

West London tram

Ford Prefect and Arthur Dent came back to earth and went along to the 2006-10 public local inquiry into the scheme by TfL for a tram on the Uxbridge Road between Shepherds Bush and Uxbridge.

Eavesdroppers on the proceedings which they found a little tedious so they started musing:

Arthur: I like trams. They run smoothly on rails and go at a sedate pace to let you watch the scenery go by. It's best if you sit on the top deck in the open. The conductor is usually quite a wag who cheers up the passengers and...

Ford Prefect. You're dreaming again, Arthur. You're thinking about the nineteenth and early twentieth century one, started by a mad American from Boston called George Francis Train who set up a horse drawn one near Holland Park in 1861, developed and extended by various late Victorians and Edwardians between Shepherd's Bush and Uxbridge. It was abandoned in 1936. This one's nothing like that. It's 40 metres long with a single deck for a start – 130 feet and is designed to travel as fast as my ghetto blaster, but it can only do that near Uxbridge where there are scarcely any passengers. Its average speed is 12 miles an hour, which is almost as good as a 607 bus, which does the 13 miles in 60 minutes. The 207 bus, with more stops, is of course slower.

Arthur. 40 metres? I think I'd prefer the bus, at least there's a top deck. But I suppose it's progress. What will it actually look like.

Ford called up a picture and refer-

ence on the Encyclopedia Galactica, co-ordinates at Ealing Broadway. This is what he found.

Arthur: Doesn't look too much room for the pedestrians. Why are those cables so high?

Ford. The thing is still pretty primitive. It's to make sure that no power surge electrocutes the passengers. They couldn't run the power in the road either unlike the Victorians.

Arthur. It will be rather dominant in the street won't it?

Ford. It will stretch further than those old bendy buses and carry about 300 passengers.

Arthur. How do you get round it when it's stopped?

Ford. You won't be able to see across the street to get to the shops opposite, but you'll be pleased to be travelling in something modern and fast so you won't want to stop to shop, will you.

Arthur. But I thought you said it didn't go that fast, especially where it's busy? And anyway what's the point if you can't get out at the town centres on the route?

Ford. Easy. The centres can be knocked down to make way for the tram or else the cars can be zapped by the tram.

Arthur. Zapped? People won't want that will they. They'll simply divert their cars onto the residential streets. Besides, I thought the whole purpose was to improve access to

the centres. What's the point if there's nothing to get to?

Ford. Everything's so slow in the back streets people will give up and abandon their cars.

Arthur. I'm getting lost. I thought people liked shopping and working in Ealing, Shepherds Bush, Acton and Southall. This thing will destroy those centres.

Ford. It will be an opportunity to get in on the redevelopment bonanza. Higher accessibility, better property values, permission for higher densities. A killing for the developers. Brand new town centres.

Arthur. I'm not so sure about all this.

Twenty first century Britain started reinventing trams all over the place because they couldn't design an air car to run on environmentally friendly micro-energy. They built them in Leeds, Sheffield, Croydon and Nottingham.

Arthur. But those are all regional centres with an obvious destination. Who wants to go from Shepherd's Bush to Uxbridge?

Ford. Not sure. But it's no more nuts than George Francis Train. He finished up joining the French Communist party before being jailed in France on obscenity charges. He even threatened to buy Ireland at one stage in his chequered career.

Arthur. Now you're sidetracking. This thing won't even go to Heathrow.

Ford. That's OK all that is already sewn up by The Heathrow Express, and First Great Western's Link from 2004 between Paddington and Heathrow, calling at Ealing Broadway, West Ealing, Hanwell, Southall and Hayes, not to mention Hex2 to St



Pancras or Crossrail.

Arthur. But won't that take most of the traffic which the tram is supposed to?

Ford. The Business Case I found shows most of the passengers will come off the 207, 607 or other bus route, with a few leaving their cars or making new trips because they like the tram.

Arthur. I still don't get it. This is going to cost however many millions to design and construct and operate, but will not make much difference to solving west London's traffic problems.

Ford. What about those fixations you have about cleaner air? The tram will be much cleaner than the cars it displaces.

Arthur. Call me a cynic but the neighbouring streets – near where I used to live – will be where all the pollution ends up. Why don't they just use cleaner fuel?

Ford. They consulted endlessly, rather than actually think what it was for. One consultation lasted 14 weeks and took 6 months to analyse, time enough to not have to reproduce the actual questions asked or

<p><i>Route: Uxbridge to Shepherd's Bush</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of route: 20km (13 miles) • Average speed: 19kmh (12 mph) • Journey time - Uxbridge to Shepherd's Bush: 65 minutes (approx.) • Stops: 41 • Tram length: 40m (131ft) • Tram width: 2.65m (8.8ft) • Tram capacity: 300 passengers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hours of operation: 6am - midnight • Peak frequencies: Uxbridge - Shepherd's Bush: every six mins Southall - Shepherd's Bush: every three mins • Construction Price: £648million at 2004 prices and rising, plus untold design fees.
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Views management and sub-regional plans

The last Forum met courtesy of the RICS on 21 September. Drummond Robson's full minutes of the discussion will be found at www.planninginlondon.com. Here is his preview.

Discussion Topic 1.

Richard Coleman, Lewis Eldridge and John Hare presented their work to provide the GLA's Views Management Framework draft SPG. See: <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/sds/spg-views.jsp>

- It is proposed to replace the current 12 protected views of St Paul's and Houses of Parliament with 26 new ones and 52 "assessment points".
- Also further protection to vista areas of Conservation Areas.
- The draft guidance includes precise geometric methods for measuring 23 of the protected vistas.
- Guidance is intended to build on the policies within the London Plan for the management of views as opposed to fixed views. (The policies themselves do not include geographical information for individual views).

Will they in practice be treated as a management tool or a rule book in spite of the claim they are a measurement of development as opposed to its prevention?

- The Plan proposed the production of SPG setting out details such as the exact position of viewing points and the width of protected viewing corridors.
- A lively critique followed covering use of fly through techniques, different summer and winter conditions, the real value of the long distance view from King Henry's Mound and lack of protection for people in the East End.

Discussion Topic 2: GLA Sub Regional Planning Frameworks

John Lett, GLA presented current thinking on Sub Regional Planning Frameworks - implications from the

Regional London Plan. Concentrated on East London where the formal period for consultation has just ended, others until 28 October.

- How much growth, where, what form, social and environmental implications
- Not statutory, not a mini London plan, not SPD, but a material consideration
- East London proposals include
 - o Annual housing target projections are proposed as twice that of the adopted plan: 14,600 as opposed to 7,100, with higher riverside and Borough boundary area densities.
 - o Employment Projections to increase from 500,000 to 636,000 by 2016 with consolidation of industry and commerce
 - o Distribution and phasing should be reviewed

- o More waste provision and managed industrial growth
 - o Further centralisation on existing town centres
 - o Improved quality of green space
 - No account taken of the effects of the Olympics so far
 - Issues raised included
 - o Concern that little thought has been given to the suburbs and how to reduce pressure on the centre
 - o Lack of proper public transport infrastructure and how it is being addressed realistically
 - o Still no examination of alternatives
 - o Need to examine the quality of life
 - It was agreed that the SRDFs need to be much more fully debated by the Forum at a special meeting.
- Come to the next meeting: see page 8.

how many people answered each one in the final undated report. They had roadshows and interviews and all kinds of techniques. The main method was to issue 454,600 brochure questionnaires to residents and businesses in the area and get 16,895 replies to at least some of the questions. That's under 4%. Over 40% of respondents didn't even give their addresses. Over half did not live on the route and presumably found it easier to give disinterested support. (Somehow cars (71 per cent) were the most frequently mentioned mode of transport used along the Uxbridge Road but buses accounted for 62%. I have no idea what that meant). Just over half of consultation respondents (54 per cent) felt there was a serious need to improve public

transport and tackle congestion on the Uxbridge Road, but the two questions were run together so the results can't mean much.

Ford (continuing, uncharacteristically for him). The consultation's purpose wasn't to help the public make their minds up but to improve the chances of success at this inquiry.

The stated consultation aims were... (he recites the list). Marvin: (almost asleep) I could have calculated the probability of getting the politically correct answer without even bothering to ask them. Vagon Jeltz would I suppose have used more persuasive methods.

Ford (pressing on even though Arthur has lost interest). The key finding I suppose was twice as many people were opposed to the tram as

supported it. There were no actual straight comparisons with bus travel, nor acknowledgement of the convenience of a car. They didn't seem to ask any of the real questions such as whether car users would actually leave their cars at home (car ownership increase being offset by less car usage), rather than if the road congestion forced on them by tram priority made them travel less, or whether people would find it easier to change from bus to tram to bus rather than simply have bus journeys. One cheery soul apparently said "The proposal is bizarre and inept and possibly entirely politically motivated."

Arthur. Why have a public inquiry about it when most people don't want it and very few people under-

stand the implications and just hope the congestion will go away?

Ford. (Sardonically). Must be the way representative government works I suppose. Anyway, none of that matters, because, as we know the earth ended rather abruptly, when they were trying to build a bypass through your house.

Arthur. I suppose we can be grateful that it stopped then and saved them the trouble. Still, I prefer the bus.

They walk away from the inquiry sipping gently on their Qualactin Hypermint tea, bemused at the funny antics of humans before boarding the Vagon Constructor Fleet air car transporter back to the Restaurant at the End of the Universe.