

The Death And Resurrection Of Light Rail Part III

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

"Clang, clang, clang went the trolley" sang the gaily costumed dancers who requested you to "Meet Me in St. Louis" as they frolicked their way through that Broadway musical reprise of a great and glorious World's Fair at the turn of the century. The "Gateway to the West" was host to the world.

But nostalgia aside, we must ask ourselves, "do we really understand the processes and underlying motives that drove America's clean, economical urban transit system to the brink of complete destruction? High-octane vapors may have had as much to do with degenerating lungs as tobacco; that could be factored into my observation that "the freeways expedited a frantic exodus from the cities, leaving the urban infrastructure in economic and social shambles."

I delighted in the opportunity to extol the virtues of several light rail systems as you undoubtedly concluded the past two weeks. The death and destruction of two urban transit systems in particular will be of great interest; there is only a shadow left of that vibrant, ebullient "Red Car Line in Los Angeles—nothing at all of "The Portland Traction Company."

For a well-documented account of what happened in these "massacres", I again refer you to James Howard Kunstler, "The Geography of Nowhere," Touchstone, 1994 (Simon & Schuster). Drawing from "Automobile Age", the archives of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, Robert Walker's benchmark study, "Urban Planning in Thirty-one of the Nation's Largest Cities" and many court

records, he makes a frightening case. In the particular case we review pp. 90-92.

"In 1925, with the acquisition of the Yellow Coach Company, the General Motors Corporation under took a systematic campaign to put streetcar lines out of business all over America...erected a byzantine network of subsidiaries and holding companies to buy up the lines, scrap the tracks and convert the routes to buses. As the great depression deepened, GM formed Atlantic Greyhound."

"In 1932, General Motors formed the 'United Cities Mobile Transit Corporation' (UCMT) to create a market for its products by taking over streetcar lines in small cities and converting the lines to buses. UCMT was dissolved in 1935 after the American Transit Association censured it for trying to dismantle Portland, Oregon's electric trolley lines, but this didn't stop General Motors."

Perhaps Portland's daily press with all its manpower and vast resources can provide us with an account of those subsequent strategies employed by this giant corporation in its successful efforts to replace clean and economical light rail with the ubiquitous "horseless carriage". Could be, since readers called to say that right after my first article appeared, other articles promptly appeared with my "new spin on the trolley car." But back to Kunstler, we have this, pp. 91,92.

"That same year [as the Portland catastrophe] the mammoth company joined with the Omnibus Corporation... in a scheme to replace New York City's electric trolley system with buses. The conversion of Man-

hattan was largely accomplished in an eighteen-month period, despite a hue and cry among riders."

"In 1936, a combination of General Motors parts suppliers, Standard Oil of California and Firestone Tire And Rubber formed a company called National City Lines... proceeded to buy and dismantle streetcar systems in San Jose, Stockton and Fresno, California. In 1943, another NCL affiliate, American City Lines, converted trolleys to buses in nineteen more cities, including Pacific Electric's 'Big Red' trolley lines in Los Angeles."

"A federal grand jury indicted GM for criminal conspiracy in the Los Angeles case in 1949, but the eventual fine of \$5000 was about equal to the company's profit on the sale of five chevrolts. By 1950, General Motors had converted more than 100 electric streetcar lines to gasoline-powered buses."

"I know that I was scheduled to conclude the series this week but I have been threatened with bodily harm (smiles) on the part of some readers unless I explore some of the new considerations that must be entertained in evaluating the "true nature of urban development and the economic confines of America's inner-cities and euphemistic ghettoes." And an economist at a local university is certain that he can get a large grant to pursue "this new spin on industrial policy and its social implications."

So, we will do it 'one-more-once' with a couple of added tid bits concerning black inventors who were pioneers in their patented contributions to light rail. Pandora's box may have a gold lining.

Classrooms linked on Internet

Classrooms across America are being wired for the Internet, but educators say computers will be of little use to students unless teachers know how to use the technology to teach daily lessons.

To help, a coalition of educational organizations, teachers unions and technology companies launched a grassroots initiative Tuesday to recruit 100,000 computer-literate teachers to voluntarily train five of their teaching colleagues.

So far, 4,000 teachers have signed up.

They are registering by electronic mail and the 21st Century Teachers Internet homepage — <http://www.21ct.org>. The site on the World Wide Web—the graphics-oriented part of the Internet—

contains a list of resources for educators and will connect them with other teachers involved in promoting and using educational technology.

"Today's students still need to know the three R's, the old basics," Education Secretary Richard Riley said. "But they also need to understand how to use the three W's—the World Wide Web."

Barbara Blevins, a reading specialist at Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in Manassas, Va., said computers force students to sharpen their decision-making skills and solve problems to find the best information available.

"What our kids have to do is manage information that it coming in at a rate that's almost unimaginable," Blevins said.

Joyce Christman, who directs a gifted education program at Bailey Elementary School in Dublin, Ohio, recently connected with an astrophysicist working at the South Pole. She chats on-line with him, downloads his writings, screens out adult humor and shares his work with her students.

"This does not replace our instruction—this is only a tool," she said.

As part of the 21st Century Teachers initiative, Christman is mentoring—via the computer—a prospective teacher studying at the University of West Virginia in Morgantown, W.Va.

President Clinton wants every school classroom to be hooked up to the information superhighway by 2000.

As of October 1995, about half the nation's public schools were linked to the Internet—up from 35 percent from the year before, according to the Education Department. But only 9 percent of individual classrooms had access.

After volunteers in California held a "NetDay" in March and wired 4,000 classrooms for the Internet, grassroots efforts began in other states to upgrade technology at schools. This month, "NetDays" to wire schools and classrooms are scheduled in at least 35 states.

"When we provide students with a well-trained teacher and the appropriate computer-based learning technology, something very exciting happens: Students pursue knowledge rather than waiting to have knowledge pursue them," says Reg Weaver, vice president of the National Education Association.

SPORTS

SPORTS BRIEFS

Yankees-Orioles series postponed

Managers Joe Torre of the New York Yankees and Davey Johnson of the Baltimore Orioles have had ample time to set their pitching rotation for the American League Championship Series. Maybe too much time.

Tonight's opening game at Yankee Stadium was postponed due to inclement weather. It has been rescheduled for Wednesday at 4 p.m. EDT. Game Two is scheduled for Thursday at 3 p.m.

George stays with Falcons

The NFL trading deadline has come and gone, and quarterback Jeff George still is a disgruntled, suspended member of the Atlanta Falcons. Both the Falcons and the Seattle Seahawks—where George was rumored to be headed for quarterback Rick Mirer—announced shortly after the 4 p.m. EDT deadline that no deal had been reached.

Lance Armstrong recovering from cancer

Noted American cyclist Lance Armstrong revealed today he is undergoing treatment for cancer after having a malignant testicle removed last week. Armstrong, a member of the 1992 and 1996 United States Olympic teams and the two-time defending Tour DuPont champion, had the cancerous testicle removed Thursday, a day after learning that he had the disease, at St. David's Hospital in Austin, Texas.

UCLA hoops being investigated

The storied UCLA basketball program is being investigated internally by the Pac-10 Conference following a report in today's Los Angeles Times that gave accounts of the sale of a car from coach Jim Harrick to the sister of a signed recruit. The university issued a statement this afternoon confirming that there is an ongoing investigation by the school and conference regarding the report and that there would not be further comment until its conclusion.

Griffey wins seventh Gold Glove

Outfielder Ken Griffey Junior of the Seattle Mariners won his seventh consecutive American League Gold Glove award, it was announced today by Rawlings Sporting Goods. Griffey committed only four errors in 390 chances and had 10 outfield assists. He is joined by teammate and fellow outfielder Jay Buhner, who was honored for the first time.

George, Rice named NFL Rookies of Month

Running back Eddie George of the Houston Oilers and defensive end Simeon Rice of the Arizona Cardinals today were named the National Football League Rookies of the Month for September. George, the 1995 Heisman Trophy winner, was named Offensive Rookie of the Month. He had 314 yards on 66 carries for a 4.8-yard average with one touchdown in four games in September. George ran for 143 yards on 17 carries in a win over Jacksonville on September 8th. Rice, the third overall pick in the April draft, earned defensive honors with five sacks among 18 tackles, two forced fumbles and a fumble recovery.

TIGER WOODS MAKES GOOD



Welcome, Tiger. You are no longer the child waiting to take his place among men. You are a professional golfer—and a winner.

So often, reality falls short of expectation and anticipation outweighs actuality. So far, that is not the case with Tiger Woods.

This man—still nearly three months short of his 21st birthday—is as good as advertised.

Woods qualified for the PGA Tour with his playoff victory over Davis Love III at the Las Vegas Invitational on Sunday. It should be just the start.

Pull your seatbelts tight and keep your arms inside the car at all times. We could be heading for a thrill ride as exciting as the one Jack Nicklaus took us on from 1962—when he won the U.S. Open for the first of his 70 victories and 18 major pro titles—through 1986 when he won the Masters for his last.

Woods is not a player—or a person—without flaws. But his talent and composure tantalize with the prospect that he may become the best ever.

Yes, the "Hello World" news conference in Milwaukee was pretentious. Yes, the "There are still some courses I can't play because of the color of my skin" ad for Nike was hyperbole simply to sell a few sneakers.

And yes, it was unwise to abruptly pull out of the Buick Challenge and insensitive to stiff the Haskins Award dinner at which he was to be honored as college golfer of the year.

None of that is stuff of which Woods should be proud.

He has to realize that the financially rewarding thing to do will not always be what's best for his ambition to be the best ever.

Does the \$40 million man—who has skipped one event because of exhaustion—really need to play in the Australian Open next month for a \$190,000 appearance fee? Or the

Johnnie Walker in Australia in January?

Woods has to keep his focus on golfing greatness. It would be very easy to become the most hyped underachiever of all time. It would also be easy to become an ungrateful achiever.

There are many wrong turns Woods could take that would lead him simply to "great" and not to "best-ever" status.

There is a voice that whispers: "He can't be this good." But with each passing week the volume of his accomplishments drowns out the doubts.

Woods has had the most astounding debut since Nicklaus.

Perhaps most impressive is how Woods won at Las Vegas.

A top-20 finish would have earned enough money for his PGA Tour card. And after a first-round 70 it would seem that's what he would play for.

But Tiger Woods is about winning. He followed that 70 with a 63 to get in contention.

He then won on Sunday by shooting a 64 and moving past 10 players who were either tied with him or ahead of him starting the round, including Love and Couples.

Among those right behind Woods who were unable to mount a similar charge were Phil Mickelson, Lee Janzen, David Duval, Vijay Singh and Paul Azinger.

Woods won with bold shots under pressure, none better than the 9-iron to 20 feet on the playoff hole. Love, hitting after Woods, buried his ball in the back left bunker and was unable to get up-and-down.

As he had in 18 consecutive matches over three years in the U.S. Amateur, Woods applied the pressure and waited for his opponent to crack.

At Las Vegas he found that even the pros feel the heat. And he showed that he's a guy who will be holding some feet to the fire for years to come.

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