

Failing Municipal Transit Systems Blame Private Autos For Decline

NEW YORK (AP)—What's wrong with the nation's big-city transportation systems? "Plenty," say the millions who fight their way into jam-packed buses, streetcars and subways every working day of their lives. "Every year the service gets worse while the fares go higher."

Transit managers, struggling to get out of the red, complain of mounting labor and equipment costs, "ravenous federal, state and local taxes," "inadequate fares," competition of taxpayer-subsidized city transit systems, competition of private automobiles, and growing traffic congestion.

"It's murdering us," says John E. McCarthy, president of New York City Omnibus Corp., which operates 21 bus routes in crowded Manhattan.

To probe the why and wherefore of the nation's transit woes, and to find out what's being done about it, The Associated Press queried transit executives, municipal traffic experts and strangers in 19 major cities across the United States.

The picture pieced together from the survey is one of growing financial difficulties for both municipal and privately owned transit systems and of steadily deteriorating service. Some of the companies are bankrupt. Some others are in dire financial straits. All but a handful say they are losing money.

High on transit management's list of gripes is the huge postwar increase in ownership of private automobiles.

"The private automobile," says President Fred Ossanos of Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company, Minneapolis and St. Paul, "has wrecked a number of transit companies and will wreck the rest of them, too, unless public opinion is aroused and enlightened."

More people driving to work mean fewer bus and streetcar riders. More automobiles pouring into narrow, horse-and-buggy era downtown streets add to traffic tie-ups that slow trolleys and buses to a crawl. Riders, audited by the innumerable delays, quit public transportation for car, pony or take their own cars to work. The result is more congestion, more disruption of bus and trolley schedules, more disgruntled riders.

Management offers a three-fold solution: Restrict private car use of downtown streets. Ban all downtown parking. Build big parking ramps on the city's outskirts.

While downtown traffic jams and the resultant decline in rush-hour patronage are bad enough, many companies are worried even more by non-use of their facilities during nonrush hours.

They blame television, which keeps people home at night. They

blame suburban branch stores and outdoor movies. An official of the Portland, Ore., Transit Company points out that "we can't maintain a fleet of extra buses to handle peak loads that last only four hours a day and let them run empty 18 or 20 hours."

One of the big things transit company officials say worry them is higher operating costs.

A big diesel-powered bus with hydraulic steering could be bought in 1940 for about \$12,500, delivered in 1940 for about \$12,500, delivered in 1940 for about \$12,500.

Replacement parts and diesel fuel cost about 85 per cent more than in 1940. Labor costs in some cities are up as much as 118 per cent, and as living costs rise, more wage demands and new strike threats are in the offing.

A new federal excise tax recently put into effect will add still more to the costs of parts and fuel.

There are also public utility taxes, franchise taxes, corporate income taxes, federal transportation taxes, state gasoline taxes and other levies, many of which vary in different localities and states.

That's the universal complaint of the transit people, particularly when they are pleading with public regulatory bodies for higher fares. Often the regulatory commissions deny the fare boost requests on the ground that the operating deficits claimed by the applicant resulted from poor management or were exaggerated.

Despite frequent refusals, practically all of the 19 cities surveyed report two or more fare increases since 1945. The same fare trolley ride that cost 6 cents in Detroit seven years ago costs 20 cents today.

Twenty-cent fares are likewise in effect in Chicago and Kansas City. The going rate in most other cities is 15 cents.

Officials of competing private bus companies predict New York's municipally owned transit facilities, including the entire subway system and a few bus lines, will pile up a year's deficit of 125 million dollars.

It's common knowledge among transit officials that every fare boost results in a decline in the number of riders carried. Up to a certain point, the decline in riders is more than offset by the increased revenue. Then the law of

diminishing returns comes into play. Atlanta, Ga., bus riders have just experienced their second fare increase in two years. The Birmingham, Ala., Transit Company hiked its fares 50 per cent in April and has been losing \$25,000 a month since. Boston's public transportation system has effected fare increases averaging 33 per cent in the last few years.

Despite fare increases, Schenectady, N.Y., experienced a complete breakdown of public transportation this year when the Reconstruction Finance Corporation liquidated the bankrupt Schenectady Railway Company.

What other solutions are being offered? The American Transit Association is waging war against free riding privileges enjoyed by police, firemen and postal employees in many cities.

To boost traffic during evening hours, Twin Cities Rapid Transit is offering a "family night" plan. On family nights you ride free into the Loop districts of Minneapolis or St. Paul. You pay regular fare going home.

Monorail transit lines are receiving the serious attention of authorities in Los Angeles and San Francisco. San Francisco is also considering reversible one-way streets.

Philadelphia's city planners are suggesting new zoning laws which would require builders of large residential, commercial and industrial structures to make provision for off-street parking.

Pittsburgh's Mayor David Lawrence wants bigger parking lots around commuter stations and stepped up commuter service on the many railroad lines which criss-cross the steel city gridiron-fashion.

Boston is building a 60-million-dollar thruway to its crowded downtown section. A fed-up rider in Philadelphia offered this suggestion: "Streetscars, subways—phooey," he said. "The only answer to this mess—and all big cities have it, I guess—is helicopter service."

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BLUDGEONED—Jean (left) and Judy Young, age seven and six respectively, were the adopted daughters of grocer Gard Young, 43, who were found beaten to death with their father and a playmate near Chester, Calif. Another of Young's children was also beaten but is still alive and may be able to identify the murderer.

Woman Takes Tiny Infant

NEW YORK (AP)—A 6-day-old girl and an unidentified woman who took her from a hospital ward before the mother could claim her were sought today by police.

New York City police sent out a 13-state alarm for the pair yesterday after they were informed of the child's disappearance Sunday from a Bellevue Hospital ward.

Police said the infant, the child of Anna and Raphael Hernandez, was claimed by an unidentified woman who gave a hospital attendant the impression that she was phoney.

It was not until yesterday that a relative of the child's parents discovered the disappearance became known.

Woman Takes Tiny Infant

Mrs. Hernandez, being released from the hospital, asked for her baby and the child could not be found.

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RR Wants Better NW Rates

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Interstate Commerce Commission will hear Wednesday a second full dress legal argument on the plea of Denver and Rio Grande Western railroad for a joint rate with the Union Pacific railroad on freight moving to and from the Pacific Northwest via Ogden, Utah.

The Commission called for re-argument for the benefit of two new commissioners who took office after the original argument was made last October. The re-argument is expected to continue through Thursday.

The case is so hotly contested that it is virtually certain to be appealed to the courts, no matter who wins.

For this reason, it is understood that the commission felt the case should be decided by a full 11-member commission to avoid a possible legal flaw when the matter gets to court.

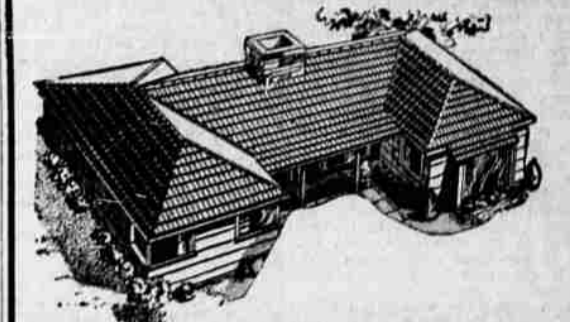
After the hearing nearly three years ago, Chief Examiner Frank T. Mullen proposed that the commission order the joint freight rate established for freight moving over the tracks of the two railroads through Ogden.

The Union Pacific, opposing the joint or discount rate, contended that it would be an invasion of the Pacific Northwest territory which it developed and would result in a 50 million dollar annual loss of revenue by diversion of business to the Denver and Rio Grande.

The Rio Grande contended, on the other hand, that Union Pacific was discriminating against it by refusing to establish a joint rate, although it had established joint rates with many other railroads.

After Mullen's proposed report of Dec. 11, 1950, finding that the public interest and shippers in Utah and Colorado would be served by establishing the joint rate, Senator Johnson (D-Colo.), in a radio speech in Denver publicly endorsed the examiner's findings.

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