

25 YEARS OF THE PASSENGER TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES AND EXECUTIVES



Representing the **PASSENGER TRANSPORT EXECUTIVES** of Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Strathclyde, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire and London Regional Transport.

FOREWORD

By Baroness Castle: Secretary of State for Transport:

1965 to 1968

It is now 25 years since the first Passenger Transport Executives and their controlling Authorities were formed. During the quarter of a century that has passed since then a great deal has changed in the transport scene, but a great deal has also remained unchanged.

The PTEs themselves have remained basically intact and the major issues that we addressed in the 1968 Transport Act, which introduced them, remain. The full integration of the PTA function into the new urban county structure in 1974 was unfortunately reversed a decade later with the abolition of the metropolitan counties. Transport *integration, co-ordination* of land use, transport and environmental policies and *rationalisation* of ownership and control are still the key issues.

Integration, co-ordination and rationalisation were the keystones of the new approach to transport that I developed in my 1966 and 1967 White Papers. These principles were enshrined in the 1968 Act itself. In the last 25 years many other countries have followed the path that we established with local democratically controlled urban transport authorities charged with addressing the transport challenges brought about through changes in our society.

Increasing car use, decline of traditional urban centres and growing concerns about the health of our planet in general have reinforced the need to carefully plan and use our transport resources. The PTAs are uniquely placed to achieve the development of public transport within a co-ordinated policy framework. Many of the achievements of the PTAs and PTEs - Metro systems, thriving local rail services, interchanges and accessible transport services - are visible and obvious in our major cities. Other achievements - in promoting and encouraging public transport use, in contributing to the vitality of city centres and in securing socially necessary bus services are not so readily visible, but are equally important.

Limitations on finance and changes to the administrative structure and funding of urban local authorities have been obstacles. The PTAs and their Executives have so far been unable to achieve all that I had hoped that they would. Introducing my 1966 White Paper I said "*The basic defects of the present situation are that the main elements in the transport system are separately planned and financed; that transport is not being integrated into the general planning of conurbations and that each urban area, which is a unit from the point of view of its transport requirements, is split between a number of separate authorities*". At times it has seemed that we have lost sight of these facts. At times it may also seem that we are still debating the same issues without resolution.

Against this background the PTEs continue their work under their controlling Authorities. The challenges of 25 years ago are now even greater than when I first addressed them in my White Paper. The PTEs are even more important to the future health and well-being of our great cities. I wish the Authorities and Executives well and hope that the solid arguments for a rational, co-ordinated and integrated transport system for our urban areas continue to gain ground.

INTRODUCTION

*by Mark Dowd, Chairman,
The Association of Metropolitan Authorities and David Howard, Retiring
Chairman, Passenger Transport Executive Group*

This publication has been produced to mark the 25th anniversary of the introduction of Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs) and their Executives (the PTEs). These bodies are responsible for supporting and promoting public transport in seven Passenger Transport Areas - Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Strathclyde, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire. The seven PTAs and their PTEs were actually formed on different dates, but all of the original four - West Midlands, Greater Manchester (originally SELNEC), Merseyside and Tyne and Wear (originally Tyneside) - commenced operations in late 1969 and early 1970.

The PTAs and PTEs represented a radical departure from the proceeding arrangements for public transport in the conurbations and set the scene for the full integration of transport planning functions on formation of the new Metropolitan County Councils in 1974. Each PTA is responsible for setting public transport policy for its area and has a PTE, headed by a Director General, to implement those policies. PTAs and PTEs were originally charged with securing and promoting the provision of a properly integrated and efficient system of public passenger transport, an aim which we believe should still be fundamental to their roles. The Metropolitan County Councils are unfortunately no longer with us, but the PTAs and PTEs continue to develop and promote public transport in their areas with considerable success, albeit without the control they had until 1986.

Looking back over a quarter of a century we can see wealth of new ideas, investment, service developments and facilities for the public which have been introduced by the PTAs and PTEs. From the high profile Metro and Supertram schemes to the ordinary day to day co-ordination, publicity and management tasks, the Executives have translated the forward thinking policies of their Authorities into practice.

There is now even greater recognition of the economic, environmental, mobility and social benefits to be derived from expanding public transport use. We must therefore look to the challenges of the next 25 years and the crucial role that will be played by our PTAs and PTEs. This document is a testament to what can be and is being done. The PTAs and PTEs are ready to face the challenge of the coming decades and an agenda for action is included within this document which sets out what could be done.

25 YEARS OF THE PASSENGER TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES AND THEIR EXECUTIVES

The concept of public transport can trace its roots back to around 1625, when the Hackney Cab in London introduced the notion of a shared vehicle plying for hire. During the next 200 years public transport evolved and grew to include longer distance stagecoach journeys. Frequent, and at times regular, journeys developed in those areas we would now identify as being served by the Passenger Transport Executives. British urban public transport had been born.

1825 marked the start of the Railway Age which was to revolutionise public transport and indeed the whole country. A network of urban railways was built at an incredible rate - within 50 years every significant urban area was accessible by rail. Railways usurped the stagecoach, but in turn created the conurbations and suburbs which shape life today. This pattern gave rise to the first urban bus services, which arrived in the shape of the omnibus.

The first British bus service began in 1824 in Manchester. The real difference between this and a stagecoach operation was the idea of selling each seat more than once, to customers who wanted to travel over only a part of the whole route. Within three years the Stage Carriage Act recognized the existence of bus services in London.

The concepts of road and rail travel combined in the idea of the tramways, the first one of which opened in Birkenhead in 1869. The Tramways Act 1870 marked the beginning of a new age in urban public transport. Local authorities now had to grant permission for the construction of a tramway and had the right to compulsory purchase of the system after twenty one years. Most of the fifty tramways built after the Act did pass to local authorities.

The Road Traffic Act 1930 updated the rules governing operations of bus services. Area Traffic Commissioners were established to take over licensing from local authorities and protect established operators, in return for those operators providing comprehensive, good quality services.

The years immediately after the war brought about many changes. The incoming Labour government created the British Transport Commission, controlling railways through a Railways Executive and bus companies by way of a Road Passenger Executive. In 1951, the Conservatives replaced the Labour Party in Government, abolishing the short lived Road Passenger Executive with most of its plans not implemented. The remaining tramway systems became victims of the desire and need to rebuild and modernise. Plans to invest in the deteriorating railways were made, but the dramatic social changes of the 1960s and a worsening financial outlook conspired to thwart these plans before they were completed.

The 1960s, whilst prosperous for the nation as a whole, proved disastrous for public transport. The growth of the car, coupled with social changes, led to the deterioration of the bus services. Beeching took his axe to the rail network, envisaging a smaller, more specialised railway, with little or no regard for any social role a comprehensive network might play.

By 1963 the growing tide of private traffic in towns and cities was being catered for with new plans for more urban roads. The transition to the 'car culture' was in full swing, but already alarm bells were ringing in some quarters and the reality of the devastation the private motor vehicle would wreak on the towns and cities of Great Britain was beginning to be realised, with the publication of the influential Buchanan Report "Traffic in Towns".

1964 saw a change of Government and a whole new thrust in transport policy. The importance of public transport was realised, both for its value to people who did not have access to a private car and as a necessity to prevent the wholesale destruction of towns and cities.

THE NEED FOR ACTION

Barbara Castle was appointed Minister for Transport in Harold Wilson's Government in 1965. She applied herself wholeheartedly to the task of reviving and updating the Labour Party's agenda for public transport. Rationalisation of ownership, co-ordination and integration were the keystones of a new transport policy.

The new strategy would take on board the issues and concerns of the motor car age, recognizing the link between transport and land use planning.

In July 1966 the first of three White Papers was published, emphasising the crucial role of transport in the economy and efficiency of the nation. The White Paper described the deficiencies of the prevailing system and concluded that the basic elements of transport, road building, traffic policy and public transport remained separately planned and financed and that transport was not being integrated into the planning of conurbations.

The answer put forward was the formation of multi-purpose conurbation authorities who would have complete responsibility for transport policy in their designated areas.

To set about immediately tackling the urgent problems of public transport, new Passenger Transport Authorities were proposed. These authorities would have a fundamental duty of 'securing an efficient, convenient and integrated system of public transport' for their areas.

Within two years of her taking office, Castle's second White Paper and the massive Parliamentary Bill that would lead to the Transport Act 1968 were published.

The December 1967 White Paper; "Public Transport and Traffic" clearly set out the need for action to give a dynamic role to public transport to relieve congestion and pollution and to ensure the mobility of people without cars. Other key points included:

- *Local authorities financially supporting local bus services with the government meeting 50% of any expenditure concerned.*
- *25% capital grants to encourage operators to update and improve their fleets and switch to one person operation.*
- *Reduction in the cost of fuel to operators by expanding the fuel duty rebate scheme.*

The most radical proposals were to apply in the four largest conurbations outside London. Merseyside, Tyneside, West Midlands and Greater Manchester (at the time defined as South East Lancashire and North East Cheshire - SELNEC) would have the first PTAs to take complete responsibility for all bus and rail services in those conurbations. Major investment in public transport infrastructure, including new transport systems, would be encouraged with government grant aid and the new authorities could finance their activities through a right of precept on local authorities in their area.

Each PTA had to produce a plan identifying how they intended to tackle their role of promoting public transport use. They would be free to amalgamate and rationalise municipal bus undertakings in their area, take over or achieve operating agreements with other bus operators, determine rail service levels and fares, set co-ordinated fare levels and ticketing schemes and integrate all public transport.

It was promised that the authorities would be given the powers, the money and the government backing to make public transport succeed. In the temporary absence of the planned all-modes conurbation transport authorities, the Transport Bill provided statutory co-operation requirements between the PTAs and highway authorities on traffic planning.

The new PTAs would be composed of elected representatives from the local authorities which provided funding, together with a number of representatives appointed by the Minister. The policies determined by these elected representatives would be implemented by Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs), bodies of professionals who would plan and manage public transport in their areas.

ENGINES OF CHANGE

West Midlands was the first PTA. It, along with its PTE, came into being on 1 October 1969, SELNEC, Merseyside and Tyneside followed at monthly intervals.

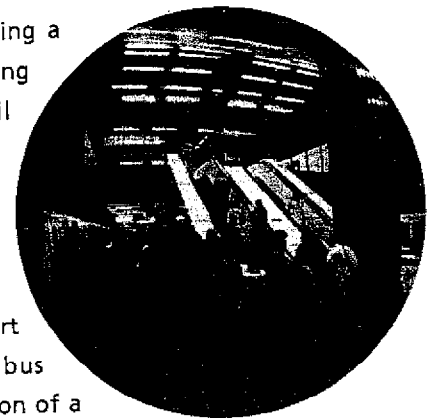
The PTEs at once faced the massive task of bringing together disparate and, in some cases, physically isolated municipal bus fleets to form a single cohesive unit. Remaining bus operators then had to be considered and decisions made to bring them into the overall centrally-planned and integrated scheme. Rail services also had to be considered in this scheme and many other issues concerning fares, ticketing, corporate identity, control and organisation all demanded simultaneous and immediate attention.

Not only did the newly-created PTEs have to organise for today, they also had to plan for the future. The 1968 Transport Act had built high expectations and each of the PTEs had to set a new agenda involving major investments in upgrading and expanding public transport.

Ownership of the railways presented no immediate difficulties thanks to the Section 20 agreements under which British Rail would provide the services specified by the PTAs. The problems came, however, in the shape of sadly neglected and run-down urban rail operations, badly in need of investment and renewal. Rolling stock was from the 1950's modernisation era, frequencies were poor and fares and services were uncoordinated. Railways were expensive to support but carried relatively few public transport users.

All four PTEs commenced major studies to determine the future of rail services; should they be developing conventional rail networks, replacing them with light rapid transit systems or even abandoning them entirely?

Tyneside PTA commissioned consultants to examine its options concerning a poor quality rail service that had been 'de-electrified' 10 years earlier. Using light rapid transit to upgrade the bulk of the existing suburban rail network, with new route sections designed to give better city penetration was chosen and, as a result, the Tyneside Metropolitan Railways Act 1973 was secured to give powers for the scheme.



The Tyne and Wear Metro provided the backbone for a public transport network based around interchanges, co-ordinated fares and local bus networks. Through ticketing and connections, coupled with the promotion of a totally integrated system, led to it being hailed as a world-renowned example and as such it attracted visitors from around the globe. By the time the first section of Metro opened however, the financial restraints of the 1970's and the new market forces of the incoming Conservative administration had ensured that none of the other conurbations could realise the dream of such a comprehensive integrated solution.

Merseyside's Transport Plan, published in 1972, provided for a major recasting of rail services, with new lines, electrification and incorporating a new cross city 'Loop and Link' construction in tunnels through Liverpool to replace the Victorian terminals which lay on the edge of the city centre. Luckily, Merseyside had already done much of the groundwork for this scheme before the PTA was formed and it was therefore able to beat the incoming financial squeeze and at least go ahead with the core elements of its strategy. As in Tyneside, bus services were to be re-organised to play a feeder role into local interchanges.

West Midlands proposed only one rail line for major upgrading and placed much more emphasis on the role of bus services in the conurbation. The Transport Development Plan published in 1972 identified the small role played by rail services in the West Midlands and actually picked out several lines that would be better replaced by bus services.

SELNEC based its plan around Picc-Vic an underground rail system linking the physically separate north and south rail systems in the area. Providing this link had been a major transport objective for over a century and Picc-Vic offered better city centre access, operational efficiencies and strategic development of the strongest rail routes. Although Parliamentary Powers were obtained, the money to build the tunnel was never forthcoming and it was finally abandoned in the late 1970's.

All the development plans from the new PTAs and PTEs focused on the major capital projects planned and all embraced the new philosophy of transport integration. Bus, rail and LRT were to form part of a complete network of public transport designed to provide a practical and attractive alternative to the private car.

Barbara Castle's vision of conurbation transport authorities with responsibility for all areas of transport and planning was realised in 1972, when the Local Government Act, conceived by a Labour administration was supported and implemented by the following Conservative administration. The new Metropolitan Counties commenced operations on 1 April 1974. They took responsibility for education, highways and social services as well as public transport, for which they took on the functions of PTAs.

At national level, the new Department of the Environment took on responsibility for all land use and parking functions and the Ministry of Transport was merged with it. These re-organisations led to the introduction of the annual Transport Policies and Programmes documents which formed the basis for the allocation of central government funding via Transport Supplementary Grants. These documents set out full details of all transport schemes that individual authorities intended to pursue. Public transport revenue support and capital investment were therefore included along with highways spending.

The four original PTAs had been augmented by a fifth, Greater Glasgow, in 1973. New authorities for West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire were now added. The English PTA's names and boundaries were altered to follow the new county boundaries. Consequently, Tyneside became Tyne and Wear and SELNEC became Greater Manchester. West Midlands PTA grew to include the City of Coventry and a large slice of predominantly rural Warwickshire. In Merseyside, Southport and St Helens were added. Greater Manchester now encompassed Wigan whilst Tyne and Wear now included Sunderland.

Authorities in South Yorkshire had already started work on the Sheffield and Rotherham Land Use Transportation Study before the PTA was created. This study set transport policy for the new PTA. It picked out light rail as being the appropriate way forward for the area and set in motion studies which would lead ultimately to the construction of the South Yorkshire Supertram.

In West Yorkshire where, following the Buchanan Report of 1963, a number of important experiments with improved bus services had been carried out in Leeds, the new County Council commissioned a major Land Use Transportation Study - WYTConsult - to shape its new policies.

Greater Glasgow occupied a unique position in that the Regional Council that became its PTA in 1975 covered a huge area including the large conurbation based on Glasgow as well as remote villages in Argyllshire, Ayrshire and Lanarkshire and even off-shore islands! The new Regional Council was therefore to function as PTA in the Greater Glasgow area with the PTE acting as its agent to co-ordinate bus, rail, ferry and air services in the remainder.

The formation of the new counties and the wholesale reorganisation of local government was a massive task. When the new structure came into being on 1 April 1974 (one year later in Scotland) the aim of developing fully integrated conurbation transport strategies as identified in the 1966 White Paper was still a long way off.

The period surrounding and immediately following these immense changes was a fairly unstable one, with changes in government, the oil crisis of 1973, miners strikes resulting in power cuts and three day weeks, escalating inflation and evidence of the start of a recession. This was not an ideal situation for the birth of a bold new concept, particularly as major changes in urban transport strategy would require considerable expenditure.

Financial considerations moved more to the fore from 1974 with emphasis being placed heavily on value for money and efficient use of scarce resources. Tony Crosland, Labour Secretary of State for the Environment, started work on a transport policy review which was to be published as a consultative document in 1976. It emphasised efficiency, curtailing subsidy to those who did not need it (especially long-distance rail travellers and motorists) and ensuring customer choice and local democracy.

The notion of a PTA covering a whole region or sub region was restated as the way of ensuring both efficiency and accountability in Local Transport, but the worsening financial crisis with the strict requirements imposed on the UK economy by the International Monetary Fund was to take its toll before these concepts could be fully realised.

The White Paper published the next year again had at its heart the idea of a co-ordinated and efficient system of public transport. However, from 1976 transport was once again taken out of the Environment ministry - a move which did not bode well for the integrated planning and transport processes that had been identified as essential in the previous decade.

FROM INTEGRATION TO MARKET FORCES

In 1978 the Conservative opposition party began to question whether 'market forces' could provide greater efficiency in public transport rather than networks planned and funded by local authorities. In 1979 the Conservatives gained power. Norman Fowler, the architect for these ideas was appointed Secretary of State for Transport. Legislative changes seemed inevitable.

The Transport Act 1980 implemented a few apparently modest reforms that at first sight

appeared to have relatively little significance for urban public transport. Three trial areas were established in largely rural areas in which bus service licensing was removed and bus operators were free to provide services where and when they chose and to compete with each other. Revenue support was no longer applied to a complete network of services, but local county councils could "buy in" any socially necessary services that the market was not offering. The results of these trials were not waited for before Nicholas Ridley, the new Transport Secretary appointed in October 1983, took the decision to press on further down the road of deregulation.

The Transport Act 1983 gave the Secretary of State for Transport powers to lay down limits for the maximum amount of public transport revenue support that could be paid in London and the PTA areas. Failure to keep within the guide-lines could lay the authority concerned open to legal challenge. The PTAs, along with London Transport, would henceforth have to submit annual financial plans incorporating three year forward programmes for government approval.

Upon his appointment as Secretary of State for Transport, Nicholas Ridley had made it clear that his aim was the complete deregulation and privatisation of bus operations. Ridley stuck firmly to his views in spite, it must be said, of many representations and well presented evidence suggesting that this was not the wisest route.

The House of Commons Transport Committee also recommended at this time that London should join the ranks of the PTAs. However, the government decided to remove any element of local political control from public transport in the capital by establishing London Regional Transport as a body directly accountable to the Secretary of State.

In 1984 the Government indicated that it intended to abolish the Metropolitan County Councils and the Greater London Council. In Scotland, however, there would, for the present, be no change to Local Government. The English PTEs were to return to the control of PTAs consisting of elected representatives from each metropolitan borough council in the area. A local authority could, if it so wished, opt out of its local PTA. The Government at first appeared quite keen that this should happen, but all of the metropolitan boroughs have chosen to remain with the PTA and PTE system, recognizing the benefits it offers.

Despite the uncertain future of transport in the conurbations, the metropolitan county councils pressed on with their plans for improving public transport and a number of bold new transport schemes were launched in their dying months. Two major examples were light rail schemes, Midland Metro was proposed by West Midlands PTE and Metrolink was proposed in Greater Manchester.

In July 1984, Nicholas Ridley's White Paper 'Buses' proposed that all PTE controls over routes, services, frequencies and fares for 'commercial' services would end and that only the function of securing services 'which would not otherwise be required' through competitive tenders would remain. The National Bus Company (and later Scottish Bus Group) would be broken up and



privatised and PTAs would be required to reform their undertakings as 'arms length' companies as a precursor to disposal. The PTEs could no longer exert any direct control over the availability, quality or price of bus services in their area.

Despite considerable reservations expressed on behalf of most of the main organisations concerned with local public transport, whether local authorities, operators or consumer groups, and a powerful report arguing for a different approach from the influential House of Commons Transport Committee, the "Buses" White Paper proposals were enacted with few significant changes as the Transport Act 1985.

TRIED AND TESTED SOLUTIONS

WHY THE PTAS AND PTEs REMAIN ESSENTIAL

Following the Transport Act 1985 it might appear that PTAs and PTEs had been left with virtually no role other than that of specifying rail services for their areas. This has proved not to be the case.

The continual process of 'filling the gaps' in the commercial bus networks is a major task on its own. The PTEs also have to answer the challenges of providing accurate and accessible information on ever-shifting services, maintenance and improvement of bus infrastructure and operation of multi-operator ticketing systems and concessionary fare schemes.

The practically simultaneous abolition of the metropolitan county councils and deregulation of local bus services made it extremely difficult for the PTAs and PTEs to play a mainstream role in urban transport policy. Whilst the PTEs sought to maintain close working relationships with all the borough councils in their areas it was inevitably far more difficult to maintain any strategic approach to transport policy through a whole conurbation.

Many local authority boundaries within conurbations are based on historical or administrative divisions and have little to do with the realities of transport networks and patterns of travel. The recent readoption of a Package Approach method of dealing with roads and transport policies is, at least in part, a response to this fragmentation. The Package Approach, endorsed by the Department of Transport in 1993, recognizes the inter-relationship of all elements of transport, including public transport, and provides a mechanism for proposals to be considered for all modes simultaneously.

financial structure

The PTAs and PTEs have had to cope with further changes. The first of these limited the Transport Supplementary Grant to capital expenditure on roads and traffic schemes, excluding public transport. This has been partially reversed with the recently-introduced Package Approach, but

the years of isolation have not helped promote public transport schemes, nor achieve the balance that social and environmental policies require between the use of public transport and private cars.

Up until 1990 the English PTAs secured their funding through a direct precept on their city and borough councils. When the Community Charge was introduced in April 1990, a levy regime was adopted instead, whereby the PTAs' funding was given to the districts as part of their overall funding. The overall level of financial support does, in theory, provide for the same level of financial support, but the system lacks 'transparency' and it is virtually impossible to identify where Government funds have been provided for public transport. Continuing restraints on local authority spending have led to severe financial restraints on the PTAs and PTEs. Grant Aid and authority to borrow money under Supplementary Credit Approvals falls short of what is needed by the PTAs and PTEs to progress new projects.

information and ticketing

Following deregulation, the unstable and constantly changing nature of the bus network has made the provision of timetable information increasingly challenging. All the PTEs have established services for their areas offering comprehensive and independent advice on travel. The PTEs' efforts have gone well beyond this with new electronic information displays at terminals, multi-lingual information leaflets and the supply of many millions of timetable leaflets each year. In the West Midlands, the PTE, now known as Centro, have pushed forward the frontiers of real-time passenger information systems with a major project designed to provide high quality public transport information throughout the conurbation. Buses are tracked by satellite, which then predicts the time of their arrival at stops along the whole length of a route. This information is relayed to electronic displays at the bus stops themselves, enabling the passenger to know how long they will have to wait. This exciting development forms part of a major initiative in managing traffic and public transport, supported by European development funding.

Without any direct control, the PTEs now have to persuade bus operators of the merits of participating in promotion and ticketing schemes. Many operators were reluctant to join in such schemes preferring to keep their distance from public authority control and use the competitive advantage of their own pre-paid tickets.

All-operator network ticketing schemes were effectively lost in South Yorkshire and West Midlands. They have now been reinstated, but with a greatly reduced volume of sales.

West Yorkshire's scheme continued very successfully immediately after deregulation, but has since been weakened because of price rises and the introduction of new operator tickets. In Tyne and Wear the PTE agreed to relinquish control over ticketing in favour of a new 'stand alone' company which operates network ticketing on behalf of all operators. GMPTE similarly formed a new joint ticketing operation with operators. GMPTE is also introducing a system of smartcard ticketing, using rechargeable pre paid tickets which will eventually be usable across the full spectrum of modes and operators within the county. It is the first such scheme of its type in the world, encompassing three different transport

modes.

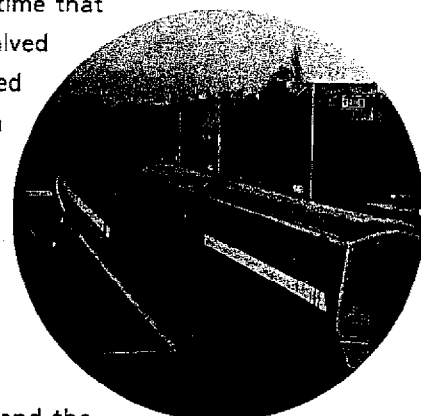


rail

With much of the bus network out of PTE control additional emphasis was placed on the role of rail services after 1985. Since their formation, all the PTAs have pursued a policy of improving rail services through the opening of new stations and lines, co-ordination and ticketing initiatives, specifying frequent services and the financing of new rolling stock.

Strathclyde has the largest urban rail network outside London with 170 stations, and has added four new lines and 26 new stations to its network. In the three years following 1986, after a comprehensive review of rail services 57 new trains were introduced or ordered.

Many passengers moved from bus to rail following deregulation. In West Yorkshire in 1987, an 82% increase in rail patronage was recorded over six years at the same time that efficiency improvements had reduced subsidy by 25%. This more than halved the subsidy cost per passenger which actually fell below that for supported non-commercial bus services. Metro, the PTE, responded to this growth both by increasing frequencies on the network and by leasing its own trains, as British Rail could not supply all the units necessary to cope with such substantial growth. Services north of Leeds and Bradford, once proposed for closure by Beeching, will commence electric operation in 1995.



The 1993 Railway Act, which provides for the break-up of British Rail and the tendering of rail operations by a new Rail Franchise Director also presents a significant obstacle to the PTEs' aims of improving and maintaining satisfactory rail services in their areas. Prior to this Act each PTE was able to negotiate the service and fares package it required directly with British Rail under a 'section 20' agreement. New trains and stations could be funded in conjunction with service proposals and, through the agreement of a national framework for service quality, penalties could be applied to British Rail for operating failures or below standard performance.

Under the new system the PTEs will not be able to negotiate directly for their own service agreements and will have to operate via the Franchising Director. In addition, the industry is being fragmented, with ownership of the infrastructure passing to Railtrack (which will be privatised in due course). There will be at least twenty-five different Train Operating Companies of which as many as five may be involved in serving an individual PTE area. This will greatly increase the problems of pursuing an integrated approach to the promotion of rail services. Moreover, the cost of providing the current level of service under the new regime has escalated considerably. A concerted campaign by PTAs and PTEs has led to some amendments to the original terms of the Act in order to preserve and protect future interests. However, many issues remain to be resolved and all the PTEs are deeply concerned at the effect the Act is having on their rail services.

light rail

A new breed of trams is emerging in Britain today, initiated by the PTAs and PTEs. In London, Docklands Light Rail opened in 1987, and was the first Light Rapid Transit construction since the

Tyne and Wear Metro. In 1988, after delay during which the government considered whether or not bus deregulation still left LRT schemes with a part to play in public transport, GMPTE secured Parliamentary approval for Metrolink and set about achieving the next difficult target set by government - involving the private sector in its funding and operation. The following year Greater Manchester PTA announced the private sector partners and construction started in 1990. The first on-street light rapid transit system in the UK was subsequently opened by Her Majesty The Queen on July 17, 1992. Within 12 months of opening the new system carried over 12 million passengers a year and was acclaimed a major success. It is reliable, clean, fast, frequent, accessible to all, and attractive to users. The fact that 40% of Metrolink passengers have a car available to them, but choose the tram instead is a substantial indictment of its contribution towards congestion relief. Metrolink receives no operating subsidy. GMPTE have already made plans to greatly expand the system.

LRT developments have continued in the wake of Metrolink across the country, with the first stages of the South Yorkshire Supertram opening during 1994. Further stages are due to open in the next 18 months. Other schemes coming along are Centro's Midlands Metro and Leeds Supertram. Strathclyde has also cleared its proposals and is about to commence Parliamentary procedures.

bus

In 1985 the PTEs and London Transport were all major bus operators in their own right, accounting for 42% of all local bus passengers. Under the 1985 Transport Act the major state-owned bus companies were broken up and privatised and the former PTE operations were formed into 'stand alone' companies with a commercial remit. The government's view was that these stand alone companies should be privatised at the earliest opportunity and they retained powers to require the PTAs to break them up into smaller units.

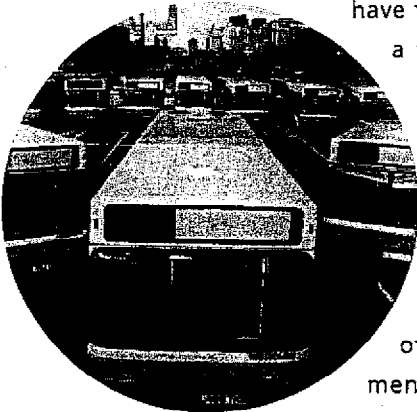
Faced with the threat of break-up, and increasing restraint on capital expenditure which necessarily disadvantaged the companies, each of the PTAs in turn reluctantly decided that the best course of action was to offer the management and employees of the companies the right to purchase them. In 1988 West Yorkshire sold its company - Yorkshire Rider - to a management and employee buy-out team. This process continued with the Tyne and Wear Company in 1989, West Midlands in 1991 and subsequently by South Yorkshire, Strathclyde, Merseyside and Greater Manchester (in two halves).

Unlike the rest of the country, London had been spared the full effects of deregulation. A programme of route tendering began in 1985 and by the end of 1994 just over half of the local network had been secured by competitive tender. This process has achieved similar cost reductions to the full deregulated operating environment whilst avoiding the disruption, instability and the excessive competition on more popular routes which have become the hallmarks of deregulation in the conurbations.

The use of bus services fell by a quarter in the years following bus deregulation in 1986, despite an increase in bus mileage. In Strathclyde for instance, a 14% loss of passengers was accompanied by a 30% increase in bus miles operated. A parallel increase in traffic congestion

was noted, particularly in cities such as Sheffield, where low fares policies had suppressed the growth in car ownership which had been experienced elsewhere.

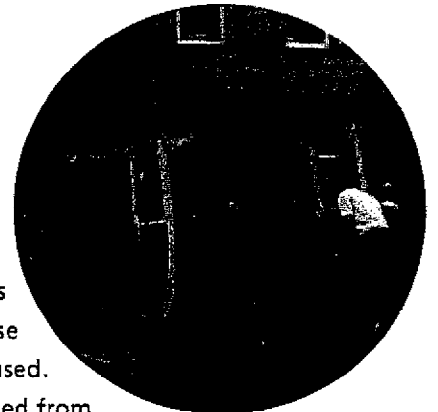
Increasingly concerned at the lowering of quality standards in bus operations and the public perception of buses as a product of 'last resort', Merseytravel started work on a range of initiatives in 1992, designed to rectify this problem. Higher quality standards on the secured bus services through training requirements and high quality vehicle specifications have contributed towards these goals, but the PTE were determined to show that bus services do not have to be downmarket and could attract passengers. The result is SMARTBUS, a four route demonstration package of high quality operation which started in February 1994.



Metro and Leeds City Council have co-operated to enable work to start on the first stages of a guided busway system for Leeds. This project involves the construction of short sections of segregated bus guideway, both on and next to dual carriageways. It will be the first demonstration of this technology within a major city in the UK, other than an experimental project in the West Midlands. Bus guideways can be provided in conjunction with existing highways at modest cost and with an appropriate agreement with bus operators, investment in high quality buses can provide the basis of a 'quality bus partnership'.

accessibility

Making public transport accessible to all members of the community both physically and financially, is a policy of all PTAs. Accessible bus services such as Ring and Ride, Dial-a-bus and Mobility Bus, along with schemes to make mainstream buses more accessible by way of grant schemes for operators all play a part in realising this policy. Other schemes such as Travel Vouchers and TaxiCard systems, allowing people unable to use conventional buses to purchase discounted taxi travel have also been used. Metrolink in Greater Manchester and the Sheffield Supertram were designed from the outset to be wheelchair accessible.



Administering and funding concessionary fares schemes for elderly and disabled people has also been a major use of resources following the 1985 Transport Act.

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

The last 25 years have seen huge changes in the provision of public transport in the PTA areas. There can be little doubt that these changes will continue and probably even accelerate in the years to come. There are three driving forces behind such changes; economic, social and environmental - each of which overlap and are often contradictory. A fourth, crucial factor is the

response of central government to the other three. It is obvious that public transport must play an increasingly important role in urban areas and that plans must be put into motion now to enable it to do so.

The Economy

The indications are that economic growth is now resuming after the deep recession of 1990-92, and this is already having an impact on employment and traffic levels. Department of Transport statistics show that road traffic resumed its upward trend in the fourth quarter of 1993. Traffic levels in the second quarter of 1994 were five per cent higher than in the previous year. Overall growth in the economy, plus continued assistance for underdeveloped regions of the country - many of which fall within PTE boundaries - will increase demand for existing public transport services, but also - and more importantly - for scarce road space in urban areas.

Traffic congestion is inflicting a heavy penalty on our economy and our environment. Assessments by the Confederation of British Industry suggest that already the annual cost of urban traffic congestion exceeds £15bn. The time penalty and additional fuel costs of heavy traffic have a direct effect on the costs of services and goods in the shops. These costs also leave British Industry in a poorer position when competing with other European countries, who have on average invested almost three times as much per head of population in their urban public transport systems, successfully persuading commuters to reduce congestion by taking the bus, tram or train and leaving their cars at home or at a station.

The success of projects such as Metrolink in encouraging road users to move from car to public transport demonstrates the value for money that can be obtained from investment in public transport. The PTEs are eager to stimulate a change in transport use that would relieve the economy of a substantial part of the cost penalties of congestion. Through both investment in infrastructure and services and through marketing and promotion of public transport the investment in the future can provide a healthy dividend.

The Social Aspect

More prosperity will have an impact on car ownership. Car ownership in the UK is still lower per head of population than in most other European countries, including France and Germany. It is more than likely that car ownership in this country will increase. The urban areas for which the PTEs are responsible currently have a lower level of car ownership than other areas of the country, therefore it is reasonable to assume that any increase in car ownership due to a growth in prosperity will have a disproportionate effect on these areas.

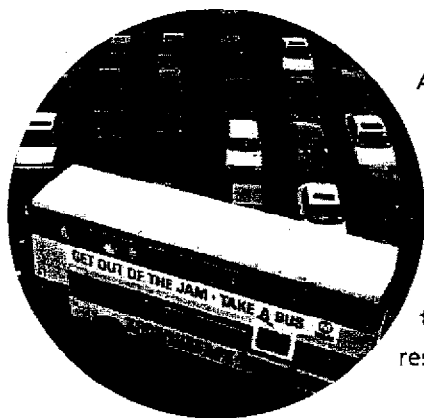
This situation was anticipated in the most recent National Road Traffic Forecast, which predicts that traffic levels will grow between 68% and 112% between 1991 and 2025 - a prediction that was greeted with horror in many quarters, not least the Department of Environment. Assuming it is not acceptable for a democratic society to restrict car ownership, what can be done to stop its continued expansion creating gridlock in our towns and cities? A shift in social attitudes towards private motoring certainly provides a partial answer to this problem, a solution strongly advocated by the report of the Royal Committee on Environmental Pollution published in November 1994.

There is growing recognition amongst the public of the adverse impact which car travel has on congestion and the environment. The awareness is there, and as past campaigns concerning smoking and drink driving show, the public's views on what is and is not socially acceptable can be shifted. There are other positive aspects too; for example, the greater environmental awareness amongst young people, although this does not seem to have eliminated their desire to own their own personal means of transport. What must be emphasised is that car ownership need not equate to use. As continental Europe shows, high car ownership need not mean declining public transport - the best mode should be chosen for each journey.

A third important factor in the social impact on transport is the growth of teleworking. Modern information technology and communications are allowing a growing percentage of people to work from home, only travelling between home and office once or twice a week instead of every day. An increasing number of companies are becoming aware of the productivity benefits and cost savings which can result from embracing such concepts. Further moves towards this kind of working routine will undoubtedly impact upon transport needs, reducing overall peak demands but making journey patterns much more diverse.

The Environment

Transport is a major contributor to environmental pollution. Whether it is the particles and smoke, noxious gases such as sulphur or nitrogen oxides or the unseen greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide that come from vehicle exhausts, transport is about the only area of the economy for which both the volume and proportion of pollution caused is continuing to grow. Although public transport, particularly old buses, is not entirely innocent, increasing the numbers of travellers using buses, trams or trains rather than their own cars would help to reverse these trends.



A second, more readily apparent and understandable aspect of pollution is the quality of the air we breathe. Experience in major cities during the hot summer of 1994 has illustrated that graphically. The growth of asthma and other respiratory diseases amongst children is causing grave concern and the statistical projections are frightening - 1.8 million premature deaths in the UK due to atmospheric pollution from road vehicles over the next 25 years, coupled with an extra seven million people with respiratory problems leading to significant disability.

As the evidence in this area mounts it may well have a decisive effect on social attitudes towards motoring. However, public transport is also likely to be the subject of a good deal of this concern. There is growing evidence of the carcinogenic properties of particulate emissions from diesel engines. The environmental impact of transport infrastructure investment is now an accepted part of the transport planner's life; major road building schemes to accommodate traffic growth in urban areas are becoming far less acceptable and other measures, to ration scarce road space and make more efficient use of it, are inevitable.

The Government's Response

Central government is responding gradually to the new environmental imperatives which are increasingly driving transport policy.

As part of its policies to fulfil its Rio commitments, there is a promise to increase the cost of motoring by five per cent a year in real terms. Depending on what happens to public transport fares, this may be expected to have an impact on the use which existing car users make of their vehicles and could also have the effect of raising the threshold at which consumers consider they can afford to buy and run a car.

Road pricing - rationing scarce urban road space by price, is also under examination. Though expensive to implement, road pricing could have a decisive effect on travel habits. As well as increasing the cost of motoring, road pricing (or congestion charging) would bring home to the motorist the impact of his or her own choice and end the situation where using a road, as opposed to boarding a bus or train, is free at the point of use. Central government is reportedly contemplating legislation to grant individual local authorities powers to introduce road pricing in their areas.

Another key change is the recent updating of the Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 issued by the Department of Environment to local authorities. Local authorities are now asked to look at restraining traffic growth in planning future development and a presumption in favour of public transport is inherent in the planning evaluation process. Recent instructions emphasise the need to take particular account of transport implications in the planning process, with three primary aims - to reduce growth in the length and number of motorised journeys, to encourage alternative means of travel which have less environmental impact and thus to reduce reliance on the private car.

It is obvious that public transport is going to play an essential and increasingly important role in providing an alternative to the car for many journeys.

To fulfil this role, public transport must be an attractive alternative, not the sub-standard product intended for those with no other option that it can sometimes seem to be today. Services must be high quality, reliable, user-friendly, accessible and well-marketed - points which all the Passenger Transport Authorities and Executives have taken on board in their policy making and planning for the future.

Additionally public transport must be in a position to cope with increased demands; the attractive alternative needs to be in place before the motorist is persuaded from his car, not after he is forced out. This cannot happen overnight - the plans must be made now and implemented quickly. More needs to be done, both in terms of putting existing plans into practice and developing new ones. The PTAs and PTEs are key players to drive forward transport policies and plans, working with their constituent Councils to ensure that the balance between public and private transport is correctly struck.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

There is a great deal to be done and there are several key reforms which would make the job of the PTEs, and transport planners in other areas of the country, both easier and much more effective:

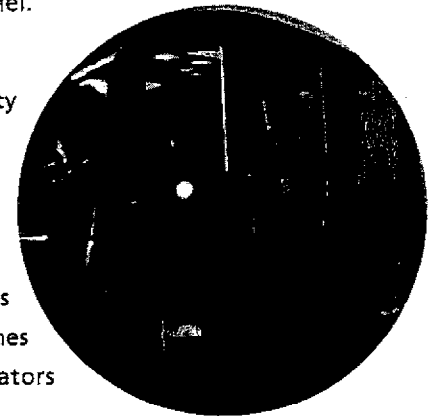
Investment funds

The first thing is to obtain early support from the government to allow investment in those schemes which are approaching readiness for implementation. Such projects include light rail schemes in Greater Manchester, Leeds, Tyne and Wear and West Midlands. A positive indication could result in work being speeded up and the new lines being ready to serve the public that much earlier, especially as this will increase the confidence of the private sector to invest themselves in these important schemes.

Greater Manchester's light rail system, the extension of Merseyrail electric services to Chester and Ellesmere Port, the modernisation of the Glasgow Underground and the success stories in South and West Yorkshire, and the opening of the rail link to Manchester Airport all prove that the public does respond to well-planned, high quality public transport services.

All the light rail systems currently proposed in the UK could be built for £2.7 billion over the next five years; another £500 million could see virtually all the rail lines in PTE areas electrified - providing massive environmental, economic and transportation benefits to millions of people at less than half the amount of money it has taken to build the Channel Tunnel.

The second requirement is to assist bus operators to improve the quality and age profile of their fleets. Not only would such an initiative, through investment grants or tax concessions, improve the image of the bus in the eyes of the general public, it would also deliver genuine environmental benefits in reduced emissions and greater fuel efficiency. The provision of grants linked to fully accessible, more environmentally friendly vehicles would also yield improvements in efficiency through reduced loading times as well as opening up a whole new market for public transport operators amongst people currently unable to use mainstream bus services.



The third requirement is to make more funds available for authorities to study and promote further enhancements to public transport. The development of plans for a light rail line or a guided busway is at the moment an expensive gamble. Such development can cost several millions of pounds, with the risk that the money could be wasted if government assistance for the construction of the schemes is not forthcoming. A firm indication would encourage private sector partnerships for major schemes, since it would reduce the risks involved in bidding for expensive projects.

Local Decision making

Government needs to ease the restrictions currently in force around local spending decisions. With 85 per cent of local authority finance coming from the Treasury, local authorities' ability to respond to the needs of their people is severely restricted. A return of the Passenger Transport Authorities' precepting status, with decisions made by local politicians accountable to local people, would be a major improvement on the arcane and complex arguments about Whitehall-imposed spending assessments.

Other local funding strategies that have been adopted in parts of Europe, such as local levies on fuel sales, employment or sales taxes might also provide a democratic and locally accountable means of raising funding for public transport. These alternatives have proved efficient and acceptable elsewhere and should be fully investigated in the UK.

Co-ordination powers

Planning for a major upsurge in public transport patronage requires efficient allocation of resources and an avoidance of wasteful duplication. In such circumstances it surely makes sense for the PTEs once again to play a greater part in shaping the local bus networks, possibly via the sort of comprehensive tendering arrangements which have proved so successful in London. This combines all the benefits of co-ordination and integration, whilst retaining the successful cost-cutting performance of privatisation.

Now that all the metropolitan bus companies are in private hands there can be no concerns about PTAs favouring their own operations. With the formation of very large national bus groups, it is essential that the PTEs, in exercising the policies of local authorities are able to deal with these powerful new organisations on equal terms. The route tendering system does keep costs down, encourages serious and long term competition between responsible operators and ensures both stability and high quality standards for customers.

Since deregulation, the loss of bus passengers in London has been held at 0.3% per annum compared to 4.7% loss in the former metropolitan counties. Fares in these areas have increased at twice the London rate and the average age and condition of bus fleets has worsened markedly. All of these facts point to the need to extend the London route tendering system or a development of it to the other conurbations.

The European Dimension

The sort of problems and policy dilemmas we face on the future of transport in urban areas are by no means unique to the UK. They are present throughout Europe and the western world.

A lot can be gained by working together with our European partners in these matters, both in terms of sharing experience, research results and best practice, and also using the resources of the European Union to assist in developing transport infrastructure across all member states.

There is a great deal to learn and more to do; nothing less than the future wealth, health and very survival of our urban communities is at stake.