

## Topic Sheet No. 4

# TRAMS AND... CITIES

WHAT SHOULD a city be? It is the centre for many activities of trade and commerce - retail, banking and insurance, business operations, arts and leisure, government, tourism and many others - where people foregather to work, shop and enrich their lives.

➤ The interest of a city lies in its vibrancy and attractiveness, a heart that is satisfying, full of depth - a place with which individuals can identify, to which a sense of belonging and affection can be attached.

➤ What are the characteristics of a city? The ancient centre, containing an irregular pattern of streets, often housing important trade and commerce, with impressive civic buildings and offices, arts centres (theatres, etc.); nearby will be the main station. Radiating outwards, we find closely packed older housing, factories, high-rise accommodation - and dereliction. Beyond lie the more spacious 1930s housing estates, with shops, and finally the post-war developments expensive low density housing, industrial estates, retail and business parks.

➤ The traditional road pattern led into the centre, to which the population was drawn for shopping and work; the growth of peripheral areas of retail and business has now distorted these established traffic flows, supplementing the radial routes with travel paths which bypass the centre, crossing the busy radial roads, causing conflicting vehicle paths and thinly identifiable traffic patterns.

### TRAFFIC

➤ Movement is the life-blood of the city, but movement requires arteries;- if they become clogged, life ebbs. Roads are the city's arteries, but too much traffic on them causes thrombosis, which, if it persists, drives trade and industry elsewhere, decay and decline set in, and reversing the process is slow, difficult and very expensive.

➤ Over the years, various solutions have been tried - new and/or better roads, traffic management schemes - endeavouring to accommodate greater numbers of vehicles with little success.

➤ The late-1990s approach is to combine these with suppression of demand - a mix of artificially altering the economics of private car usage, and of providing alternative modes which are not only more efficient in the use of space, but also competitively priced, attractive and satisfying to the traveller.

### TRAMS

➤ The ability to move up to 250 people in one vehicle, fast, clean and comfortable, from where they are to where they want to be, penetrating the heart of the city, is one of the vital advantages of a tramway system. With careful planning of the routes and track paths, journey times are cut and mass movement into the heart of the city is provided, as Manchester's Metrolink has demonstrated.

➤ Trams help reduce congestion - the source of noise, dirt, vibration and pollution; congestion is the scourge of modern urban life. The Road



The Austrian capital of Wien is a city which uses trams in a big way. The largest European system outside Russia, it is expanding again as planners recognise the benefits of moving large volumes of people on mostly segregated track. Michael Taplin

## WHAT DOES THE TRAM OFFER?

TRAMWAYS ARE planned and operated for two reasons:

- ◆ To solve traffic problems, to unlock gridlock.
- ◆ To enhance the image and ambience of a city or town.

THEY OFFER:

- ◆ The ability to move 2000-18000 people per hour along defined traffic corridors, effectively and efficiently;
- ◆ The removal of many private vehicle journeys from the highway, freeing up traffic flows and reducing congestion;
- ◆ Reduction in noise, pollution, vibration and dirt, thus improving the local environment for workers and shoppers;
- ◆ A quality ride in a comfortable and smooth vehicle - a key factor to persuade commuters to forsake cars;
- ◆ Reliability and public confidence; the presence of shiny rails induces the expectation of a tram arriving soon;
- ◆ A significant cutting of point-to-point journey times, reducing the stress of do-it-yourself driving;
- ◆ A means whereby the authorities can offer a viable alternative to the dependence upon the car-culture;

◆ The ability to return some city centre streets to the pedestrian and cyclist, yet penetrated by public transport;

◆ Enhancement of the streets in which they operate by the use of sympathetic and decorative street furniture;

◆ Opportunities for new business development and regeneration, through excellent links, of run-down areas;

◆ Over the longer term, revitalisation and expansion - they are a sign of confidence in the future of the city.

THEY CONSIST OF:

- ◆ A (generally) electrically-operated, smooth, quiet and pollution-free mode of guided public transport;
- ◆ Partly on-street running, often with a package of traffic-calming measures, including traffic-tree zones;
- ◆ Partly segregated running, where higher speeds enable heavier traffic flows to be maintained in safety;
- ◆ Underpasses or flyovers at traffic pressure points, and (often) priority where at-grade-crossings exist;
- ◆ Vehicles which are user-friendly, designed for the disabled and mobility-impaired, swift and safe.

Traffic Reduction Act lays upon local authorities a duty to control and reverse traffic increases, and careful, long-term planning is needed to achieve these goals. Effective solutions are difficult to devise, expensive and slow to take effect, but the need for them seems unavoidable.

➤ There is general agreement that public transport, coupled with road restrictions for other vehicles, is the only real answer. An integrated and planned public transport system, reliable and attractive and on a long-term and stable basis, in which trams have a role, is pivotal in solving these problems. The Light Rail Transit Association strongly supports such an approach.

➤ Many cities across the world, seeking to attract business, trade, commerce and wealth, as well as increasing influence in the affairs of their state, are including tramways and light rail in their basket of improvements. The building of new lines indicates

an authority which is creating the sort of city described in our opening paragraph, where self-confidence, competitiveness, and the willingness to expand in a controlled and beneficial manner are the hallmarks. In this manner, the solving of current problems also provides the opportunity to enhance and beautify the immediate locality - as has happened in Grenoble.

➤ To the visitor, a well-maintained tramway in a city adds an extra dimension, indicating a place which cares about the quality of life, attractiveness of its surroundings, and determination to tackle and solve urban problems. Tramways represent a long-term investment in the essential transport infrastructure of a city - an expression of enthusiasm, confidence and hope in its future.

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