RUSSIAN TRAMWAYS: AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

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Vienna: Public transport's role in a capital with enviable living standards

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Facing up to an uncertain climate

HOWARD JOHNSTON, PUBLISHER

The past month has seen extreme weather bring large sections of Northern Europe to a standstill with widespread closures of airport runways and highways due to record snowfall in many areas. While this caused chaos over the Christmas break for many travellers, it is also encouraging to note that tramway operations continued largely unaffected. Some more modern low-floor designs struggled, seeing some operators bring out their older fleet members or even borrowing from local museums to continue services, but the point is that light rail in its various (and glorious) forms kept cities moving.

Climate change can no longer be ignored as such unpredictable weather demonstrates how the environment will continue to affect us all in our daily lives. Cleaning up the atmosphere without hampering urban expansion can, and must, be achieved by removing private vehicles from our roads if we are to sustain a long-term future as many cities face the challenges of doubling – or even tripling – in size over the next 50 years. All this falls against a backdrop of the toughest economic climate we have seen for generations. The signs from 2010 were encouraging with many LRT schemes worldwide receiving the green light, but do we have the finances to accept the challenges we face in the coming years of austerity? While no-one would argue that investment in education or health or public services should be cut in favour of public transport, it is important that we all still lobby hard to ensure that spending is maintained to fuel the growth of the future.

Lastly, after almost 16 years and 190 issues, I am handing over the editorial reins of Tramways & Urban Transit to my successor, Simon Johnson. Over the last three years, he has successfully made this magazine more topical, more relevant and closer to the heart of global debate on rail development. I know that you will all wish him the best as TAUT embarks on its 74th year — he would love to hear from you....