

How to improve public transport in Malta



by Angelo Xuereb

A MAJOR PROBLEM in Malta today is without doubt how to overhaul the old-fashioned public transport system. Introduced in the Forties, when towns and villages were much smaller, it is centralised along the main roads of the villages.

This inefficient system has led the Maltese to buy more cars. We are buying approximately 10,000 cars a year, which means that over Lm40 million are being spent outside Malta annually. This does not include petrol and insurance and replacements, say, every five years.

Cars depreciate rapidly, so it would make more sense for the government to invest in an efficient public transport system that would appreciate in time and save on those millions of *liri* now finding their way out of Malta.

The majority of the island's population lives in the inner and outer Harbour areas, which also house most government and private offices, so a fast and efficient transport system must be devised to relieve traffic congestion in these areas.

Monorail link

My suggestion is to have a main monorail link (see map) between Gzira and Paola. The crossing of the harbours could be either by underwater tunnels or by ferries carrying the same bus or train. One could start operating with the latter and later invest in the tunnels.

The main line would have three main stations — one at Gzira (next to the Regional Road), another in Valletta ditch, below the main city entrance, and another in Paola (Għajn Dwieli), with two more stops along the line.

The three main stations would be complemented with large car parks. Another large car park should be built next to Portes des Bombes, which would be linked to an underground train or bus through the existing tunnel. This tunnel could be extended to near Fort St. Elmo, with stops in Floriana and two stops in Valletta. This railway system could later be extended to nearby towns.

In future this system could also be integrated with internal and external city buses within Valletta, while a ferry shuttle between Sliema, Valletta and Senglea, as outlined in my proposal for the Valletta master plan (see *The Sunday Times*, October 29, 1989) should also help ease traffic congestion in these areas.

Such mass transportation ventures generally are not profitable when one considers the capital investment required. Government should subsidise the capital cost of vehicles. The operation could then be privatised and run at a profit.

This system has worked well in major cities all over the world. There should be no reason why it could not be applied to Malta. The rock found in these areas in Malta is soft and therefore poses less of a problem.

To complement the monorail system, an efficient bus system must be introduced. Operators of this system, however, must realise that time is becoming more valuable and that they would have to shorten transit time. Present bus routes would have to be revised and Valletta-bound traffic must be reduced.

Bus routes

The bus system should have three districts — North, Central and South. Bus routes from the North would lead to the Gzira underground station, those from the Central district would reach Valletta station, while those from the South district would lead to Paola station.

Additionally, a system of small town buses should be created to pick

up commuters in towns close to the above-mentioned stations. The distances from nearby towns to the stations is short and therefore small buses, which could easily negotiate narrow streets, should be used. Thus commuters would avoid long walks to bus stops or bus stations.

Other bus routes from villages have to be altered and new routes would have to be formed so that it would be possible for a commuter to transit from one village to the other without having to go through Valletta. For example, one route could go from Rabat through Zebbug, Siggiewi, Mqabba, Kirkop and Birzebbuga.

These routes would pass from the outskirts of towns and villages and only at certain times of the day. These roads normally are not so busy while stops are less frequent, thus helping to reduce transit time.

Conditions

To attract more commuters to use this transport system, a number of conditions have to be observed. These include airconditioned buses,

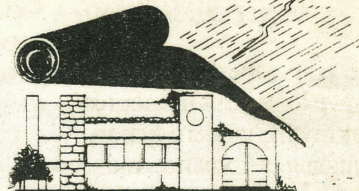
uniformed drivers, on-the-spot fines for disciplinary infringements, attractive bus shelters and termini (where controlled advertising space could be allocated), attractively-designed buses, re-introduction of different colours for the different bus routes, and the sale of tickets from ticket booths or retail outlets to avoid wasting the bus driver's time.

The improved service would then justify a slight increase in bus fares, while buses could be built locally to save on foreign exchange.

I feel these proposals are feasible and should improve Malta's image, especially now that it aspires to join the European Community. They are intended as food for thought and for consideration by the country's decision-makers in this field.



Protect your roof with our various selection of reinforced Bituminous Membranes, as well as with chequered aluminium Bituminous Membranes. Guarantee up to 10 years.



FOR FREE ESTIMATES PLEASE CONTACT:
MR. A. APAP, 46a Tower Street, Mosta - Tel: 432249

SUMMER IS FAST APPROACHING BUT . . . DON'T DESPAIR!!

Get into shape F.A.S.T. with our Super Callenetic Workout & Sweat it out to the rhythm of the beat in our Cardiofunk Classes (Low Impact Aerobics)

Have fun keeping your body in shape with INGRID, LIZ and their Fitness Team: Vanessa, Jackie and Lara

at the SAFARI SANCTUARY

Dance and Fitness Centre
Tower Road, Sliema.

All classes commence on April 15, 1991.
Bookings April 10, 11, 12, from 5 to 7 p.m.

Enquiries Tel: 330607

Studio fully airconditioned.

Frelle

The shop for embroidered sheets, satin sheets, satin lingerie, foulards and towels. All of fine quality.

49, Old Bakery Street, Valletta
(corner with St Lucia Street) Tel: 237039