GOING NOWHERE FAST

THIS is ludicrous! We can talk to people anywhere in the world or fly to meet them in a few hours. W e can even send probes to other planets. But when it comes to getting around our cities, we depend on system s that have scarcely changed since the days of Gottlieb Daimler.

In recent years, the pollution belched out by millions of vehicles has do minated the debate about transport. The problem has even persuaded California – that home of car culture – to curb traffic growth. But no matter how green they become, cars are unlikely to get us around crowded cities any faster. And persuading people to use trains and buses will always be an up hill struggle. Cars, after all, are popular for very good reasons, as anyone with small children or heavy shopping knows.
So politicians should be trying to lure people out of their cars, not forcing them out. There's certainly no shortage of alternatives. Perhaps the most attractive is the concept known as personal rapid transit (PRT), independently invented in the U S and Europe in the 1950s.

The idea is to go to one of many stations and hop into a computer-controlled car, which can whisk you to your destination along a network of guideways. You wouldn't have to share your space with strangers, and with no traffic lights, pedestrians or parked cars to slow things down, PRT guideways can carry far more traffic, nonstop, than any inner city road.

It's a wonderful vision, but the odds are stacked against PRT for a number of reasons. The first cars ran on existing roads, and it was only after they became popular – and after governments started earning revenue from them-that a road network designed specifically for motor vehicles w as built. With PRT, the infrastructure would have to com e first-and that would cost megabucks. What's more, any transport system that threatened the car's dominance would be up against all those with a stake in maintaining the status quo, from private car owners to manufacturers and oil multinationals. Even if PRTs were spectacularly successful in trials, it might not make much difference. Superior technology doesn't always triumph, as the VHS versus Betamax and Windows versus Apple Mac battles showed. But "dual-mode" systems might just succeed where PRT seems doomed to fail.

The Danish RUF system envisaged by Palle Jensen, for example, resembles PRT but with one key difference: vehicles have wheels as well as a slot allowing them to travel on a monorail, so they can drive off the rail onto a normal road. Once on a road, the occupant would take

LIVEWORKSHEETS

over from the computer, and the RUF vehicle -the term comes from a Danish saying meaning to "go fast" – would become an electric car.

Build a fast network of guideways in a busy city centre and people would have a strong incentive not just to use public RUF vehicles, but also to buy their own dual-mode vehicle. Commuters could drive onto the guideway, sit back and read as they are chauffeured into the city. At work, they would jump out, leaving their vehicles to park themselves. Unlike PRT, such a system could grow organically, as each network would serve a large area around it and people nearby could buy into it. And a dual-mode system might even win the support of car manufacturers, who could easily switch to producing dual-mode vehicles. Of course, creating a new transport system will not be cheap or easy. But unlike adding a dedicated bus lane here or extending the underground railway there, an innovative system such as Jensen's could transform cities.

And it's not just a matter of saving a few minutes a day. According to the Red Cross, more than 30 million people have died in road accidents in the past century-three times the number killed in the First World War-and the annual death toll is rising. And what's more, the Red Cross believes road accidents will become the third biggest cause of death and disability by 2020, ahead of diseases such as AIDS and tuberculosis. Surely we can find a better way to get around?

Questions 1-6

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage

TRUE if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this
1 City transport developed slower than other means of communication.
2 The pollution caused by city transport has been largely ignored.
3 Most states in America have taken actions to reduce vehicle growth.
4 Public transport is particularly difficult to use on steep hills.
5 Private cars are much more convenient for those who tend to buy a lot of things during shopping.
6 Government should impose compulsory restrictions on car use.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Questions 7-12 Classify the following descriptions as referring to

A PRT only

B RUF only

C both PRT and RUF

Write the correct letter, A, B, or C in boxes 7-12 on your answer sheet.

7 It is likely to be resisted by both individuals and manufacturers.

8 It can run at high speed in cities.

9 It is not necessary to share with the general public.

10 It is always controlled by a computer.

11 It can run on existing roads.

12 It can be bought by private buyers.

Question 13

Choose THREE letters, A-G. Which THREE of the following are advantages of

the new transport system?

A. economy

B. space

C. low pollution

D. suitability for families

E. speed

F. safety

G. suitability for children

LIVEWORKSHEETS