

Respondent's Details

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Please Return by 19 February 2010

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I am responding: as an individual

Is your response confidential? If so, please explain why (see Appendix 1 “Confidentiality of Consultations – Freedom of Information Act 2000”).

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Provision is made throughout this questionnaire for you to provide additional comments. If, however, you wish to provide more detailed comments on any aspect of the consultation, please feel free to append additional materials and supplementary documents, clearly marked and cross-referenced to the relevant questions, as necessary.

Questions on Detailed Policy Proposals

Question 1 (page 15)

Do you agree that the Department should have the necessary authority to implement the Rapid Transit proposals?

No

Comments:

I believe the proposals under consideration are ill conceived and will do more harm than good to the city's reputation and ability to attract inward investment, and hence the authority to implement rapid transit proposals should not be provided at this time.

Further comments provided at the back of these questions.

Question 2 (page 16)

Do you agree that the Department should take land acquisition powers for the implementation of the Rapid Transit system?

No

Comments:

Not until a viable rapid transport solution has been presented – see comments at back of these questions.

Question 3 (page 16)

Do you agree that the Department should have the power to purchase, lease and dispose of goods, services and facilities for the Rapid Transit system?

No

Comments:

Not until a viable rapid transport solution has been presented – see comments at back of these questions.

Question 4 (page 17)

Do you agree that a performance-based contract should be introduced for the operation of the Rapid Transit system?

Yes

Comments:

Yes, in the longer term but there is some way to go before this is a key consideration

Question 5 (page 18)

Do you agree that the Department should be responsible for:

- specifying Rapid Transit service requirements, quality-of-service and the fare levels;
- awarding the Rapid Transit contract; and
- monitoring and reporting on Rapid Transit operator performance?

No

Comments:

Not on the basis of the current plans, the Department need to reconsider their proposal. At the moment what they have presented is not fit for purpose.

Question 6 (page 18)

What are your views on the proposal to offer financial incentives to the Rapid Transit operator to grow the Rapid Transit market, introduce innovation and improve services?

Comments:

In time I believe this will be a good strategy.

Question 7 (page 20)

Do you agree with the proposed powers to regulate passenger conduct on Rapid Transit Vehicles and in/on Rapid Transit premises?

Yes

Comments:

Question 8 (page 21)

Do you agree that the dedicated public transport corridors on which Rapid Transit operates should be strictly enforced?

Yes

Comments:

Question 9 (page 21)

Do you agree with the proposed powers for the Department to install, operate and maintain off-board ticketing machines?

Yes

Comments:

I would point out that the bendy buses currently unused in London will have such a system pre installed. Would make sense to use these.

Please make any further comments on the Detailed Policy Proposals here, ensuring that you clearly refer to any relevant questions or responses submitted above.

Further comments relating to my answer to question 1:

My main concern is the use of Bus Rapid Transport, which is not fit for purpose. It will make no significant improvement over current bus operations, other than to add more bus lanes. It will have no identity, people will not be tempted out of their cars, and above all it will be a huge waste of money. The use of such a system, for me, does not pass the sniff test – if BRT truly brings with it all the advantages it promises, why has not one other major city in the UK chosen to use it?

Indeed the cities which are cited as the best examples of BRT include Adelaide, Las Vegas and Swansea – this is absurd, is it not patently obvious that Belfast has more in common with Dublin, Sheffield, Edinburgh and Manchester? Light Rail must be the obvious choice, and in my opinion (having used for example the Luas in Dublin) such a modern, clean, sleek system would infuse civic pride in the City, and actually make people ditch their cars.

I also believe that if Belfast is to attract inward investment it ought to present itself to be a modern, civically minded, environmentally aware city where public transport is not just an afterthought. Putting more gas guzzling buses on the road (despite however many WrightBus employees will be saved) is the wrong approach. I have had the fortune (or rather misfortune) to actually ride one of these BRT buses (I suspect a lot of those involved in planning this project have not), and I can report that they are small on the inside (fewer passengers than a normal bendy bus), poorly laid out (a U shape of seats at the back), uncomfortable (steps inside) and noisy (thanks to use of a typical bus diesel engine).

I have read the KPMG / Atkins report and believe it to be fundamentally flawed – firstly I think the costs of running bus operations are understated, and secondly I believe the advantages, in terms of passenger numbers of LRT is under estimated. In particular I would refer to the dismissal of a connection to the City Airport as having little incremental additional passengers. As a terminal which attracts c.2.5m passengers per annum this is ludicrous.

With or without the report the city appears to have decided that the cheapest option is the best option. Although the report suggests that an upgrade to LRT may be made in future, this is highly unlikely to materialise. If the BRT system is viewed as a success, they will buy more buses. If not they will not spend more money on it. So there is really only one chance to get it right.

Why not look to Nottingham for inspiration rather than Las Vegas – a city of 200,000 can operate a efficient, profitable tram system right here in the UK! If not Nottingham, then look to France or Germany where there are countless tram systems in smaller cities than Belfast. These cities are environmentally clean and prefer to spend on public transport than roads and flyovers.

In my view BRT would be a terrible event for Belfast – I would far rather see a continuation of the current buses rather than squander money on a system which isn't fit for purpose. If I were an international investor I would be discouraged from investing in Belfast if this cut-price, non-solution goes ahead, rather than encouraged – presumably not the kind of return that the civic planners are after.

As an alternative I would suggest is that an initial tram line be built linking high population density areas / buildings – ie the City Airport, Tillysburn, the Odessa, Titanic Quarter, City Centre, Europa, and Queens University. I can't imagine that this would not be a success, not to mention the first thing that visitors and investors see on arrival in the city. If money is the issue then run more normal buses on normal bus lanes to cover the rest of the city until such time as LRT can be rolled out properly. Do the planners realise that a fleet of bendy buses is being decommissioned in London and are sitting unused? Those could be bought cheaply and offer a better solution to BRT (certainly larger and better laid out).

But do not run BRT, it will be a complete waste of time and money.

Questions on Integrated Impact Assessment

In considering these questions you should bear in mind that it is proposed that a further Integrated Impact Assessment screening exercise will be undertaken prior to the implementation phase of the Rapid Transit project.

Question 1

Do you have any views on the Integrated Impact Assessment Screening conclusion reached by the Department?

No

Comments:

Question 2

Are there any particular equality issues that need to be considered in relation to the policy proposals contained in the Detailed Policy Proposals booklet?

No

Comments:

Comments on Equality Screening

We welcome your comments on any aspect of the draft equality screening document. Please bear in mind that it is proposed that a further screening exercise will be undertaken prior to the implementation phase of the Rapid Transit project.

Comments: