

## Let the Monorail System Steam On

**ENTREPRENEUR BELLO XERRI HAS JUST REVIVED THE PLANS FOR A MONORAIL SYSTEM IN MALTA. IT MAY BE OVERWHELMING BUT IT DEFINITELY IS A START TO SOLVE OUR NATIONAL TRANSPORT CALAMITY.**

Stuck in traffic, my mind begins to wander. The daily slow moving queues of cars are making it rather impossible to get anywhere on time. Maybe it is high time we invested in a completely different system of transport which would make commuting by public transport a normal state of affairs. I'm thinking about one system which would allow us to go from one side to the other of this little island of ours in a fraction of the time that it currently takes us. I'm thinking of some kind of railway system above or below ground. I'm thinking of the monorail which has been recently proposed by the local hotelier and construction entrepreneur, Bello Xerri.

The well known entrepreneur who has over the last years put forward plans for a single rail system, should be taken seriously. This is probably the most efficient way of transport for our little island. His suggestions include a ferry service which links Sliema, Valletta and the Three Cities as well as a monorail transportation system. The privately run, public transport system proposed will have four main underground stations in four different localities.

Lets' face it, this is probably one of the greatest ideas that has been submitted so far. A quick look at our public transport system over the years shows us that locally we are nowhere near of offering the general public a decently efficient transport system which gets the commuter from point A to point B without any hitches. The railway, which existed more than a century ago, is indeed the closest local public transport system to this proposal.

The railway was a highly reliable means of public transport service back in 1883 – of course a stark reminder of the our colonial past. Though it originally ran from Valletta to Rabat, with the Mtarfa extension being added later on, it provided daily commuters, both foreign and local, with a relatively fast service. There were in fact plans for it to be extended to other localities such as Qormi as well as to the localities close to the Grand Harbour. This however was not to be as the system ran into financial difficulties and the service was suspended in 1931. Seemingly our transport systems often end up meeting the same faith. We do not need to go far back, Arriva's complete flop is one of them.

The train was eventually overtaken by the tram and by buses. Buses were seen to be efficient in the early twentieth century but precisely it was back then that they were efficient. Unfortunately it seems that as a people we are stuck into the scenario where we believe that buses are the main means of public transport to be used locally. Considering the ever increasing number of cars on the road, the likelihood of traffic easing down on its own accord is not bound to happen anytime soon. As a daily commuter to work, I am truly baffled by the thought of why we still do not have an adequate public transport system. By this I mean a system which truly works well in the current times. Beyond question, increasing the number of vehicles on our meagre 2,254km of road network length is not the solution. A single rail system is. Instinctively the initial and reactive attitude of our deeply-rooted archaic culture props up the usual cut-and-dried arguments against such an incentive. These arguments often run along the issues of infrastructure in such a tiny country, the major overhaul required, the relatively hilly aspect of our terrain, the cost and so on and so forth. But seriously, do such arguments in 2014 still hold? Are we to believe that we are to remain with the local scenario forever? Are we as a people to remain stuck in such an archaic mindset? I hope not!

It is true, this project does require an overhaul but then can't we go through this like other countries do? The geographical terrain can definitely be worked around – we undeniably have the tools and machinery needed to carry out such works and more, probably. I'm sure that some other local known and not-so-known entrepreneurs would be interested in this. And as for the costs, haven't the Maltese Islands always found a way of dealing with necessary things? If this is necessary, should we be looking at the cost as a snag?

We must put things into the proper perspective – something which has probably been tweaked according to the whims and fantasies of the moment. Transport is meant to ease travelling from one locality to another and not to appease one group or another. Honestly with such a limited road network, one would expect transport to be of no main concern locally. Undoubtedly our public transport system so far has only served to deter potential commuters from using it, rather than to attract them. It is high time we changed this. It is high time we changed our deeply ingrained mindset and start looking at serious alternatives by supporting bold impresarios like Bello Xerri to further develop solutions that will make a difference.