



## **DEAD CERT FOR A LIGHT RAIL NETWORK**

Numerous articles have begun to appear raising the spectre of a light rail network for the City of Edinburgh. These are to be welcomed. They show both vision and aspiration. They also take into account the increasing difficulties for travellers and business in moving in and through the City. Time is of the essence as the difficulties mount and the traffic flows continue to increase. It is not enough to simply bemoan that Edinburgh has become a victim of its own economic success. Action is needed in view of the problems that are arising and the timescale for construction.

The Crossrail pronouncement heralds an opportunity to look to rail both light and heavy gauge as the future and the solution. It is on the basis of that small but vital start that the dreams of both a Borders Rail link and the south suburban line are laid. That I believe is the route that must be followed for the creation of a transport network worthy of a Capital City in the C21.

However, I do not believe that it is possible or practical to pursue both that vision and maintain the prospect of a guided bus network. The two schemes neither sit together harmoniously nor can be afforded simultaneously. To go forward with light rail must mean killing off the dead end route of CERT.

I should say that in stating this I do not seek to condemn those who first initiated the idea many years ago. At that stage it was innovative and more importantly the only practicable scheme available. Government attitudes, cash constraints and technological knowledge meant that the prospect of a light rail network was light years away.

Times though have changed. The guided bus network is now shown to be the technology not of C21 but of the latter part of C20. Even those cities that have invoked it now recognise that its time has past. The perception that it could be installed easily and cheaply has been shown to be a mirage. Its costs mount but its delays lengthen.

Now then is the time to abandon CERT and start afresh. This can and should be done in a spirit that is both consensual and avoids recriminations. What's done is done. Let's shed no tears but cast no blame over CERT. Instead let us recognise that at the start of C21 the route ahead for the City of Edinburgh is a light rail network that adds to both existing and reopened lines and that compliments and dovetails with other current and future modes of travel.

It will be costly and it will take time. However this is a network not just for a few years but for many generations to come. It will be the basis upon which Edinburgh can grow and flourish. It is after all the physical arteries that are the lifeblood of the community. Better therefore to take our time to get it right than progress at pace and repent at leisure. Moreover in transport like most other things in life you get what you pay for. Do it on the cheap and you'll get the quality it merits.

The vision for Edinburgh has to be to aspire to be a truly Capital City. That means to have the public transport networks taken for granted in other European Capitals such as Copenhagen and Helsinki. Even Dublin is now recognising that and is preparing to take its city forward into C21.

These must be thought through, planned and costed and then rolled out over time as cash permits. A start is being made with Crossrail. Steps must be taken to ensure that the redevelopment at Granton is predicated on a light rail network. No plans no planning permission must be the maxim. Bit by bit the network can and will be extended. From a rail link at Edinburgh Park and the Airport to fast ferry crossings across the Forth. It can be done with a City and people sharing a vision and a unity of purpose. It will not be done in a year but neither was Rome built in a day.

Edinburgh is now a Capital City it must not only think as such but act in a manner befitting that title. Now is the time to abandon CERT and go for a light rail network.

# trams4edinburgh.co.uk

## Orleans Tramway Launch Report (or what City of Edinburgh missed)



### What a Difference a Day Made” - 20th November, 2000

Place Du Martroi, one hour before the launch of Orleans Tram Route 1. Eight gleaming bronze trams had silently taken up their places in the Square, as the sound of Dinah Washington reverberated from the tannoys situated around the Square. The words of the song said it all, a fifties classic suited to the dignity and beauty of the occasion. Orleans (pop 260,000) knew it had made the right choice, and crowds thronged the streets awaiting the arrival of Lionel Jospin to cut the tape on the first tram to carry passengers through the streets of Orleans since 1935. Since dawn, armies of streetcleaners had been out removing any trace of litter. 1,300 invited guests thronged the Square, contained by barriers to separate the general public from “les invitees”. We were there, along with official representatives from London and Dublin - City of Edinburgh had felt unable to accept an invitation which would have been offered if desired. Lionel Jospin entered the Square on foot to the music of and surrounded by a jazz band dressed in “Blues Brothers” suits. They were to follow the proceedings throughout the day. A brief speech, dwelling on the magnificence of the new system, the vehicles, the tram architecture (five firms of architects were commissioned) and the opportunities the new system would bring to the people of Orleans, then the invited guests took their places on the eight awaiting vehicles. Probably for the only time in its history, four trams on each of the two tracks headed up Rue de la Republique “cote a cote” to the cheers of onlookers. On to the terminus at Fleury Les Aubris when a similar ceremony involving the local Mayor, Lionel Jospin and Band took place. Then back on board for a cross town trip via the centre, le pont George V over the entire 18 kilometres of this magnificent state of the art system, constructed in just 2 years, to Olivet. There a further ceremony involving the local mayor, followed by a final trip to the end of the line, and the superb new glass sided depot which was about to play host to further speeches and a champagne reception for 1,300 guests. A spritely gentleman, well into his éghties, was introduced to les invitees - the last man to drive an Orleans tram over 60 years ago. He was well received. By 8.30 pm, the guests had been taken back to the city centre in a fleet of buses, and the organisers were left to prepare for the next great occasion - the opening of the system to the public three days later. It has truly been a memorable day.



But thinking back to the day before, when we had arrived in Orleans by train, one memory stood out from the final run into the city centre. To the side of the rail track, running parallel with it for probably around 15 miles, stood a concrete structure, a track clearly abandoned, daubed in parts with graffiti and very much a monstrosity which nobody could afford or be bothered to remove. On the morning of the tram launch, I asked the gentlemen who had been allocated two hours to take me around the sytem “what was it?”. It was, quite simply, a failed idea from the 70s - a concrete test track for a new type of train, guided by concrete and hovering above the track. An expensive failure. That was the past - the tram was the future.

Was there something at the back of my brain taking me back to Edinburgh and a certain scenario currently taking place.....????????? I couldn't be CERTain, but I was sure there was ....

Michael Marwick, t4e, November, 2000  
40 Dundas Street, Edinburgh (0131) 556 5938

