

# ***Hackney Environment News***

**Autumn 2003**

## **73,38, WHITHER THE ROUTEMASTER?**

Following the news in the last HEN that the classic Routemasters on the 73 bus route are threatened with decommission – a threat which now seems to be taking place – we have been investigating further into the future of these buses.

Transport for London (TfL) have resolved that once the present Routemasters have “reached the end of their useful life” (in practice another 10 years) they should not be replaced and that in time all buses in London will be Driver Only – a position which has the support of Councillor Vincent Stops, Hackney’s Cabinet Member for Transport, who states that passengers should realise that “time has run out for the Routemaster”.

The justification for this seems to be twofold: firstly that buses should conform with the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 requiring all buses to be fully accessible, and secondly, over safety concerns of having buses with an open platform.

On the face of it, these seem wholly laudable reasons for replacing the old Routemasters with the newer models. In reality, however, the picture is quite different. Disability Awareness in Action pressure group states that the new models of buses with ramp access for wheelchairs have not, in practice, encouraged more disabled passengers to travel by bus.

The second justification for abolition is over safety of the open platform on the Routemaster. TfL were reluctant to provide any figures for injuries on Routemasters – stating that they were roughly double those of injuries sustained on Driver Only buses, but they did concede that the numbers were very low.

Routemasters provide a faster, more flexible, more efficient and more pleasant journey for passengers, drivers and conductors. Mayor Ken has now done a U-turn on his original vision of re-establishing the Routemaster as the first choice for buses in London – after buying up all the ones he could get his hands on. To make the reasons for abolition even more tenuous, TfL plans to maintain Routemasters in Central London – as a sop to tourists – since they do acknowledge that Routemasters are more attractive and more popular with passengers! Perhaps it is not too late to mount a campaign to save them.

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