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Workers' Party of Ireland

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Discussion Paper on Urban Transportation in Dublin

Sinn Féin The Workers' Party

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Any Dublin worker will tell you that the public transport service in the City is chaotic. Everyday hundreds of thousands of workers are subjected to scores of major and minor daily irritations; poor connections and transfers, infrequent service, unreliability, slow speed, delays, crowding, noise, filth, lack of comfort, inadequate public information and worst of all mounting fare increases.

The City is being strangled with endless queues of cars and buses stuck in congested streets using up most of their petrol standing still. The amount of energy and time wasted must be phenomenal every year. The problem is now so serious that the frequency of total collapse such as we experienced during the Spring Show is bound to increase.

Basically there are two different and opposing solutions being presented in one form or another. They both aspire to solving the question of the mounting traffic chaos in our city.

The first of these proposals, and at the moment the one with the most support in political terms is that proposed by Mr. James Molloy, the Dublin City & County Manager and Mr. M. McEntee, Chief Engineer (Roads). Their proposal is based on the Dublin Transportation Study of 1971 and was presented to the new Minister for the Environment last January.

The central pre-oil crisis theme of the D.T.S. was that a massive rise in private car ownership was both inevitable and desirable. Accordingly they proposed in a detailed submission, to spend £466 million at 1976 prices on 70 miles of motorway. The motorways system would consist of a ring road in the county and an eastern by-pass of the city centre.

The second solution is the by now familiar Rapid Rail plan of 1976 involving a link-up of all rail stations under the city. An essential element of the plan involves the provision of road passenger 'feeders' to the Rapid Rail stations. Inevitably this will involve the creation of bus lanes. The Rail plan arose from a study of the Newcastle system in Britain made by CIE's regional planner, Mr. Donal Mangan.

The plan is not without some considerable support, however. The Dublin City Centre Business Association, for instance, has expressed support and the anti-motorway lobby among others, support the plan as well, these include NATO, ACRA, Association of Public Transport Users.) The May issue of the UNITED IRISHMAN carried a letter urging all socialists to campaign for the Rapid Rail as well as bus lanes.

It is estimated that the cost of the system has already passed the £150 million mark. It was revealed lately that CIE plans to go into office development to raise money for the construction of the Rapid Rail System, and has already acquired six properties.

There is no cheap solution to urban transportation. As has been shown both Rapid Rail and the motorways are enormously expensive. We cannot afford the luxury to build both. However, it is obvious that both solutions are being actively pursued. Sooner or later the contradictions inherent in this situation will resolve themselves and one or other of the solutions will be axed.

The Motorways Solution

This proposal, as I have said, has the most political support. Certainly Fianna Fail has shown their colours early. Their connections with the construction industry and their jobs-creation promises of the election have led them to undertake to introduce motorway legislation. The motorway battalions have taken fresh heart in the wake of Fianna Fail promises. Tom Roche of Cement/Roadstone for instance, sees his opportunity to make a few more million in his Liffey Toll Bridge

proposal which is before the Corporation for planning approval.

When Jimmy Tully decided to throw out the motorway proposals last Spring he directed the Dublin Corporation and County Engineers to review the recommendations of the D.T.S. drawn up seven years previously. There are over 200 of these engineers and they also seem to have taken fresh heart in the wake of Fianna Fail's favourable disposition to both the private car (abolition of car tax) and motorways generally.

It is certain the higher echelons of these engineers saw Tully's cancellation of the motorway proposals as a temporary aberration, one which could be corrected in a different political climate. It is understood that they then resorted to preventing development taking place in the path of the postponed motorways, by using such instruments as Planning refusals and disapprovals.

When the political climate did change last June these so-called public servants wasted no time in preparing a detailed submission to "prevent the strangulation of the city's roads." This submission which the Department of the Environment are now studying is, as I have said, based on the broad strategy of the D.T.S. It is a proposal which is going direct from the City and County Manager over the heads of the City Council to the Minister of the Department of the Environment. The City Council will meet shortly to vote on the plans.

If Fine Gael link up with Labour and the anti-motorway Community councillors, then they could defeat the plan and postpone the motorways once again. However, the outcome is not certain - a defeat for government plans could prompt an early local election and Fianna Fail are expected to do well. Accordingly Councillors do not view with relish the prospect of an early election.

What is our position on motorways? We have argued that the basic assumption behind motorways, i.e. to get more cars on the roads and get them moving more freely and thereby solve the problem of moving people from place to place - has been proved false time and time again!

The experience of many European countries points clearly in this direction and many cities are now turning to other methods to solve the problem. We must avoid a situation where the so-called solutions quickly became the problems.

Cities such as Bologna in Italy for instance, have found out to their enormous benefit that the basic philosophy must be to move people and not private cars. This city which is about the same size as Dublin and which has been ruled by a Communist/Socialist city government for nearly 30 years, has an extensive system of bus-ways. The private enterprise private motor car lobby has been defeated and the city government has introduced a highly successful system of - would you believe it - free bus fares during rush hours! Public transport has triumphed and the number of passengers using the system has increased by 50% in two years.

In the context of moving people and not private cars the idea behind motorways can be described as thoroughly right-wing. The idea accepts that private car ownership will continue increase and that personal mobility will increase along with it. However, upwards of 80% of the population will be excluded from these increases - the old, the young, the handicapped and the poor, wither because they cannot drive or because they cannot afford a car.

It is evident, therefore, that the primary aim of an urban transportation policy, as Proinsias De Rossa argued in the U.I. recently, must be the maximum mobility of people and goods in the most efficient way available without damaging the environment or the quality

of peoples lives. This therefore leads us to the inevitable - the development and extension of the public transport system.

The Public Transport Alternative - Rapid Rail

Public Transport in this country has been under attack for many years. Indeed, our Party has been to the forefront in exposing the politically motivated attacks on CIE down the years. It is not surprising therefore to find that CIE were assigned no position of any importance on the D.T.S. It is obvious that public transport was forced to take a back seat from the word go.

The D.T.S. did, however, produce the idea of linking up all the rail stations under the city, almost as an afterthought, and CIE's Donal Mangan quickly took the idea and produced a plan. However, despite the initial quick response, CIE seem to be making little effort in pushing the Rapid Rail plan. They have so far done nothing to gain the support of the trade unions despite the fact that 3,000 new jobs could be involved.

They have made attempts to introduce Bus-ways in the past. But these efforts tended to be half hearted and the influence of politically motivated road planners and councillors is always sufficient to defeat any worthwhile proposal. CIE's stand at the Spring Show for instance, had no mention of their grand plans for an underground.

On the positive side Donal Mangan told an An Bord Pleanála public hearing in Dublin last week that their plans for the ultra modern system are still very much alive. In fact he revealed that CIE were negotiating to buy 20 sites on top of the six that they had acquired already. The hearing was called because the Hibernian Insurance Co. is appealing the Corporations refusal to grant them permission to develop the Dame Street premises. They want to build a five storey office block. CIE are objecting to the plan for the site because they want to buy it and develop it and adjacent properties instead, as a headquarters for their planned underground.

How long will St. John Devlin tolerate this state of affairs is anyone's guess. Mangan told the hearing that at present CIE owned less than half of the properties it required to launch its proposed Rapid Rail Plan, but he said they were acquiring sites as quickly as they possibly could.

It is quite obvious therefore, that in some circles in CIE the Rapid Rail plan is far from being a dead duck. However, it is equally obvious that the Government and CIE would be quite unperturbed to axe the idea completely should the motorway proposal prove to be the more politically expedient. The recent history of CIE shows clearly how difficult it has been for public transport interests to pave their way.

Our Party took a firm position in support of the idea of Rapid Rail over two years ago. Indeed we were the first significant voice to support the idea and a poster was produced in time for use in the Dublin South West bye-election of 1976. A series of articles have appeared in our publications over the same period and recently Proinsias De Rossa was instrumental in getting ACRA to support the plan.

However, our efforts in this field tend to be unco-ordinated and badly thought out. There is an urgent necessity, now more than ever, to step up the campaign for Rapid Rail. CIE's proposals for the electrification of the Bray/Howth line must be accepted by the Government - if they fail to give it support now then the future of public transport service in Dublin which hinges on this proposal will be in great jeopardy.

It is vital that the public transport service as it exists now should not be allowed to decline further through loss of passenger fares

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which is the inevitable result of these fares being increased. We must ensure that groups such as the Association of Public Transport Users take a more clear cut line in active support of Rapid Rail. CIE must be forced into fighting its own corner more effectively. The vicious attack on CUE by the Private Bus Owners launched two weeks ago on the occasion of the 25% bus fare increase must be exposed for what it is, an attempt by unscrupulous profiteers to make a fast buck.

Proinsias De Rossa said in the UI recently " a Rapid Rail campaign must be mounted. To be successful it must aim to get the broad support of all the organisations whose members will directly benefit from it - NATO, TRADE UNIONS, ACRA and groups such as APTU and the Living City Group.

Sinn Fein The Workers' Party has the organisation, the personnel, the facts and the figures to get it off the ground. Now is the time to shout stop - we want a rapid rail system for Dublin."

Last month's UI headline claimed victory on the issue of public transport in Belfast. We could claim victory down here if we plan our campaign now.

Tom Breen (Momington, May 20, 1978)