

Minister launches public transport reform document



Transport Minister Austin Gatt this afternoon launched a document proposing a root and branch reform of public transport. He told a press conference that the government had set a target date of 2015 for a complete system, including, if possible, a tram service, which truly served the people and which led the people to prefer public transport to their cars.

He said a major reform of the bus service had to be completed by 2010 at the latest - in view of EU rules, and reform in the area of mini buses and taxis had to be completed earlier.

Dr Gatt said public transport should include as many forms of transport as possible, including buses, taxis, ferries and trams. Malta needed to have a new, energy efficient fleet of buses of different sizes as appropriate for the different localities, a new route network, new management for the bus service, and full utilisation of the buses every day.

Rapid services needed to be introduced to major destinations, such as Mater Dei, but in general services needed to be more frequent and operated over 24 hours. There should also be links between the various towns and villages and services to the Park and Ride at Blata l-Bajda and similar parking areas.

A new ticketing system needed to be introduced, with incentives for frequent users. The bus drivers needed to become employees who would work an acceptable number of hours. It was dangerous that some drivers currently worked as much as 16 hours at a stretch.

Dr Gatt said there also needed to be changes in the relationship between the ADT as the regulator and the Public Transport Association (ATP), which, despite being the operator, acted like a trade union.

While acknowledging that some form of state funding would be necessary for the social aspect of public transport, the minister said the current system where the bus owners had a guaranteed income whatever the level of usage had to stop – not least because since this system was introduced in 1995, the number of patrons had fallen.

Dr Gatt said the ADT was working on proposals for a new bus network and they would be presented to the ATP for discussion shortly.

Studies were also under way on the type of buses (and mini vans) which would be needed for the bus service and the recurrent expenses which could be expected from a modern and efficient bus service. All these issues would be discussed with the bus owners, along with the future management of public transport in line with EU directives.

Separately, Dr Gatt said detailed studies were under way for the introduction of water taxis this summer and initial studies had been launched on the possible introduction of two tram lines – from Valletta to Birkirkara and Rabat and from Valletta to Sliema. Economic viability still has to be proved. Should it be viable, the aim was to introduce a tram service by 2015.

“Our purpose is to have an efficient public transport system that is environmentally friendly, financially sustainable, integrated, modern, and tailored to the people’s needs,” Dr Gatt said.

The minister said last week's public transport strike had helped the reform process because the people had shown that they wanted change.

The document can be found at: www.mitc.gov.mt

Comments

G.Grech (4 hours ago)

I would opt for the underground system like many countries have done notwithstanding its initial high cost. Just to mention a few of them, Canada, USA, England, Hong Kong, Italy. Hong Kong is a very small island and the Brits still had opted to give them that means of transport. And anybody who has been there (I did) can vouch for its effectiveness and at the same time it does not create any problems on the surface since its underground. The millions of tourists use it (I did incessantly and its so easy to use and get around + cheap).

There is a Mr. Canada here saying that the 3 mile one came to 1 billion bucks...I presume the canadian powers predicted its cost...and still went for it..? Why ? because it is effective, make sense, not an eyesore. Lets go for a trial line, its not like we do not have the tech to build tunnels, Enemalta built one connecting the 2 p/stations, the St. Venera tunnel etc... we need an

underground system. The cost for it can be subsidised from bus / shipbuild and other out dated subsidies we already pay for with no returns. Go UG!

Denis Catania (11 hours, 27 minutes ago)

Trams, water taxis and small electric buses should do the trick.

Underground is a good idea, but Malta is too small. It would take two hundred years to finish. Especially if they have to stop work every time they find a bone. The old boats you can sink them and create reefs.

Peter Korsten (12 hours ago)

Whilst I'm a big railfan, underground is just not an option because of several reasons. First of all, it's too expensive. One should have a look at the North/South line currently being built in Amsterdam: over two billion euro for just under 10 km of track, some 6 km of which is underground. OK, so Amsterdam is built on a swamp and it's a World Heritage site, but even if you build tunnels just under the road surface and close majors arteries for a couple of years (there's this bridge that took a bit longer to complete than was planned...), it's going to be very expensive.

Second, Malta is not at all comparable to a densely populated city, where high-capacity heavy rail makes sense. It's perhaps best comparable to a provincial town with surrounding towns and villages. In that case, it would probably be best to have a tram-train: bigger than a tram, but smaller than a train. For instance, a Bombardier Flexity or a Alstom Regio-Citadis.

The only problems are sharing the roads and level crossings. And these are serious problems, but not as serious as footing the bill for an underground.

A.Briffa (13 hours, 23 minutes ago)

@wilfred camilleri. OK we read your comments. What's the point of repeating the same thing?

Louis Amato-Gauci (16 hours, 16 minutes ago)

@ Wilfrid Camilleri - Not sure that your comments regarding cost overruns on the Sheppard Subway are in any way relevant - or even correct. One major contributor to those cost overruns was the fact that the old Sheppard subway station at Yonge Street had to be retrofitted to accommodate an east-west line, new platforms and interchange facilities. Also, contrary to your suggestion, the Sheppard subway line was expensive precisely because it was created entirely by means of a tunnel-boring machine (a first for Canada).

Toronto "found it hard" to build this 5.5 km stretch because it is a city with very limited taxation powers, and as such had to broker a deal for funding with the two senior levels of government (federal and provincial). It had to somehow deal with the fact that the Mike Harris government abruptly axed \$137 million from the project when construction was already well underway, followed by the demise of the old Metro level of government and the amalgamation of five boroughs to form one city in 1998.

I do not see the relevance to Malta's situation at all.

By the way, a 5.5 km subway in Malta would take you from MIA to Valletta.

Joseph E Briffa (17 hours, 18 minutes ago)

We need the change asap and we have to act now; it's been dragging for far too long. Why can't the bodies of small buses - capacity 30 - be built at the Drydocks and just the engines imported,

thereby providing work for the drydocks and saving on importation costs? I am sure it would be possible to provide a couple of hundred of such buses in just 18 months, and 100 every subsequent year and the old junks phased out. The new 'Chinese' buses would do the long runs to Mellieha, B'bugia, Zurrieq, Rabat while the small buses would do the short runs to Sliema, St Julian's, B'Kara, the three villages,. During rush hours, buses should run every 10 mins, and every 20 mins during other times. Buses would run from 6 a.m till 11.p.m. Night buses would run from Paceville. A building with toilets and showers should be constructed at St James Ditch to cater for drivers' needs. Ferries would run in Grand Harbour & M'Mxett harbour every 1/2 hour; the lift to Upper Baracca reinstated. New ferries built at Drydocks. Taxis shld use meters, drivers sit in their cars. NoTrams or U/G.

Franco Farrugia (17 hours, 21 minutes ago)

@ Neville Agius - I don't think that 'Parole ...' is correct in referring to Minister Austin Gatt. Quite the contrary. You may dedicate it to anyone else, but to Austin Gatt? I don't think you're half blinded, politically!

Wilfred L Camilleri (17 hours, 38 minutes ago)

As I mentioned earlier underground is too expensive. Toronto spent \$1 billion for 5.5 kilometers (3.4 miles) of underground using the latest tunneling technology. An above-ground rail or trolley system is just as efficient and much cheaper to build and run. Toronto also has a surface electric trolley system that is very efficient and supplements the underground and bus transit.

A Camilleri (19 hours, 6 minutes ago)

What about the fact that Malta is equivalent to a densely populated European city? That should make it an advantage for underground infrastructure as distances are short and population high in relation to the distances / infrastructure needed. Has the government conducted some preliminary 'back of envelope' costings before dismissing the idea? What funds would be available from the EU for the purpose?

Meanwhile I've always wondered what criteria is used to prioritise road re-building. Eg why is Naxxar Road, Birkirkara to Mosta so neglected. If it was properly surfaced and marked two lanes on each carriageway could be used. As it is everyone needs space to manoeuvre the potholes and therefore drive in the middle of the road. What's the logic behind the new one-lane roads? Has anyone given any consideration to easing traffic FLOWS? Or removing bottlenecks. Eg. Naxxar San Gwann road could easily be restructured to make overtaking possible. As it is everyone has to drive at the speed of the slowest moving lorry.

john fenech (19 hours, 15 minutes ago)

Minister while I agree that the present transport system must be dismantled and remodelled on three or four zone interlinked and operating on shift basis, for safety and efficiency reasons. In the mean time take what we have and start tomorrow to give the public what was promised yesterday.

Utilise the minibuses, green cabs and ferry boats to service those location presently not on the PTA routes or require a double journey to reach the destination.

Also increase the park and ride facilities to popular localities. Remove or decrease the taxes on motorised bicycles, green cars, low power motorbikes and bicycles.

Most of the above can be running in a few weeks, God forbid if we have to wait another seven years to achieve some kind of reform. In all probability by that time we will be up to our eyeballs in carbon dioxide, and we will have one of the busiest hearse companies in Europe! And all the fuss of last week, your promised resignation included, for f... all!

L Ebejer (19 hours, 16 minutes ago)

I cannot understand all these comments about underground tunnels for trams .Trams run on the roads and they are driven by electricity from hanging lines. May I ask the minister are all the new buses that were subsidised from our taxes to be scrapped to make way for new buses?I suggest to look at the possibility that their engines be modified to run on gas.Hope that something be done to the sacred vis a vis the Gozo bus service (diservice).That will be a hard nut to crack!!

A.Callus (19 hours, 55 minutes ago)

Underground is one of the best options. But it does not have to be hugely expensive as some are stating. We can learn on the mistakes of other countries. The "underground" tunnels do not all have to be underground. Anyone who uses the London UG knows this. One line (for a start) that crosses Malta or at least central/South could be a good start.

As regards profits etc... Maybe you people don't know that currently the government is making losses from public transport through subsidies. It does not need to be profitable from day 1, it is very hard to make public transport profitable immediately.

M.Spiteri (20 hours ago)

We've waited so long - I certainly don't mind waiting a bit more if things get done properly. We've even gotten to the point when bus drivers wear a proper uniform in a 'decent way' Imagination is certainly rife over here - let's go underground, let's swim, let's fly - oh let's get serious. The biggest difficulty is our road and village set-up - do you see any straight roads in Malta? Can you imagine all the twists and turns for trams? Let's invest in bicycles for town centres and please let us admit once and for all that we are a 'pampered lot' who will use a car instead of a 10 minute walk - just look at the success of car free days in Malta!!

Etienne Pavia (20 hours, 39 minutes ago)

Malta is a tiny island with a mere few sq km. If we had four/five sub-stations operating within specific areas, one would just hop from a bus to another to get to a place. If system is properly designed and implemented one can reach from South to North in just 2 bus changes and shorter time than current inefficient system. Also big buses are not suitable for Malta, we just need more frequent service by mini-vans that cater for 20pax. I travelled extensively and in small countries or big cities having the size of Malta you rarely see big buses using public roads obstructed by a huge no. of cars.

F J Brincat (20 hours, 41 minutes ago)

To be honest, I cannot see the economic viability of underground transport yet, plus the fact that it could take ages to construct one test tunnel.

Possible solution could be Monorails, though they are aesthetically unappealing and have a couple of technical disadvantages.

Neville Agius (20 hours, 52 minutes ago)

It seems that for PN every good idea is not viable like what happened with the wind farms ... too expensive therefore don't do it.... now underground transport is not viable aswell... so let us

remain status quo !... I would like to dedicate the song "Parole, Parole" performed by Mina to Transport Minister Dr. Austin Gatt.

Franco Farrugia (20 hours, 56 minutes ago)

@ A Borg's prophecies: Oh, my goodness, here we are - the prophets are out again, after some months in hibernation. And they have started almost 5 years early! Haven't you all learnt your lessons (both sides!) and not pronounce what is surely to happen in the near future? For God's sake, put a sock in it!!!

James Sultana (21 hours, 5 minutes ago)

New fleet of energy efficient buses ????? AGAIN???? Haven't WE- through our taxes- just financed new buses for the owners ?? Where was Mr. Gatt during the last "reform" in which WE paid for the buses in what was to be an improved route system ? Does he know that nearly all the buses are certified at Euro III levels ?

Is it the new fleet of energy- efficient buses that is needed. OR AN EFFICIENT WAY FOR SOME IMPORTER TO MAKE MONEY????

How come no mention of gas-driven buses (and cars) ? Most European cities use these kind of buses due to less pollution and cheaper running costs.

Wilfred L Camilleri (21 hours, 6 minutes ago)

Underground systems are extremely expensive to build and require a huge and regular ridership to be sustainable. Even Toronto, with a population of 2.5 million, found it hard to build a new underground line and they didn't have to dig through a lot of bedrock to do it. The Sheppard line cost just under \$1 billion and took eight years to build. The line has five stations and is 5.5 kilometers (3.4 miles) long. For Malta, tram lines and a fleet of modern fuel-efficient buses is the only real feasible alternative. Revamping the Maltese transit system is a long term undertaking and 2015 is not unreasonable.

Miriam Galea (21 hours, 7 minutes ago)

Dear Austin,

My advice is: don't dare touch the Gozo Transport a-system. You as a gozitan should understand why.

Leave their Minister in peace and don;t echo-the-island...if you know what I mean

Miriam

Wayne Grima (21 hours, 10 minutes ago)

I agree with Jesmond Navarro..2015?? By that time I expect to have flying buses!!! Come on seriously. It is always the same story here...

A Camilleri (21 hours, 10 minutes ago)

@ S Muscat. You cannot add the annual amount of tourists to the local population. The 1 million tourists are not here all year round. Based on a one week average stay and ignoring seasonal adjustments they are the equivalent of 20,000 full time residents.

However I think that without an underground network, public transport will never be efficient. It would still be subject to the same congested roads and traffic.

caroline crutchley (21 hours, 22 minutes ago)

Congratulations Minister Gatt on picking up on many of my suggestions in my letter to The Times. If you would like my opinions you're welcome to call

Paul Gauci (21 hours, 30 minutes ago)

The city of Frankfurt in Germany has a population of approximately 650,000. Not a lot more than Malta. But they still have an underground system.

I can understand that an underground system may be too expensive however why don't we study the viability of an underground system which caters for the towns and cities around the 2 harbours? I'm sure that ONE CIRCULAR lane like this would have enough patrons:

Sliema -> St Julians -> San Gwann -> Mater Dei/University -> B'Kara -> St. Venera -> Qormi -> Paola/Tarxien -> Fgura -> Zabbar -> Smart City site -> Kalkara -> Valletta -> Sliema

A.Borg (21 hours, 35 minutes ago)

@ Jesmond Navarro

Yes, it's 2015 because by then Labour will be in govt and rest assured that Joseph Muscat will implement such needed reform without any further procrastination. 'PN' and 'DEADLINES' are two words that aren't really compatible.

Karl Abela (21 hours, 46 minutes ago)

@Muscat:

400K inhabitants + 1.5 mill tourists does not make a population of 1.5 million. At most, the population including tourists in August or September averages 700K. That's not half the quota we need for an underground transport. Having said that, I still agree that we need to think outside the box for a more efficient means of transport.

v.pulis (21 hours, 47 minutes ago)

if water taxis are being contemplated then it is imperative that the barracca lift is reintroduced.

This form of transport is not mentioned in the report.

It would be nonsensical to ferry passengers from say Senglea or Vittoriosa and then leave them stranded at Valletta wharf.

Otherwise the water taxi idea is a commendable albeit overdue decision.

André Xuereb (21 hours, 53 minutes ago)

If the 2015 "target" is the modernisation of the fleet and improvement in manners/working environment of the bus drivers, I would have to agree with you. However, if the target is the changing of the mentality of the public to prefer public transport over cars, well then I would agree that quite a few years are needed after modernisation of the fleet and other "preliminary" measures: such a change in mentality is perpetuated rather slowly in general.

Mr/Ms Muscat: The problem is that the viability of such a system depends (if one is to believe the minister) on having a population of 1.5 million people, a large proportion of which uses public transport. Having a total "influx" of 1.5 million people is not the same thing. However, your idea of a test line (say airport-valletta-Cirkewwa) might prove quite interesting.

Michael Vella (21 hours, 54 minutes ago)

Good idea on the two trams-No need to go underground. Trams like in Amsterdam would be just fine. Even a short tram from Blata l-Bajda to Valletta would ease traffic! I thought the minister would set a target for 4 years and not 7 yrs!!

Keith Chircop (21 hours, 59 minutes ago)

Have to agree Mr. Navarro here.

George Pace (22 hours, 2 minutes ago)

Excellent idea but do we have to wait seven years for something which is in urgent need of implementing. The transport system is a chaotic shambles and a shame on successive Governments who never did anything about it but poured huge sums of tax payers hard earned money into a bottomless well. But its gratifying that at least we received a huge thank you from the recipients as demonstrated by the chain gang strike last week.

apgrech (22 hours, 5 minutes ago)

I think that an overhead tram system will be much cheaper to build than an underground one.

Luisa A (22 hours, 12 minutes ago)

I would also like to suggest, that elder people, let say over 70, can travel FREE on any bus, anytime. This can save us some cars from the road! I'd like to see some form of plastic card system that can be topped up, something like the Oyster card in London, and that it can be economic for the frequent traveler

S. Muscat (22 hours, 37 minutes ago)

Dr. Gatt has been quoted as saying, by this or another paper that underground transport, according to his experts, is not a viable option, unless you have a minimum of 1.5 million people in the country. On the last count, we are just over 400K people living here and we get over a million tourists every year. The total of which probably makes up the 1.5 million quoted on yearly figures. Why not invest in at least one line of underground transport and see how it goes. No need to create a 101 different tunnels for starters.

Sabine Cassar-Alpert (22 hours, 38 minutes ago)

Can't help wondering what the good minister has in store for Gozo. Or is it too early for pre-election goodies?
