



Could this be FUTURE BRITISH URBAN TRANSPORT?

BACK *to* *THE FUTURE!*

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I SUPPOSE that when most people hear the word "tram" they think of a noisy, uncomfortable, clanking vehicle making its unsteady way around many a town or city street of the past. So when I was invited to join Joe Harman and some of his colleagues from the local branch of the Institute of Transport on a trip to look at the new generation of trams I jumped at the chance.

So it was that daybreak one morning in October found us on a coach bound for Sheffield to sample the delights of the South Yorkshire Supertram. We were dropped at the Meadowhall Shopping Mall, a very large complex of shops and stores with a connecting BR station, bus depôt and a terminus for phase one of the Supertram system.

After some refreshment we went a board for our first ride – past the Don Valley Stadium and into the city centre. The trams – all single deckers – comprise three sections, double articulated to form one walk-through compartment. Despite the fact that they are thirty-five metres long and run on BR standard width rails, they can

negotiate some amazingly tight bends. The ride is smooth and quiet with seating for eighty-eight, although each vehicle is capable of carrying 250 people. The two end sections have a low floor, which combined with low platforms at tramstops makes for a one-level walk-on system to ease the access for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

We also visited the *dépôt* which is fully equipped to deal with all the routine maintenance and some of the more serious problems. For major overhauls and repairs the German-built trams have access to BR track on whose lines they travel to the contractor's works.

The entire system, which will stretch from Hillsborough in the north to Mosborough in the south, is budgeted to cost £240m. It will consist of some twenty-seven kilometres of track and will serve forty-two stops and should be complete later this year. Much of the track is off-road but a lot of work has been put into designing and installing special road signs and traffic lights. These can be overridden and operated by the tram driver from inside his cab to gain access to busy junctions. The driver also has radio contact with a central control as well as the ability to talk to his/her passengers.

Tickets can be bought at machines at the tramstops or at a discount in packs of five or ten from retail outlets near the stops. Eventually it is planned that they will be interchangeable with bus and even rail tickets.

And so Sheffield – the last city in England to stop using trams over thirty-four years ago – now has the most modern system in Europe. Who knows, perhaps one day such systems will once again be commonplace in towns and cities around the country! In the meantime, if any of our members visit Sheffield in the months to come I should be pleased to hear their reactions on this exciting project.



SUPERTRAMS BUSY IN SHEFFIELD