

VICTORIA TRANSPORTATION CENTRE

Tim Pharoah - report on behalf of Westminster City Council, 1973

COMMENTS ON TRANSPORT ASPECTS OF GREATER LONDON COUNCIL BRIEF FOR REDEVELOPMENT OF VICTORIA STATION

The suitability of Victoria as a location for substantial increases in employment deserves serious consideration from the transport point of view. The Greater London Council, in their revised criteria for office location (see Town Planning Committee Agenda 3 February 1972), have said that growth may be allowed "in close proximity to Central London Termini, or to places which provide significant facilities for the interchange of passengers, provided that the development will not cause passenger traffic exceeding the transport capacity". But no attempt has apparently been made to demonstrate that the suggested additional office space at Victoria Station satisfies this requirement.

The effect on commuter conditions depends on

- (a) capacity of commuter services
- (b) total employment
- (c) origins of commuters
- (d) times of travel

These are commented on below

(a) There is information on commuting by British Rail services to Victoria. This shows that in 1969 the worst load factor passengers in the morning peak period (7-10 am) was 155% (i.e. one person standing for every two people seated, assuming an even distribution through the train); the average load factor for the same period was 85%, the worst of the major central London termini. In the peak hour itself (8.15-9.15 am) there were about 1,850 empty seats on trains arriving at Victoria.

The load factors vary considerably, however, for inner suburban, outer suburban and outer South East area trains. There is a discernable trend that peak hour conditions are improving on the short-distance trains but deteriorating on the longer-distance ones. It is the latter which give cause for concern since it is the longer-distance trains where seats are most required.

AVERAGE LOAD FACTORS - PEAK HOUR ARRIVALS (8.15 - 9.15)				
Victoria	1969	1970	1971	BRITISH RAIL PLANNING OBJECTIVE
Inner Suburban	99	101	103	110
Outer Suburban	122	113	112	100
Outer S.E.Area	117	118	121	90

Source: SOURCE Greater London Development Plan Inquiry, Paper S30/76 (Amendment No. 1)

This trend is due mainly to the outward movement of population.

(b) The ability of British Rail to provide extra longer-distance trains to improve commuting conditions needs to be clarified, but it is clear that additional commuters to Victoria will aggravate rather than alleviate the problem. In considering extra employment at the station site it should be borne in mind that substantial increases are already committed in the Victoria area (generated by about 1 million square feet of new office accommodation in Victoria Street), the effects of which on commuting conditions have not yet been quantified. Moreover, increases in office space are envisaged in other Central Area locations, which could further add to the Victoria commuter load.

(c) The origins of commuters are also important. There is evidence to suggest that people (in the longer term) often choose their home location to be able to travel direct to their place of work (i.e. to minimise the need to change transport facilities). For example, in the four years following the move of Shell International Petroleum from various offices in the Cities of London and Westminster to the Shell Centre on the South Bank, the proportion of their employees commuting to Waterloo station increased from 40% to 65%. Also British Rail have noted that “over 50% of the Southern Region passengers can, and do, choose their London terminal so that on leaving the station they can proceed to their final destination on foot”.

It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that additional employment at Victoria will mainly be catered for by the British Rail lines into the Victoria terminal, together with the London Transport Victoria and District lines. Again, the present and potential capacity of these facilities needs to be assessed.

(d) One advantage of locating employment at or near stations is that it can achieve a degree of “staggering” of travel times (because employees at the station need to allow less time between the train and their office) and so relieve peak-hour conditions. Additional employment at stations will not, of course, improve upon present conditions, though it may create fewer problems than additional employment located elsewhere. New employment at stations would only bring about an improvement in travel conditions if it is undertaken as a replacement for employment elsewhere.

SPECIFIC POINTS ON DRAFT DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

PARAGRAPH 3: Development objective (f) should refer to the need for a “convenient” not an “ordered” environment for pedestrians. The ordering of development is a means to the end of creating a convenient environment; the ordering of pedestrians is not a desirable objective.

Development objective (h) is irrelevant to the planning brief. As far as the planning authorities are concerned, proposals need not be “economically viable” in the financial sense; planning gains as outlined in (a) to (g) are the essential objectives. As far as the private sector is concerned proposals will not be submitted unless they are thought to be economically viable; this is of no immediate concern to the planning authorities.

PARAGRAPH 4.4.2 (d)

This paragraph implies that the integration of Green Line services with rail facilities at Victoria is now of less importance since the London Transport Executive is no longer responsible for them. The need for integration should be assessed on the basis of actual and potential interchange traffic; the change of responsibility for Green Line services is irrelevant.

PARAGRAPH 4.13

References to the need for segregating different types of pedestrian (residents, long-distance passengers and local workers) are misconceived. Segregation may be desirable for the purpose of achieving convenient movement on foot, but this will depend on the type of trip (e.g. bus-train, train-work, train-air terminal, home-train) not on the type of person.

PARAGRAPH 4.12.3

Says that *“any road improvement scheme must achieve at least 15% reserve capacity at all junctions”*.

First of all, use of the word “improvement” is misleading. The Highways Act 1959 (Part V), for example, provides for a variety of types of road improvement, and not all of these relate to the provision of additional capacity. More important, the statement is inconsistent with the Greater London Council's own statements and policies with regard to traffic restraint in Central London, and with the Secretary of State's View of this matter (see GLC paper “Living with Traffic” March 1973 paragraph 1.28 which calls for a reduction in traffic of 10-15%, and Statement by Secretary of State on the draft Greater London Development Plan (1969), paragraph 37).

CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR AN OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR VICTORIA STATION

From the point of view of the planning authorities (or the community as whole) the main purpose behind the redevelopment of Victoria Station is to improve transport terminus and interchange facilities. This is clear from the brief in sections dealing with relevant GLDP policies and “Development Objectives” (paragraphs 2.1 and 3).

Two questions arise from this”

(i) How can the transport improvement be secured?

(ii) What other benefits can be secured at the same time?

- (i) Transport improvements could be achieved by either government grants (particularly central government infrastructure grant under the Transport Act 1968; the current rate for interchange schemes being 75%) or allowing British Rail to undertake profitable development to pay for the improvements, or by a combination of the two. A third possibility of financing improvements from British Rail fare revenues can be disregarded in view of the Board's difficult financial position and statutory obligation to break even.
- (ii) The method of financing the transport improvements is likely to have a significant bearing on the other benefits that can be secured

upon redevelopment. Infrastructure grants alone, for example, are unlikely to allow for any new residential accommodation or open space. Profitable development, on the other hand, would probably consist of office development, large quantities of which could have serious environmental implications for the Victoria area.

The draft development brief does not distinguish clearly enough between the need for transport interchange improvements and the opportunity for other kinds of development at Victoria. It is therefore suggested that two broad alternatives should be considered before the brief for redevelopment is finalised, These are:-

- A. Interchange improvements. Redevelopment would be limited to transport facilities together with, perhaps, redevelopment of existing buildings in (for example) Terminus Place and Hudsons Place. This option could be financed largely if not wholly from government grants to British Rail and London Transport. Little private capital would be involved.
- B. Interchange improvements and other development. In addition to interchange improvements this would include redevelopment over much of the station site (including decking over the existing rail tracks) with profitable (office) development to pay for interchange improvements and/or other facilities such as residential development and open space. This second option would involve a substantial amount private capital, but the implications of this for the availability of infrastructure grants for the transport elements should be thoroughly investigated.

Both of these broad alternatives should be investigated in terms of the various matters raised in the draft brief; employment policy, environment etc., as well as transport. The main difference between them, however, apart from finance) is that the intensity of development would be greater with option B than with option A.

From the transport point of view, option A appears to offer more flexibility because more space would be available not only for improvements to existing facilities but also (if necessary) for the provision of terminal facilities for a channel tunnel link and/or additional rail link to Heathrow Airport and/or Green line and other coach services. With regard to the latter there could be large traffic and environmental benefits from transferring the present coach station to the Victoria Station site. In addition there may be greater opportunity for the site to contribute to the improvement of traffic and environmental conditions in the immediate locality, in particular the removal of through traffic from Pimlico and Belgravia.

While option B may also be able to accommodate the same range of transport facilities, this will probably be more difficult to achieve in spatial and environmental terms because of the additional (non transport) development involved. It might prove difficult in design terms, for example, to include

Non-revenue-earning development (e.g. residential, open space) as well as office and the transport facilities.

Nevertheless, it is option B which is clearly implied in the draft brief. Paragraph 4.2 says that “*the site presents favourable conditions for an imaginative, bold redevelopment of metropolitan scale*”. It is not clear, however, what constitute the “*favourable conditions*”. The architecture and design will be constrained by the two adjacent conservation areas; there are Listed Buildings within the site itself; there is a need for (presumably expensive) decking over the railway tracks; the area is sensitive to high buildings; the present area generates large volumes of pedestrian and vehicular movement, and both road and particularly rail facilities to Victoria are overloaded at peak hours. Indeed, one might say that additional employment and other activities are being proposed for the site despite its circumstances.

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