

# Let us revive Valletta

**O**VER the past three decades, there have been numerous plans, discussions and reports on how we can revive Valletta but regrettably, relatively very little has actually been done. It seems that we are missing the vision and the motivation to act.

On October 29, 1989, I had presented a proposal for a Master Plan for Valletta. My vision and various proposals presented in my four-page feature are still considered valid today. They included: transportation, car parks, ferry shuttle, architectural lighting, rebuilding of the Opera House and City Gate, restoration works, pedestrianisation of certain streets, the undiscovered maze of underground tunnels as a tourist attraction, etc.

The only ideas to be adopted were the architectural lighting around the perimeter of the bastions, the pedestrianisation of Republic Street and St John Street, a half-hearted ferry service from Sliema to Valletta, and an underground car park outside Valletta, although still without a roof garden.

Following this, in 1991 I came out with an underground mass transportation system linking the north of the island to the south through Valletta. By December 1996 I improved on this proposal, associated with an overall master plan for the entire public transportation system throughout Malta. Unfortunately, although many liked and approved the proposal, there is not enough will power to implement the scheme.

This time I am presenting a Valletta transportation master plan which I believe will dramatically revive our capital city, involving relatively minor intervention and capital costs.

## Present neglect

Before embarking on such a master plan one has to analyse:

Why has the population of Valletta dropped from around 20,000 to less than 7,000 since the war? Why are corporate offices still moving out of the capital? Why is the city's general appearance still neglected?

Why is there still so much parking along the streets? Why was only one underground car park (not covered!) built? Why have parking meters not been adopted? Why is the main shopping activity still concentrated around Republic Street? Why have we still not rebuilt the Opera House and the ugly City Gate? Why have we not constructed the new underground central bus terminus?

I could go on and on but when you go deeper into the issues, one of the main common denominators is lack of an efficient transportation system, coupled with inadequate car parking.



by Angelo Xuereb

## Original Valletta master plan

Architects Francesco Laparelli and Matteo Perez d'Aleccio, who designed the new city of Valletta in the 16th century, had never dreamt of motor vehicles! If only they could see how today we managed to ruin their plans with the thousands of vehicles parked on the city's pavements and squares, they would surely get the shock of their lives!

The brilliant engineering adopted at that time during the drawing up of the Valletta master plan was centred around horse-drawn means of transport and they had taken the necessary measures for this.

We should be ashamed that despite having a modern transport system, with all the technology at our disposal and with a better standard of living, we have not managed to establish this World Heritage city as the jewel in our crown. We should all be ashamed of this!

## The proposal

Valletta is built on a peninsula and to revive the city in today's hectic world, where efficiency is the prime mover, it is vital to have an efficient transportation system which links all the inner and outer harbour areas.

These connections should be various and include scheduled public bus services, private cars, shuttle services, circular buses, ferry links across the harbours

and possibly an underground mass transportation system linking the north and the south of the island.

These links must be efficient and have to work in tandem otherwise they will not function, as had happened with the half-hearted ferry service from Sliema. A commuter must *not* wait for more than a few minutes for the next land transport service and not more than 20 minutes for the harbour ferry.

The main objectives should be to:

- reduce the number of private cars which enter the city
- reduce the on-street car parking
- encourage the use of public transport
- preserve our World Heritage city
- have a cleaner environment
- spread business activity throughout the whole city and not just concentrate around the upper part of Republic Street
- inter-connect the existing and proposed car parks
- provide a link to the new Valletta Waterfront project which will be a major family and tourist entertainment centre
- link the towns across the harbours

It is calculated that, every day, approximately 26,000 commuters use the Valletta bus terminus while another 8,000 use their own cars to get to Valletta. We all know that it is almost impossible to park within the city after 8.30 a.m. and many use the bus terminus just to change over to another bus service.

The proposed park and ride project and the Valletta Waterfront should be directly linked to all the other car parks outside Valletta and connected to the main multi-transportation node below the existing main bus terminus, by an uninterrupted shuttle service as shown in red on the plan.

**T**his route can start from the Yellow Garage which used to be the Valletta railway station and next to the proposed large underground car park at Freedom Square, pass through St James Ditch, through a short tunnel below the bastion and below Gerolamo Cassar Avenue and down to the bottom of Crucifix Hill at sea level. It then passes behind Pinto Stores at the Valletta Waterfront project, another stop at the proposed 650-bay parking lot by VISET, pass over a new small bridge to link with the Park and Ride project which can take over 900 surface car parking spaces.

From here it can easily be connected to the existing old railway tunnel by means of a new tunnel beneath National Road. This circular route could possibly be operated by an electric vehicle, with its capacity changing according to demand.

This main junction would also be served by two other separate circular minibus routes (preferably electric-powered). One would serve the inner part of Valletta and the other the periphery of the city. Both routes would have various stops and an interchange link at the corner of Old Bakery Street and St Nicholas Street. The outer route would also have an interchange with the ferry service from Marsamxett and Valletta Harbours.

The Marsamxett Harbour ferry terminal would be complemented with a lift so that passengers would avoid walking uphill or having the bus travelling down to sea level, while the Valletta ferry terminal would be located within Customs House or adjacent to it. Both berths are protected from rough seas.

Between Customs House and St James Ditch, a tunnel or clearance of recent structures needs to be done, in order to have an uninterrupted route. The ferry terminals on the other sides of the harbours could be located where most appropriate.

## Encouraging more residents

Having these integrated transportation shuttle services; more people would be encouraged to visit Valletta for its heritage and for shopping. This will also encourage more people to take up residence in Valletta, since parking and connections from the car parks should not be a problem. Furthermore, this will give a boost to offices, for those who can afford the necessary structural internal alterations to install lifts and the necessary restoration works.

Having easy access all around Valletta will encourage more business, open up more shops all around Valletta and not remain focussed on the upper half of Republic Street and Merchant Street.

The internal circular minibuses will allow passengers to get off whenever they want without the need to walk uphill. It would be recommended that these internal circular bus routes would be free of charge with easy embarking/disembarking as otherwise it would be too cumbersome and time wasting. This service should not be expensive to operate. When I was mayor of Naxxar, I had introduced a similar service free of charge for the users which is still very much in demand up to this very day.

Should the main Valletta bus terminus be relocated underground as planned, and all the car parks connected together as stated above, I have no doubt that Valletta would be revived to its former glory with less on-street car parking which is ruining the beauty of this gem and have a cleaner environment.

My message to the government is that this is a viable project which can be introduced within a relatively short period and with a reasonable cost that our budget can surely afford. Some or all of these shuttle services can be operated by the private sector. If we sincerely want to revive Valletta let us go for it, let us have less talk and more action!



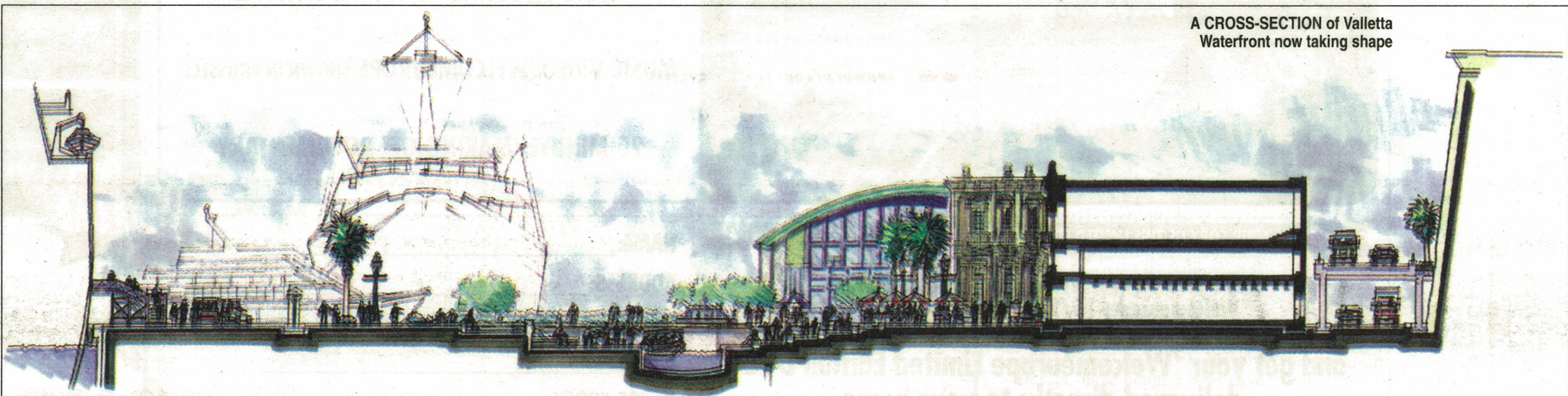
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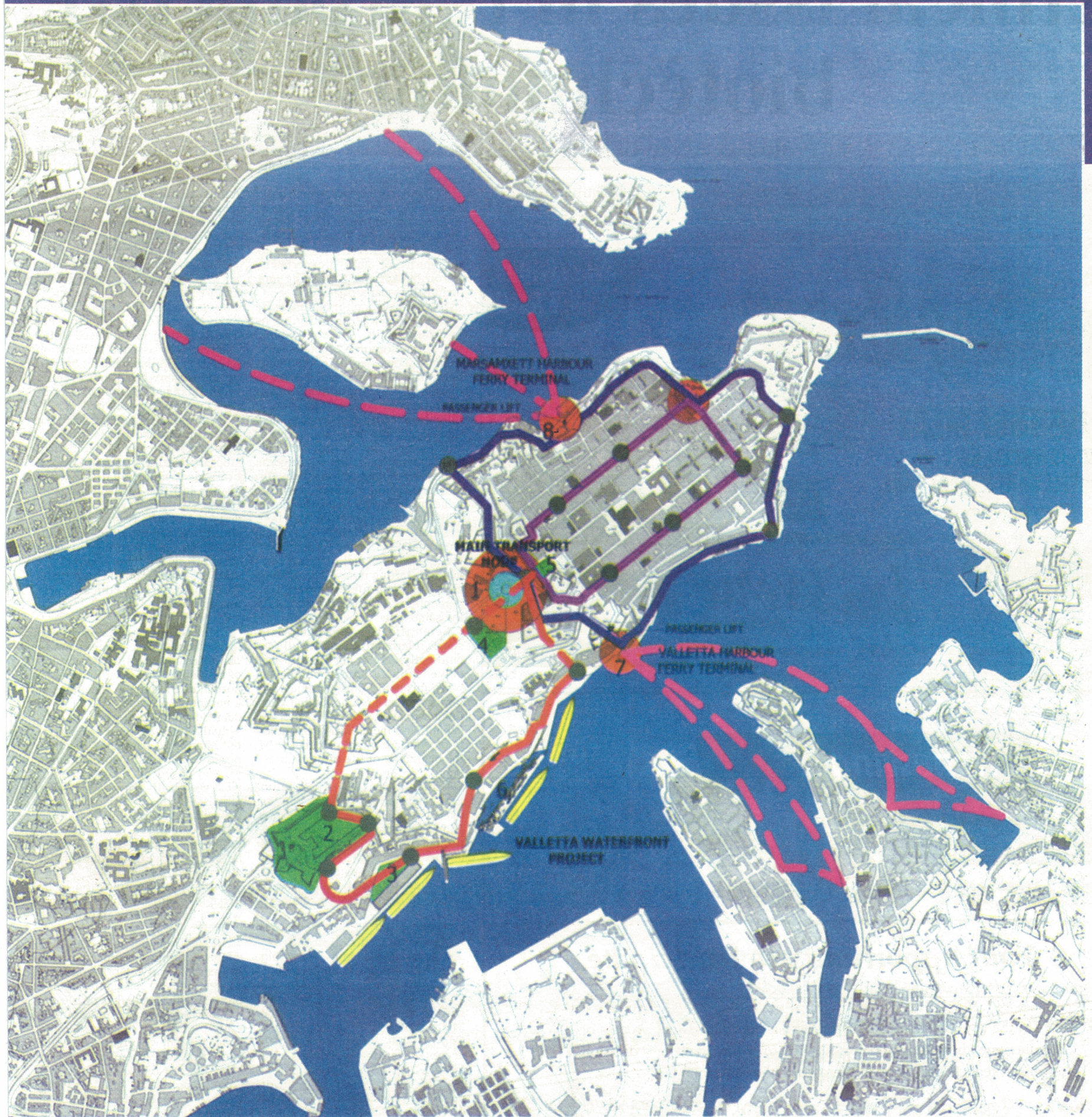
MINIBUS



HARBOUR FERRY












A CROSS-SECTION of Valletta Waterfront now taking shape

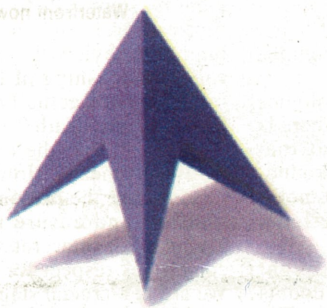


# PROPOSED VALLETTA TRANSPORT MASTERPLAN

ESTIMATED POTENTIAL NUMBER OF TRANSPORT USERS - DAILY

-  MAIN PARKING ZONES
-  UNDERGROUND TRAFFIC SYSTEM
-  SURFACE TRAFFIC SYSTEM
-  BUS TERMINUS
-  TRANSPORT NODES
-  VALLETTA CIRCULAR ROUTE
-  VALLETTA INTERNAL ROUTE
-  TRANSIT POINT
-  FERRY ROUTE

1	MAIN PUBLIC TRANSPORT STATION	26,000
2	PARK & RIDE CAR PARK	2000
3	VISET CAR PARK	1,000
4	MCP CAR PARK	3,500
5	PROPOSED FREEDOM SQUARE UNDERGROUND CAR PARK	2,500
6	CRUISE PASSENGERS	700
7	VALLETTA HARBOUR FERRY TERMINAL	400
8	MARSAMXETT HARBOUR FERRY TERMINAL	600
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>36,700</b>



**AX Holdings**