

## **Gliwice's (Poland) tramway network closed down!**

### **1) Brief information about the city of Gliwice**

Gliwice is the city with the population of almost 200 000 (exactly 197,393 in 2008), which makes it the 18<sup>th</sup> largest city in Poland in terms of population. It is also the third largest city within the Katowice urban area – the conurbation being the largest urban area in Poland, with the population of 2.7 million. Gliwice is a founding member of Metropolitan Association of Upper Silesia, uniting 14 cities of Silesian Voivodeship (with the total population of little more than 2 million). The Association's principal aim is to work out a common development strategy, as well as to cooperate in the field of industrial projects (previously, it used to promote the vision of uniting all member cities under the umbrella of one single city called Silesia, but it seems that idea has been abandoned for the time being). Finally, it makes part of Silesian metropolitan area, comprised of Polish (80% of the population) and Czech urban areas. Katowice conurbation in general covers the same area as the Upper Silesian Industrial Area, the largest area of this kind in Poland. One should note that Gliwice used to be a German city until 1945, after the war it became part of so-called recovered territories for Poland (this was during the German period, when the first tramway line was established, exactly 115 years ago). Now it constitutes a major educational centre in the region, with headquarters of main Silesian academic institutions.

### **2) Tramways in Gliwice – short history**

Gliwice's tramways have been operating since 115 years without any interruptions (they were considered to be an important element of the city's tradition - that's why the Council's decision provoked so many negative reactions). They used to make part of Silesian Interurbans (Tramwaje Śląskie), which is still the third longest tramway network in Europe, as it connects thirteen Silesian municipalities.

In 1892, particular Silesian cities signed an agreement with a German Kramer company, concerning the planned construction of a tramway network, connecting region's municipalities. Gliwice's part of the network had been launched on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1894 (people of Gliwice celebrated its 115<sup>th</sup> birthday just before the line's closure; the celebration was combined with the farewell ceremony). At that time, tramway connected Gliwice with the neighbouring city of Zabrze. Electrification of the line took place four years after its construction.

Before its closure in 2009, Gliwice's part of the network had been comprised of two lines passing through the city (which, as mentioned above, had been making part of a larger Silesian tramway/train system).

The gradual decline of the whole system started in the 70's/80's, as few existing lines had been shortened. In 1991, an ambitious and innovative project of Regional Movement Railway (KRR – aerial metro connecting Silesian cities) has been officially abandoned; although the construction was already in progress (the Polish parliament crossed it off from the list of priority projects, and thus depriving it of additional funding). Trains' frequency has been shortened as well, together with the establishment of new bus lines, which often doubled what was already in place.

In 2003, the Municipal Transport Union of the Upper Silesian Industrial District (KZK GOP – in charge of transport in the Silesia) has been taken over by the state's Treasury. Since it was not in municipal hands, incentives for investment were lower and it was more difficult to apply for structural funds. In December 2008, shares in the company were distributed among particular cities, paving the way for investment and modernization of existing connections (at least, this is what was expected at that time, but in the end it didn't turn out to be this way).

### **3) Council's decision to close down the line**

First rumours about a possible closure of the tramway network in Gliwice came up in September 2008. It was linked with the publication of the so-called "city centre's revitalization concept", according to which four big shopping centres would be constructed in the centre (one of them already exists, the construction of the second one is in progress), replacing tramway rails. Those rumours were quickly denied by the Council, which even promised to construct a new, modern tramway line.

In January 2009, two weeks after the city took over a part of shares in KZK GOP, Zygmunt Frankiewicz, Gliwice's President, announced in the local newspaper his plans to close down the tramway network, arguing that there were no financial means to modernize the line. His argument was a partial lie, since there is a special programme, which aims to help Silesian cities to modernize their tramway infrastructure before Euro 2012 football championship. Thus, Gliwice resigned of 11 million zlotys (about 2.7 million euro) which had been provided for the city. In contrast to Gliwice, other Silesian cities (like Katowice, Chorzow, Tychy, etc.) see the potential of tramways and keep on modernizing their parts of the network, taking advantage of structural funds designed to rebuild the transport infrastructure.

At the moment, it seems that there is no coherent transport strategy in Gliwice at all. The position of public transport has been gradually weakened, since there is no "park and ride" system, and parking in the city centre is

free, which is also contributing to the devastation of Gliwice's architecture and environment. Planned construction of large shopping centres (with free parking) will further damage the public transport's competitiveness. Another element is the failed policy of KZK GOP, which did not manage to design a tariff policy well-suited to commuters' needs and still develops new bus lines, doubling existing connections (President Frankiewicz is one of KZK's board members).

President Frankiewicz has repeatedly stressed his willingness to limit existing tramway connections. According to him, old tramway lines contribute to financial problems of KZK (deficit of 20 million zlotys / 5 million euro in 2008), as they consume a lot of electric energy and require a constant inflow of money needed for their maintenance. President's critics say that he should rather pay attention to high costs of bus network (linked with oil prices), and failed policy of KZK, which keeps on developing new, useless bus lines, therefore rising operating costs.

During Council's meetings, President Frankiewicz also expressed his doubt in tramways' eco-friendliness, saying that buses are in fact friendlier to the environment than tramways. His actions were in obvious contradiction with experts' recommendations, which rather stressed the need of maintaining the existing Gliwice's tramway network.

President's decision was supported by KZK and the Council, and since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2009, tramways are no longer present on Gliwice's streets. They were replaced by new bus lines. The decision is a problem not only for inhabitants of Gliwice, but also for people living in neighbouring cities of Zabrze and Ruda Slaska, who commute to Gliwice every day for work.

#### 4) Reactions to Council's move

Closure of tramway network provoked numerous protests in the milieu of Gliwice's inhabitants. The creation of a Citizens' Committee for the Defence of Tramways and the Promotion of Municipal Communication in Gliwice was followed by other grass-roots initiatives. The above-mentioned Committee, apart from sending different petitions and protest letters, collected 20,000 signatures required for a local referendum initiated by citizens. Its aim would be to deprive the President Frankiewicz and members of the City Council of their posts. Signatures are in the process of being verified. If everything goes well, the referendum will take place in November (the decision is supposed to be announced in mid-September). Such a referendum would constitute a kind of precedent in the history of Polish self-government (though, there are doubts that required number of citizens will turn up on the ballot).

On 31<sup>st</sup> August, a special ceremony took place, which aim was to "say thank you to 115-year work of Gliwice tramways". For local activists, the closure of tramway lines is only a temporary solution, as they hope for re-establishment of the network.

### Tak manipulowano już 50 lat temu w USA !



Pictures found on the website of the Citizens' Committee for the Defence of Tramways and the Promotion of Municipal Communication ([www.tramwaje.ubf.pl](http://www.tramwaje.ubf.pl)): Pictures say: "that's how people in the USA were manipulated 50 years ago – don't let being fooled"

### Nie dajmy się oszukać !

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Source: website of the Citizens' Committee for the Defence of Tramways and the Promotion of Municipal Communication (Obywatelski Komitet Obrony Tramwajów i Promocji Komunikacji Miejskiej w Gliwicach): [www.tramwaje.ubf.pl](http://www.tramwaje.ubf.pl)