

Greater Manchester Transport Campaign

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Regional Centre Transport Strategy Consultation
Transport Policy Unit, Manchester City Council
Room 308, Town Hall
Manchester, M60 2LA

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Dear Sirs,

Regional Centre Transport Strategy, Consultation Report

INTRODUCTION

We refer to the above report and wish to make our strong objections known. May we also protest over the total lack of any previous opportunity for the public to take part in the formulation of this strategy; although of course we note its details were already drawn up by the City Council and the Passenger Transport Authority many months ago to enable these organisations to bid for the Government's TIF funding.

It is also notable that the long and detailed document was finally issued for public consultation over the Christmas/New Year period just when most people are busy with other family matters and voluntary organisations do not meet. It is therefore difficult for them to have had time to read and study let alone absorb the tremendous ramifications involved.

There is so much wrong with the proposals that one hardly knows where to begin since it has been drawn up in a totally theoretical manner worthy of any Communist State, arbitrarily moving transport arteries that have grown up over decades and totally ignoring the wishes of the people affected. No mention of asking what the passengers want because BIG BROTHER knows best.

TIF and CONGESTION CHARGE

The whole concept is, of course, assuming the TIF bid is successful, that the Congestion Charging proposals are implemented and that the GMPTE will be empowered to innovate or withdraw existing bus services at will. There is considerable doubt on all these aspects since many other local authorities who proposed bidding for TIF funding such as Birmingham City Council, have we understand, now withdrawn seeing the conditions as unworkable. We have no doubt that when the public fully understand the Congestion Charge proposals they will be up in arms and major alterations will be required. The gigantic cost of implementation for instance, and the complexity of charging, means that a motorist could drive into Manchester six days running and pay a different amount on five days and nothing on the sixth. London with all its unlimited funds and power sensibly started with the central core area and a set charge and later expanded it and Manchester should do the same.

Page 1 of 4

The Independent Voice for Public Transport Users in Greater Manchester

PARK AND RIDE

It is notable that towns and cities that have successfully revamped their town and city centres have two things in common. They have successful and well used Park and Ride schemes and bus services that go right through the town/city centres without passengers having to change onto shuttle buses. There are numerous examples but York, Nottingham, Cambridge, Oxford, Brighton, Maidstone and Exeter come to mind as examples from different parts of the country and different types of places. There is no mention of Park and Ride schemes in the RCTS document yet the Congestion Charge Scheme cannot work without the implementation of numerous such schemes and although mention is made of new Cross City bus services they are in fact NOT cross city at all but circumnavigate the centre.

CROSS CITY SERVICES

Manchester used to have many well used cross city bus services but these have all been squeezed out by Manchester City Council with the connivance of GMPTA/E. These new services have been drawn up in a totally arbitrary manner such as service CC5 from Stretford to Ashton largely following the route of the proposed Metrolink between these places. CC1 has a curious almost V shape coming from the east and going to the south east and unlikely to attract through custom. CC2 appears to connect Stagecoach's premier service 192 with First Manchester's premier service 8 without giving any reason for doing so. Where for instance, do the passengers from beyond Stockport go? Do they have to change at Stockport or will they have another service ending at Chorlton Street? In fact change seems to be the main result of all the proposals. Bus passengers do not want to change on to Shuttle buses. Just watch how many passengers alighting from a no.17 bus at Shudehill actually then board a No. 2 Shuttle bus. Practically none. Of course, if the majority of passengers arriving at any of the proposed Interchanges did transfer the Shuttle buses would be absolutely swamped. Shuttle buses work well in taking passengers from the rail terminal to their work or shops but rarely otherwise. There are many examples countrywide.

It is interesting to note that the operators of the East Lancashire services to Manchester (X40-X44) took a poll of their passengers as to whether they wanted to go to the new Shudehill Interchange and the answer was a decisive no! But in the plan (CC3) it appears they are told they must go there! BIG BROTHER has spoken! No clear reason is given for service (CC4) linking Chorlton with Middleton but again have any of the public been asked?

The public, of course, have shown over and over again their preference for bus services arriving at and departing from Piccadilly Gardens where traditionally they have always operated. Bus services transferred from there lose many of their passengers whereas ones that change to start from there suddenly gain much custom. If part of the absurd 'Berlin Wall' in Piccadilly Gardens was removed and the equally absurd Bury to Piccadilly tram line through the pedestrian area diverted to its sensible course following the outbound service, there would be room for a reasonably sized bus station just where people want it. It would save much congestion and therefore pollution in nearby streets. The busy yet highly successful Harrogate bus station is an example of how it could be done in a comparable space.

CAR TRAFFIC

If the RCTS strategy is to work it depends on a considerable reduction in car traffic coming into the city centre, something we fully support. However, car drivers will not readily change to a shuttle or any other bus and will seek to go elsewhere such as Trafford Park Shopping Centre or work outside Manchester. There is a real danger that Manchester City Centre could lose out to other centres such as Preston or Liverpool where public transport friendly policies are more to the fore and buses go right through the centre. On the other hand car drivers will transfer to trains or trams if it results in a quicker or more comfortable journey.

As we have repeatedly pointed out in our illustrated newsletters (copies available on request) the existing train services cannot cope because of stupid Government insistence that the Northern franchise (which is actually a contract) does not allow one extra train or even second hand carriage to be obtained. Of course Yorkshire Forward and Merseyside PTA have funded some extra trains in their areas but Greater Manchester PTA has so far failed to help, so we suffer highly dangerous conditions on some local trains. The RCTS document talks glibly of 80/90 extra carriages but no mention of where finance is coming from. It is a NATIONAL DISGRACE that Northern is restricted as they are, when they have obtained such a large increase in usage, but it is now we want the extra train units not in 2012. More motorists would love to commute to Manchester by train now but cannot even get on to go to work. Try Mills Hill Station at 8.15am any weekday morning!

INTERCHANGES

So we are to have four Interchanges, one each at Chorlton Street, Shudehill, Salford Central and Parker Street. Of the four proposed interchanges mentioned only one exists, that at Shudehill. This has been an unmitigated disaster and an appalling waste of £28 million though no doubt the extra 777 car park spaces above it will help to create city centre congestion. A walk through the Interchange will normally reveal it is almost empty. Its design is years out of date, neither the clocks nor the automatic bus bay doors are reliable and the shops which PTA officers assured members would be popular are, apart from the newsagents, totally empty. There is no electronic departure indicator, an essential feature in any modern bus station outside Manchester. A café opened but soon closed as it had no trade and the newsagents are clinging on by their toe nails, perhaps with PTE help! The finger island is without any facilities and freezing cold in winter. Buses enter and leave next to a busy and complicated cross roads which also has Metrolink trams crossing. All passengers have to cross busy bus lanes to get in or out of the Interchange. The bus entrance and exit is also between two sets of traffic lights and pedestrians have to make their way across these roads to the City Centre. No wonder passengers prefer to wait at the Urbis bus stop with no shelter in pouring rain, rather than dice with death to reach Shudehill Interchange. Yet the proposal is to make 110 buses an hour (i.e. 220 movements) use this quite appalling facility. Despite this more such places are planned around the edge of the city centre! We cannot think of any better way of discouraging people from using public transport than wasting millions of pounds on further such facilities. We could comment much more on this aspect but space forbids.

MAYFIELD

We observe that the City Council/PTA/E propose to throw National Express out of their recently partly rebuilt and expensively equipped Chorlton Street Coach Station and use it as one of the new Interchanges with National Express re-located to a new Mayfield Coach Station. Presumably the Mayfield site is still owned by one of the railway's property boards and is a huge and valuable site. This should be largely sold and the funds and part of the existing property used to eliminate the bottle neck between Piccadilly and Oxford Road stations by building additional tracks. This is perfectly feasible and should have been done years ago rather than leave Mayfield Station empty for decades.

With regard to the other proposed Interchanges it is difficult to comment without more details but we cannot see passengers being particularly happy at being set down at say Salford Central when they want to go the Arndale Shopping Centre.

SUMMARY

The RCTS document is ill thought out in many ways and is being rushed through without any proper consultation with the public, whose money is to be used in vast quantities by planners with a pre-conceived idea of what is required. It is also our understanding that outside consultants were used for at least part of the RCTS proposals and we suspect they neither lived locally nor regularly used local public transport or knew its historic context. We reserve the right to comment, criticise or even praise in much more detail as and when opportunity arises and as more details are revealed. Finally, it is suggested that the plans have been drawn up in consultation with the bus operators. That depends on what you mean by consultation since we know of considerable reservations by these operators. However, when they are told this is what we ARE going to do, they try to make the best of it by suggesting slight amendments in the hope they may obtain tenders for services which are subsequently offered, in order to stay in business. It is also of course an opportunity sometimes for larger operators to squeeze out smaller ones and subsequently increase the cost of future tenders through lack of competition. It is notable how this has happened in London in the last few years with many small but well equipped companies going under. Your comments and reply is awaited with interest.

On behalf of Greater Manchester Transport Campaign

TONY FAWTHROP
Chairman