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**OBSERVATIONS OF EUROPEAN TRANSIT**

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**Subject :** OBSERVATIONS OF EUROPEAN TRANSIT**To :** ITO MANAGER <rapidrail@shaw.ca>, ITO Administration  
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My wife and I have just returned from a six and half week vacation tour of Europe, encompassing 7 countries and 12 cities, starting in Edinburgh and ending in Lucerne, Switzerland. I am on the Victoria ITO Transit server list so I made keen observations of all the transit systems during my travels. My observations were striking. Four cities had street cars while a fifth, Edinburgh, is currently in the process of tearing up their main shopping area, Princes Street, and installing street cars, closing it to all but transit and authorized vehicles. The city of Oxford has also now closed most of its city centre to allow only transit and authorized traffic. Most of the cities used the main train station area as a transit hub with trains, street cars and buses interconnecting with each other, enabling easy access to every mode of transportation. The most noteworthy were Amsterdam, Strasbourg and the London underground. All systems have been designed to maximize efficiency and continuity with ease of use. The street cars in both Amsterdam and Strasbourg work with astonishing efficiency and are incredibly popular with locals and tourists. The Strasbourg street cars were by far the most impressive.

**IN CONCLUSION :** In order for any transit system to work with maximum effectiveness and to encourage transit use of all systems whether it be train, bus, street car or light rail, all should be interconnected, preferably at a central point for easy transfer from one to the other in order to maximize and promote convenient transit use.

In regards to the blue bridge replacement in Victoria, there really is no option but to include construction of the train portion of the bridge. It would be sheer folly not to include the E & N or street car / light rail on the bridge. It simply would not be practical to expect commuters to walk from the other side of the blue bridge to gain access to the downtown core especially in the winter months. There is an old English saying "You pays me now or you pays me later " and the latter will cost double ?.

**THE ADVANTAGE OF STREET CARS / light rail over buses** is that they show a commitment not only to a route but for a clean environment and this perception by the commuter would be an important consideration to leaving the car at home. Buses work well but they still use oil, rubber tyres and diesel to operate. The street car is a clean and very efficient way of moving large numbers of commuters and tourists .

**THE FUNDING** of a good transit system is certainly a challenge but perhaps suggestions such as the promotion of some sort of transit bond, which would include a free transit

pass, corporate sponsorship of stations or street cars could be among many ideas to be explored. Maybe we should be looking at Europe to see how it is done, London's underground has now been in operation for over 100 years and one would think they must have got it right by now so why are we as Canadians trying to reinvent the wheel ? The London underground also has the Oyster card which costs 5 pounds to buy, one then simply loads the card up with an amount of credit for traveling on the tube, buses, and the new river cats. The card gives the user a discount from 30-40% on all transit. During use the card is simply passed over a "gated" card reader to enter the system and then again on exiting the transit system where the travel amount is then deducted. The 5 pound deposit is refundable together with any unused transit money loaded on to the card when handed back in. During our travels there was not one transit police with a gun to be seen, just conductors and ticket inspectors which seemed to work with remarkable efficiency. Violation fines are stiff and strictly enforced.

BICYCLES are everywhere in Europe and all seemed to be displaying mandatory lights front and rear. Bikes in Switzerland were even displaying registration stickers which are similar to the mandatory \$15 registration scheme of bikes in Hawaii. Perhaps its time to look at the registration of all bikes and some education of rules of the road for bike users. In some parts of the world school children must pass a bike proficiency test before being allowed to bike to school.

If a good transit system were implemented perhaps we could look at ideas such as encouraging aging seniors to trade their drivers licence in for a free transit pass.

In a recent interview in Surrey, BC, Sir Richard Branson when asked what he contributed to his success as a businessman replied "Stop screwing around and just do it ! " translated "stop analysing everything to death and just do it !"

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