Off your trolley?
Following the collapse of the Supertram scheme for Leeds, and rising levels of traffic in the city, the debate about how to improve our transport facilities rages on.

The last trolleybus journey in Bradford

If Supertram is not to be the answer - what is?

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All sorts of solutions are proposed for improving the lot of travellers to, and around, Leeds.

One possible solution that has its adherents is the trolleybus - a bus powered by overhead wires, from which the bus draws electricity using two trolley poles.

Ironically it was Leeds, back in 1911, that was the first city to see such buses run. Near-neighbour Bradford was the last place to see a trolleybus collecting passengers, the vehicles were in action as late as 1972.

Gary Stevenson speaks for the Yorkshire Tbus Group, described 'as a loose confederation of individuals concerned about transport solutions in Yorkshire', he says:

"Trolleybuses would solve the transport problem in Leeds, it is a solution that is cheaper than a tram but, if you do it right, you get the quality of a tram."

"They are very quiet you don't get the shake, rattle and roll of a tram." Gary Stevenson

"One downside of a trolleybus is that ordinary diesel buses are easier to switch to onto a different route or even another town."

The majority of transport users in Leeds may well not care what transport system is chosen as long as it provides a regular and reliable service, and maintains traffic flow through the city. What would you do?

Have Your Say
What transport option(s) would best sort out Leeds' problems?

Your name:
Sue Murphy
There is too much pollution in Leeds. we need clean transport to combat traffic fumes. If trolley buses do this then thats a step forward

Ed McAndrew
I read recently that they’re going to put buses on the supertram routes instead of trams. I hope these aren't going to be DIESEL buses - we don't want even more pollution in Leeds!

Michael Taylor
One clear advantage with trolley buses is there ability to climb hills, the proposed route of the Supertram could be run, plus because they go up hills as well as a regular bus then it could be taken up to the airport instead of terminusing at Boddington Hall, there are no rails to get broken by HGVs. Eventually a Western route could be built over to Pudsey, into Bradford City Centre and like the Tyne and Wear Metro, two cities could have an intergrated transport system.

Jonathan Glover
I've just had a look at the tbusleeds.org.uk site and it looks like a great idea for Leeds. I hope the authorities are thinking seriously about this, we need something environmentally sound.

John Fines
Trolleybuses sound like a really sensible idea to me - so don't expect to see them anytime soon in Leeds!

P. A. Edwards
Make buses show up on time. That would be great. Please put in better street lamps on walking routes to bus stops and stations. Design improvements can make many routes safer when dark. Trolley buses are fine with me.

Linda Mawson
I think that the best thing would be to introduce a trolleybus network on the same routes that they planned for the supertram, then back this up with lots of new suburban railway stations. This would still work out cheaper than the supertram and it would go a long way towards solving the traffic problems.

Helen Lowfield
I have seen electric trolleybuses on the continent. They are really quiet and clean. The ones they have in Geneva are really big and take loads of passengers. What I want to know is why can't we have them here?? Why is it that we can't seem to get our act together in this country when it comes to transport?

Peter Phillipson
Liz suggests a congestion charge - but few people would be willing to pay - instead they will go to other cities - and Leeds City centre would enter into a spiral of decay, disinvestment, etc with eventually it suffering a slow, lingering, painful death. Because of the air pollution issue there is a good case for bringing in both trams and trolleybuses - and reopening / electrifying more local railway lines - and instead replacing ALL the diesel buses and trains in our area. Britain is one of the richest nations around - if money was spent with wisdom we *could* afford these investments - the real problem seems to be that with so much money being raked in from motorists our beloved government does not want good public transports, in case that revenue stream is reduced. If the wastage of money down the EU black hole
was stopped so much would be saved that all British cities could get clean electric street transports, taxes cut, and the British rebate sorted out too!

Irvine Bell
Many of the postings on this site demonstrate a woeful lack of knowledge of modern trolleybus technology and operation. The Atkins Report on Bus Rapid Transit for Leeds [available from the Department for Transport website] should be read by everyone with a serious interest in the future of public transport in Leeds. Essentially the Report says that Leeds can get what it would like to with trams but with diesel buses at around half the cost. In detail, point by point, Leeds won't get exactly the same with buses as with trams, but there are plusses and minuses. The trams may ride a little better, but a higher proportion of passengers will get seats on the buses. The buses may be a trifle slower than the trams but the buses will be twice as frequent. Expected passenger loadings and expected benefits will be similar whether tram or bus. The only clear advantage the Report gives to trams is emissions and - rather surprisingly - the Report has not considered a trolleybus option. With a Report such as this in its hands, no Government is likely to fund a tram schemes for Leeds. The only realistic hope is to get Government funding for a Bus Rapid Transit [BRT] system. Surely it must now be better to campaign for an electric BRT system than for electric trams. Otherwise, the default option is diesel buses.

Gordon Mackley
There is much sensible comment in this exchange. What Leeds needs is a modern transit system that is permanent, non polluting on street, not reliant on rapidly depleting oil based fuel, but also has affordable capital costs. A trolleybus system is the obvious answer. But this does not mean buses with poles on the roof, it means 'system' with proper stops, level boarding, suitable reserved sections (with physical boundaries - not just painted lines), full passenger information systems, non-driver ticketing, traffic priorities and traffic management for the other traffic. In short what you would do for a tram system but without the costs and disruption of digging up the road and installing the track. To correct some inaccuracies in other posts: Installing poles and wires is not difficult and disruptive, it is actually fairly simple in construction terms (poles and wires are constructed along and across roads all the time for all sorts of other purposes). Wires would not obstruct high loads as they would be above the statutory minimum height for road obstructions which applies to bridges over roads, other wires etc. Dewirement of modern trolleybus systems are very rare and if they do occur, can be very quickly rectfied without the driver leaving the cab. In the meantime the vehicle is not stranded in the middle of the road but can move forward on auxiliary power to a convenient location.

J B Priestley
It is all very well for the Irish poet " AE" to call them "those high-built glittering galleons of the streets"; but no man inside a tram, no matter how he strains his fancy, really feels that he is inside a glittering galleon. The people show a sound instinct when they desert the tramway for any other and newer kind of conveyance. There is something depressing about the way in which a tram lumbers and groans and grinds along, like a sick elephant.

John Blandford
The logic behind trolleybuses is that they don't cause pollution on the street like diesel buses do. Think of all the poor kids with asthma!

Brendan
It's a good thing that trolley buses are restricted to where the wires go - this means that people can rely on the service because they know it's not going to be closed down or altered like you get with ordinary buses all the time
Ian
Trolleybuses are a great idea. Their installation doesn't cause anywhere near as much disruption as trams because you don't have to dig up all of the sewers and underground cables. If you had a trolleybus system using the same routes as the proposed supertram, with platform stops, off-bus ticketing, traffic priorities, and nice big modern vehicles with lots of doors, it would only cost about £170m as opposed to £300m-£455m for the supertram.

Gerry Bottomley
Yes, Trolleybuses are the answer. Diesels churn out fumes on the street - we should be turning away from that kind of transport in the 21st century. There's nothing 'Victorian' about wanting to reduce pollution. A quick look at the tbusleeds.org.uk website will show you that the most modern trolleybuses hardly ever come off the wires and even when they do, it's no problem to get them back on again. They're also much cheaper than trams or monorails.

Rich Edwards
I can't see the point to trolleybuses. You have all the limitations of the bus and tram systems with none of the benefits of either. Trolleybuses are limited by the overhead cables but still have to share the roads with all the other traffic including diesel buses and still get stuck at traffic lights etc. Plus as 'edwards' says if one were to disconnect itself from the cable or break down it would cause a monumental traffic jam. The only advantage to trolleybuses would be that being electrically driven, the operator couldn't constantly hike fares and blame it on oil prices (though I'm sure they'd find another excuse...) The monorail idea may sound radical but is actually very sound and uses technology which has been proven elsewhere (albeit generally on a smaller scale). It would get the NIMBYs complaining at the elevated tracks but if lines were run along central reservations, railway embankments etc, the visual / noise intrusion would be minimal. The main problem with buses (and trams, to an extent) is that they have to share the same congested roads, hence reliability suffers. Elevating the tracks above street level solves the problem at a stroke. Of course any transport strategy would need to be multi-pronged, so the provision of additional bus and cycle lanes, suburban train stations and even using the canals (water taxis anyone?) are all sound ideas. The one 'solution' I do strongly oppose is unfortunately the only one likely to be adopted - congestion charging. Certainly it may cut the number of vehicles, but penalising those on low incomes by pricing us off the roads merely reinforces deep social inequalities and the image of public transport as 'peasant carriers' and doesn't affect the wealthy whose employers will usually pick up the added costs of their car use...

Liz
No it would not. What Leeds needs is congestion charging and a reliable, clean, reasonably priced and efficient bus service for those thrown out of their cars. What we have is everybody using their cars because the bus service is so poor. Less grand schemes more reality.

Terry Piper
I don't think it's the answer, I do feel that more permanent bus lanes might help if they are planned and enforced correctly. However this should be among a raft of measures including the speeding up of reopening stations such as Kirkstall and Armley in addition to park and ride schemes for both buses and rail that include weekends. A decent night bus service and provision longer peak hours might also help. I also agree that increasing the bus fares in excess of inflation isn't helping keep people on buses nor is the bad time keeping!

Tom
a grand plan is needed for Leeds, backed up with commitment from government - inner city travel is a nightmare for many people using public transport. But whatever is done, don't spend the next 15 years talking about it!
Jill Wilkinson
i remember getting ready for work and waiting at the bus stop not knowing if a bus would be on time never mind actually turning up. Then when it did eventually turn up it would be so full you were unable to get on it. THEN some odd little busses that carried about 15 people turned up very regularly, we were able to get on these busses, i was more confident in the fact i was getting to work and on time. They were great, fast on time regular. Then they were stopped and i went back to waiting and waiting and yes even more waiting. Bring back the little shuffle busses they were great.

Billy Haw
The only solution is more enforced buslanes!!!, the total cost? A TIN OF PAINT, the reality? buses that can go anywhere quickly. all the other solutions are a waste of taxpayers money, trams? Victorian ideology, in the past and should stay there! trolley buses? what a waste of time and money, and the ugly overhead wires? Re nationalise the transport system without recompense to the shareholders, they have invested in an industry that has failed the public for over 20 years and should be made to pay! along with the tories who privatised it in the first place. Not one of the improvements that privatization was supposed to bring about has materialized, competition? ha-ha, lower fares? slap my thighs laughing, better service? the biggest joke since |Thatcher said she had no intention of closing all the pits.

edwards
We have trolley buses in Vancouver.No pollution, smooth, good acceleration.But out of the Question for my home town Leeds.Roads far too narrow.Thats why we got rid of the trams in the first place.When the collectors come off the wires,as happens a lot you have a dead bus and a major traffic jam.Learn from the past

Dean
Light railway is the future, but used in the right way. If Leeds system served the white rose and elland road (2 of the main causes) and used some existing trackbeds, there wouldn’t be this problem. The problem is so well documented amongst the online community, why are you still asking for opinions? Like New stations at Armley and Kirkstall, a spur to the airport from the Harrogate line, park and ride at Stourton, utilisation of old trackbeds on Holbeck viaduct and in Beeston. Dual carriageway the entire ring road over (or under)passing roundabouts to keep traffic flowing. And that’s just the beginning, just think if I had the inclination to list all poorly designed road junctions in the area, I’d be here all week. There are so many solutions, yet none of them seem to make their way through the thick skulls at the council

Thomas
Overhead monorails would provide speedy transportation to & from the City without having to mix in with other road users. This would also encourage car drivers to abandon using their cars.

Alex
I understand from BBC; Leeds that there are subway system abandoned in Victorian times in Leeds. Therefore we can enhance these systems to make it usable for present situation. Cost will be the big factor for this, but it is worth looking at as the foundation of it has been built. On the other hand, trams and trolleybuses may cause even more traffic problems if the patterns of traffic changes in years to come. Tubes will not be affected by that, therefore it is a good investment on my point of view.

Lisa
Just a cheap,regular, reliable and clean bus service would make all the difference to me. Buses should be regulated again as we’ve ended up in a situation where they are run for profit and not the convenience of passengers

Darren
The solution is simple, cheaper, reliable public transport to tempt people who do drive, to instead convert to public transport. Waiting 30-40 minutes for a bus is going to put people off from using buses and trains, so get more of them on the road and track.

**RIC FUN**

How about not increasing bus fares by 8 (EIGHT!!!) times the rate of inflation. I mean how is encouraging people not to use the cars. If the price increase at same rate by 2010. It will be cheaper to get a taxi to work. MAKE THE BUSES CHEAPER/FREE.

**David Firth**

I cannot see the logic in Trolley Buses. To start with the exspence & inconvenience to the public while the overhead cables are installed. Also large loads being transporte to various place would restricted if they are size that would interfere with cables. As a former service bus driver I know that in general bus lane restrions are not respected with other vehicles either parking in or using the lanes. So in my eyes I cannot see any benefit other than it would use cheaper fuel. And a bus can divert easily on to other routes if required the trolley bus would be restricted in movement

**Simon Smiler**

According to a British Government report issued by the Committee on the "Medical Effects of Air Pollutants" air pollution hastens the deaths of between 12000 and 24000 British people a year and is associated with 14000 and 24000 hospital admissions and re-admissions - causing sufferers and their families untold amounts of misery and costing our health service & taxpayers £billions. In effect this means that 50 years after the clean air legislation resulted in the ending of coal sourced smogs the air that we breathe in our towns and cities is yet again so heavily polluted that yet again people are suffering ill health (and even dying) from it. Since pollutants from heavy duty diesel engines (as used by HGV's and motor buses) are significant sources of that air pollution it stands to reason that as part of environemntal solutions designed to protect human health by minimising urban air pollution every major town and city in Britain should be looking at electric street transports (such as trolleybuses) as being *the* environmentally sound alternative to motorbuses. The House of Commons environmental audit committee says that carbon emissions from transport are "still moving in the wrong direction" but apart from clobbering motorists with yet more taxes the govt. has failed to find effective ways to entice people out of their cars. Global experience in cities such as Lyon, Arnhem, Salzburg and San Francisco has shown that trolleybuses will attract car users who would not switch to motor buses - so electrification of our urban routes could help reverse this upward trend. This would also help reduce overall road traffic levels too. Investing in trolleybuses would also help alleviate the problems of air pollution within the wider global context, helping us in Britain to meet our commitment to cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 20% by 2010. It would also "add value" to people's daily lives - something which current British government transport & environmental policies totally fail to do.

**Carsten**

There are a lot of cities 'round the world using trolleybuses, and apparently with great success. Big bendy trolleybuses are definitely a good alternative to trams, and preferable to any diesel bus option.

**Paul**

I remember trolleybuses and think that they would be ideal in Leeds, especially if used in the guided busways and on bus lanes. Technology must be able to allow a dual vehicle diesel and electric traction, so the trolley arms could be raised and lowered as needed, that way they could be used in housing estates without the need to put wires.

**Julie**

I can vaguely remember trolleybuses - this might be worth looking at
as 'cheap trams' for Leeds.

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