

THE LYON MÉTRO

by Eric Stuart

As with many cities, Lyon had a comprehensive tramway in the past. It operated on three gauges (60cm, Metre and Standard), the latter two surviving until the 1950s. There were also rural tramways. The replacement modes were trolleybuses and motorbuses.

In the 1970s, the received wisdom was that cities of one million inhabitants-plus needed a metro. As the population was expected to reach that figure soon, a number of plans were formulated. The initial system decided on was to be a capital 'Y' shape, with the single leg of the 'Y' pointing east. On reaching the city centre, there was to be a junction, with a branch to the eastern city centre and the new main SNCF station, Part Dieu, with the other to the section of the city lying between the rivers Rhône and Saône, reaching the other main SNCF station, Perrache. Trains would serve each branch alternately. However, after the junction and station had been completed, there was a change of plan. All trains from the east would serve the northern arm of the 'Y' and a new platform was built in the tunnel to the southern arm. This took the space of the westbound track, so all trains now reverse on the eastbound track, with passengers passing between the original station and the 'new' platform to change trains – an odd arrangement. The northern arm is called Ligne A and the southern, Ligne B.

As time has passed, both arms of the system have been extended. For a time, one of the branches terminated at the then venue of the Lyon Football team (OL). After matches, fans were shepherded into the first two coaches of the trains, the rear being left for passengers further along the line.

These two lines are operated by three coach trains, with an operations system essentially like that of the original Victoria Line with the ATO operating the doors and driving to/from depots. The trains are rubber-tyred like some Parisian lines.

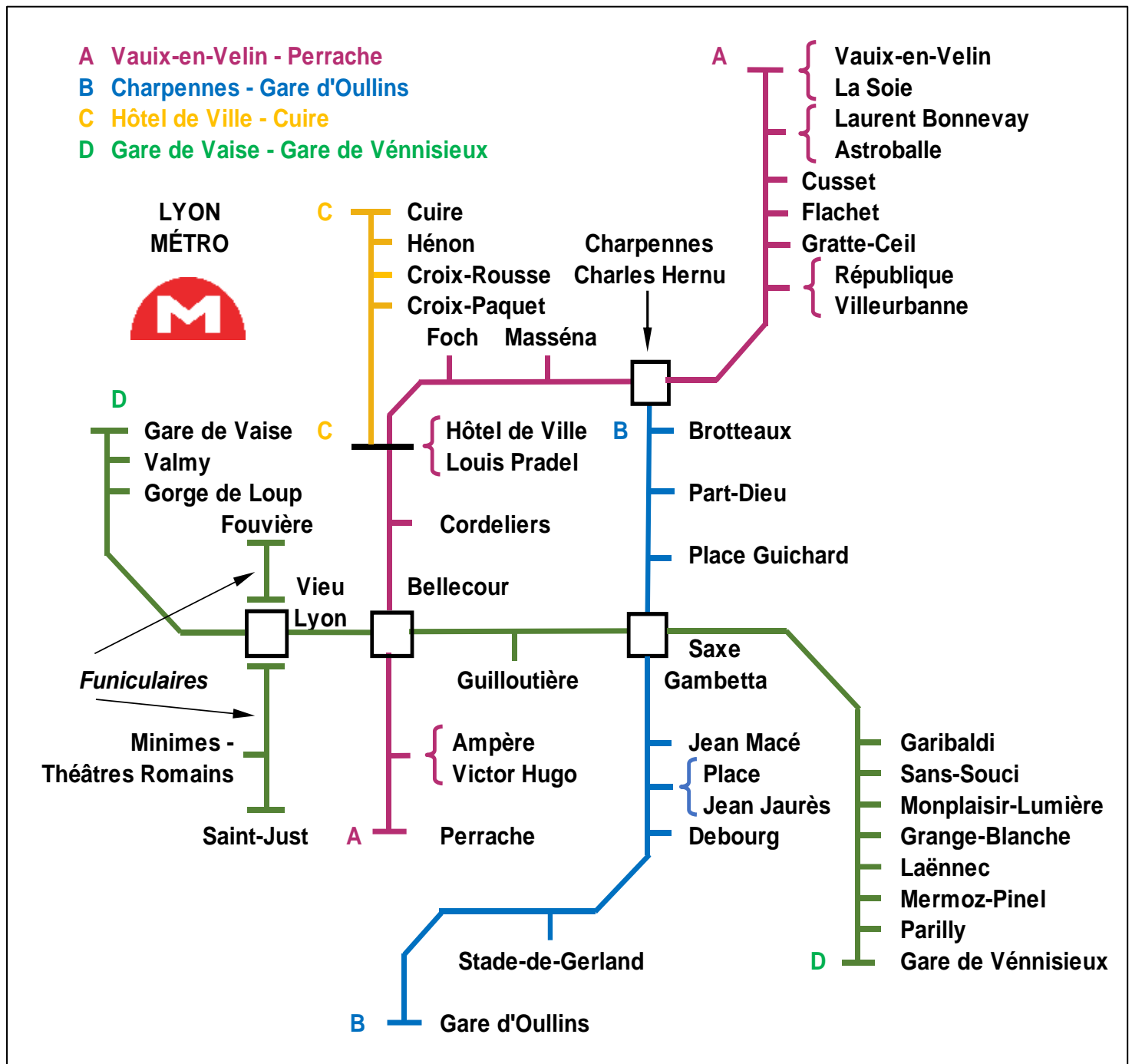
Ligne C is much more interesting. Lyon was served by six funicular or rack lines, leading to surrounding high areas. Two have been closed, one being converted into a steep road. Another was modernised with Swiss-built cars. This line was then incorporated into a new metro line. The southern end of the rack line was extended to meet Metro A. The northern end was extended for a short distance over a closed SNCF line that served a small terminal station at the north end of the city. Trains on this line are steel wheel on steel rail and are conventionally driven. The driver controls the running of the train and checks it on and off the steep rack section; he also operates the doors. The north end of this line is the only public part of the métro that is in the open.

Line D is different again. It is rubber-tyred, but is completely automatic, with no platform edge doors. Running is fast and one can look out of the trains, fore and aft, and see trains ahead. Ligne D runs from the south-east suburbs to the north-west suburbs, crossing A and B. Trains are two coaches, although successful tests have taken place with double-length trains.

The remaining two funiculars are considered as part of the métro system, with through ticketing. One of them has an intermediate stop at the Roman Theatre, where the passing loop is situated. This produces amusing incidents (though not for the tourists). If a tourist wishing to descend just misses a train, he/she tends to wait on the platform. But, since each car remains on its own track, the next train in the same direction will be from the opposite platform!

As the funiculars are steep, seating is transverse: imagine what might happen if the seats were longitudinal! However, starting about five years ago, the transverse, high-backed and comfortable transverse seating on Lignes A, B and D has been changed to harder, longitudinal seating, which the French called "English Style"! As on the funiculars, the part-rack Ligne C retains transverse seating for the same reason!

Limited extensions to the métro system are still in the pipe-line. The public have been allowed to walk through parts of the system before track-laying. I took part in one such trip and reached a low point under the river. However, the cost of métro construction has caused a reversion to trams and some new lines have been built over what were, under previous plans, to be metro lines. There is even an express tram to/from the airport. The current mayor wants a new métro line to the west, which would undermine a tram-train route!



The system is well run and clean. I saw someone get down on the track to get something. I think there is a scanning system, but, whatever, there were two staff there within seconds and the approaching train stopped automatically. "Suitable words" were spoken in French!

There are about six strategic park+ride locations, generally including a bus station for easy transfer. A number of the stations are of considerable architectural merit, in varying styles. All seem capable of taking longer trains. Initially, new trains are planned for Ligne B, with the existing Ligne B cars used to enhance Ligne A. An extension south from Oullins to a hospital is actively in hand but an extension north-west from Vaise was dropped some years ago. Interestingly, a number of the tram routes now cover previously-envisaged metro extensions. Lyon is a neglected location for transport enthusiasts, with varying forms of public transport and freight still passing through the central passenger stations. The past is still in evidence with the former funiculars and even old, mixed-gauge trackwork to be seen. It is well worth a visit.



Ligne C train at the intermediate station (Croix-Paquet) on the rack section. Trains for Lignes A and B are similar but run on rubber tyres.

The newish Gare d'Oullins on ligne B showing a typical design and spaciousness, with trains currently only 3 car-lengths – although this is not the most interesting architecturally.



Trains on the St Just funicular passing at the Théâtres Romains station.

All photos: Eric Stuart

The blue (island) platform at Gare de Vaise on ligne D (interchange above with SNCF). This colour is believed to deter 'one unders' – but your writer doesn't know if this was the motivation here!

