

The Death And Resurrection Of Light Rail, Conclusion

BY PROFESSOR MCKINLEY BURT

"What's good for General Motors is good for the country" a company president announced with a perfectly straight face a few decades ago, though, as we cited last week from Kuntzler's documentation, "the giant corporation had converted more than 100 electric streetcar lines to gasoline-powered buses."

A reader says the manager at his county agency went into an alliterative frenzy, "pitiful, piss-poor public policy," and he was just into part one of this series. The obvious, of course, is "there was none" -- and there is the further consideration, "does the nation today have a clearly defined, comprehensive urban transportation plan which would facilitate the restoration of clean, safe, healthful and economical light rail systems around the country?" No, we're told to "Get On The Bus."

One thing for sure is that a well thought out 'industrial' policy has always been in place and the major corporate interests served have only temporarily had their vast economic power curtailed or harnessed to the

public good in a meaningful way. Two notable occasions come to mind; President Theodore Roosevelt's crusade against Wall Street brokers and bankers, the railroad tycoons, and the petroleum industry at the turn of the century.

And, more recently, the "New Deal" dynasty of President Franklin D. Roosevelt who organized, cajoled and brow beat every element of the American infrastructure in his effort to bring the country out of the great depression of the 1930's. Which path will the light rail resurrection follow? -- and it definitely seems that, like 'Lazarus', the sensibility of electrified railway systems will prevail as they rise again.

There also is much speculation as to how minorities will fare this time around -- will new 'right-of-way' acquisition of hyper-expensive inner-city real estate further impair the economic circumstance of African Americans and Hispanics? Nationwide, we find whites alarmed as well as lending enthusiastic endorsement. As in the case of Portland, they call black friends or media, "what was

'your' legal experience when the sovereign authorities salvaged you with eminent domain and urban renewal (removal)?" I've had calls from St. Johns to Hillsboro.

In an ironic footnote to the process, last week an African American woman, Shirley A. DeLibero, executive director of "New Jersey Tran-

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sit", the state's transit authority, was named 'Transit Manager of the year' by the American Public Transit Association. New Jersey Transit was voted "Best in the Nation" in 1996, and DeLibero honored as the transit manager "who has done most to advance public transportation in the United States and Canada."

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and across all segments of our society. For instance we have the reported enthusiasm and dedication exhibited at the recent "Rail-Violation" conference in Washington, D.C. One attendee insists that a litany of ills would be mitigated: "social justice, crime prevention, conservation of resources, environmental protection, employment opportunities, energy conservation, etc." Well, that's pushing the envelope.

From the university community we hear equally enthusiastic opinions and the noisy sharpening of grantsmanship tools--which brings about an interesting consideration. Academia and the big national "think tanks" who propose to do the new studies and recommendations that relate to 'public' policy on transportation and urban infrastructure get a lot of their funding from industry (or foundations supported by industry; either directly or indirectly).

One should not really expect industry to 'roll over and play dead' in these matters that vitally affect their welfare as well as the public's. A visit with former fellow faculty mem-

bers at a local university indicates that such is the case. One friend is leaving for Texas at the end of the school year to work with a group of economic researchers funded by the petroleum industry. They are all interested in what would happen in response to a rapidly decreasing fossil fuel consumption.

One micro-economic model given intense scrutiny is the energy crisis" that confronted government policy makers at the end of 1973 when the Arab oil-producers announced a cutback of oil exports. Interestingly, a principal 'think tank' consultant in the complicated dynamics of balancing gasoline consumption, speed limits, engineer specifications and prices at the fuel pump was "Alan Greenspan" (Townsend-Greenspan and Company). If the name is familiar, it is because he is current chairman of the all-powerful Federal Reserve System.

Today, we would hope that our new schools of urbanologists will have better solutions for enhancing the quality of life in the nation's metropolitan areas than the "MLK

Blvd." model (Union Ave.). In an inspired exercise of economic idiocy, the 'Model Cities' social planners gaily destroyed a prosperous business district to the tune of billions of dollars, depriving city, state and federal government of hundreds of millions in tax revenues over the decades.

This urban disaster was accelerated by the installation of that nationally infamous 'median barrier' which, like the "Berlin Wall", had deliberately political and social goals that permanently crippled the development of acres of adjoining residential areas (and people). But not before the streetcar tracks that carried clean, efficient and economical light rail were dug up and exported to Asia where, combined with steel scrap from those other 100 American cities, they were used to build factories to compete with American labor and industry. Hello trade deficit! are our leaders really naive?

Will we ever have sense enough to demand a revision of that early industry arrogance to, "what's good for the people" is good for the country?"

Minorities skeptical of Kemp

No matter how many appeals for GOP votes Kemp makes, many blacks can't forget that one of his first acts as the Republican vice presidential nominee was to switch positions on affirmative action and immigration.

"Racial unity is important, but there is a big difference when you're practicing and talking on a podium," said Jahar Haque, a cancer researcher at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, who heard Kemp speak on Monday.

In Knoxville, Tenn., state legislator Joe Armstrong complained that Kemp's message "changed when he became the vice presidential nominee."

"We know that his record is the complete opposite of his running mate, Bob Dole," Armstrong said last week.

Kemp had split with the party -- and GOP presidential nominee Dole -- over proposals to let states deny public education to children of illegal immigrants. He also criticized a

1996 California ballot measure to end state programs that award jobs or college admissions on the basis of race.

He switched positions to fall in line with Dole after he was plucked from the political sidelines for the Republican ticket's No. 2 spot in August. Kemp rejects any suggestion that he's done an about face.

"Unity does not require unanimity," he says.

Ramadan Salih, vice president of the Metropolitan Republican Association in Cleveland, where Kemp campaigned Monday, said his party needs to work harder to win the traditionally Democratic minority vote.

"They have to start to reach minorities by getting with the people on the ground floor," he said. "In the future, we hope to make things better."

David Bositis, senior analyst at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a black think tank, said Kemp's vow to "carry the word to every man, woman and child, of

every background" won't be enough to move chunks of black votes into the Republican column.

In 1992, former President Bush got 11 percent of the black vote; Bill Clinton, 82 percent; and independent Ross Perot, 7 percent, he said.

"It's going to have to be a case where the Republicans offer a lot more up front in terms of seriousness in getting black support than simply the idea that Jack Kemp was nominated to be vice president," said Bositis.

But Milton Bins, chairman of the Council of 100, a black Republican group, dismissed that notion. He named a short list of GOP officials, including Ohio Gov. George Voinovich and New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman, who were elected with significant help from black voters.

"This notion that black people will

not vote Republican is an outrage," Bins said. "It's an error."

Stumping before mostly white audiences, but also in the predominantly minority communities, Kemp weaves his inclusion appeal into his daily sales pitch for Dole's 15 percent across-the-board tax cut plan.

In Augusta, Ga., the former NFL quarterback recalled racism in the league and watching the parents of his black co-captain sit in the end zone "behind a rope while my dad and mom got to sit on the 50-yard line."

"I'm not bringing this up to shame anybody," Kemp said. "I am bringing it up to remind us of how far we've come yet how far we have to go in America so that every single person can have the dignity and justice and freedom and equality of opportunity on which our party is based."

Your vote is power

On Saturday, October 19 from 9:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., five community-based organizations will launch a community involvement/voter education program.

The effort is being led by the African American Legislative Round-table founded by Representative Avel Gordly currently serving District 19.

The Urban League of Portland is participating as a sponsor and both the Northeast Rescue Plan Action Committee and the Black Leadership Conference and the Black United Fund are co-sponsors.

The forum open to the public at no cost will be held at Lutheran Inner City Ministries 4219 NE MLK Jr. Blvd.

The purpose of the forum is to register voters and educate them on current issues in preparation for the

'96 general election. The forum will also seek to identify community members who are interested in developing their skills and knowledge in order to consider future public service.

The forum will feature topics such as *Why should you vote?*, *How your vote makes a difference*, *General Election Ballot Measures with a focus on minimum wage and Cut and Cap*, and *The status of affirmative action globally and locally*.

The forum will also offer a panel on identifying the skills needed to be effective in public office and what it takes to wage a serious campaign.

The general public is invited to attend and there is no cost.

For questions and more information, please call Faye Burch at 281-3771 or David Brody at 280-2611.

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Good move. And that means voting for Democrats.

If you *don't* think there's a difference between Democrats and the Newt Gingrich Republicans, think about who's *been there*, fighting against the Republicans who, if given the chance, will continue to cut, slash and block the progress we've made. They're against direct Student Loans, Affirmative Action and increasing the minimum wage.

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