and books, tours of transport systems and cut-price admission to selected transport sites.
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