
Tramway Topics

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SOARING OPERATING EXPENSES.

And Record Payment to the Consolidated Revenue.

While the result of the Board's operations for the year which ended on the 30th June last will not be available until the auditors have completed their report, three outstanding facts emerge from the figures which are known with certainty. These are:—

(1) The operating expenses exceeded the previous year's figures (£3,099,000) by £400,000;

(2) The traffic revenue at £4,030,000 was £26,000 above the previous highest total recorded in 1946; and

(3) The payment to the Consolidated Revenue in respect of the Government's contributions to the Fire Brigades' Board and the Infectious Diseases Hospital was at £150,000 nearly £13,000 above the record for 1947-48.

So far as operating expenses are concerned, the great bulk of the huge increase was due to the cost of the 5-day 40-hour week being in force throughout the whole year, and increases amounting to 10/- per week in all through the Cost of Living adjustment, and so was inescapable. Advances in the cost of practically all materials also played a part, and here again the burden could not be evaded.

Factors which helped to produce the record revenue were full employment in industry leading to increased services, which totalled over 788,000 miles and brought up the year's mileage to 31,216,000, resulting in an increase in paying passengers of 15,000,000 and making the total 338,000,000. Neither the mileage nor passenger totals reached the record figures—31,539,000 miles in 1942-43 and 354,800,000 passengers in 1944-45. That we had more revenue last year from fewer passengers is explained by the fact that in 1945-46

Servicemen were being carried for a merely nominal fare. How many passengers we carried who did not pay no man knoweth. It would, of course, be possible to arrive at a rough approximation if we took the number of trips checked throughout the year, 173,744, and the number of irregularities discovered, 24,709, and then went on an assumption that a similar number of irregularities would have been found in the millions of trips which had perforce to remain unchecked. When that formula was used some two years ago it was estimated conservatively that unpaid and uncollected fares and over-riding were costing the Board £250,000 per annum.

It is interesting to note that the operating expenses for last year were, in round figures, approximately £1,980,000 above those for 1938-39. That huge difference was met without any increase in fares, thanks to the Board's far-sighted action in 1942 in securing Parliamentary authority to augment substantially the reserves during the war years of plenty. Now that the Board, at the request of the Government, has suggested certain fare increases—approximately 40 per cent. of the passengers will not be affected—Melbourne's tram and bus fares must still be about the only things in Australia which have not risen in harmony with the higher prices for all other goods and services.

SAN FRANCISCO'S TRANSPORT.

Latest Report Flays the Management.

San Francisco, it seems, can give a start and a beating to any other city — including one much nearer home which may occur to the reader — in the number of reports it has called for in recent years on its municipal transport system. The latest, a weighty volume of 300 pages, is headed "Report on the Economic and Organisational Features of the

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Municipal Railways," and from excerpts we have seen it can be said that the investigator, Mr. A. C. Jenkins, has "pulled no punches." As for bouquets, these are not to be discovered.

"What's the matter with the Muni," asks one of the local papers, and Mr. Jenkins takes over 200 pages to supply all the answers!

Melbourne's traffic schedules are prepared so meticulously, based on up-to-the-minute traffic checks, that it seems astounding to find that in San Francisco "new schedules are based upon old ones with modifications instead of upon traffic checks and time checks," and that "traffic checks are about two years in arrears."

Costs, Mr. Jenkins estimates, are 20 per cent. too high, no use is made of the information revealed by the tapes of the headway recorders, the Schedule Supervisor "is not acquainted with the number of daily turn-backs due to service delays, estimating when asked a daily average of 75 compared with the actual average of 365," the cable tramways are fit only for the museum, the garages are messy, the supervision is insufficient — in short, if you want to find out how not to run a street transport system just hop over to San Francisco.

All of which reads very funny when it is recollected that not so long ago a couple of returning tourists were writing to "The Age" telling Melbourne of the wonderful system which San Francisco was creating—or was about to create—through the eventual scrapping of trams and the provision of new trolley and Diesel buses. Apparently the new transport Heaven has not yet materialised for Frisco.

SO THAT ALL MAY KNOW.

"You must be making tons of money" remarked a friend to an official of the Board as a South Melbourne tram loaded to crush capacity swung round into Spencer Street the other evening, "tram packed and only the driver and conductor to pay, plus the power."

"There is a bit more to it than that," said the official. "You are like the man who estimates the size of an iceberg by what he sees, and forgets that the vast bulk of the iceberg is unseen. In the case of that tram, you only see the driver and conductor; you fail to remember that a lot of people you don't see have to be employed and paid so that that car can be on the road. Trackmen, overhead men, repair and maintenance men, cleaners, mechanics, roster, traffic, wages, costing and disciplinary clerks, electrical, testing and motor engineers, the supervisors, the secretarial and engineering side—

all these and more have to be reckoned with, and that means that the expenses you do not see are several times the amount of those visible to you."

MOSCOW'S 3,500,000 DAILY TRAM PASSENGERS.

Public transport in Moscow is provided by the Metro subway, which extends to 25 miles, trams, trolleybuses and Diesel buses. Another subway route of 12.5 miles is under construction.

The Metro deals with the greatest number of passengers daily, but the trams are a good second; they now carry 3,500,000 passengers as a daily average with 3,500 trams and trailers over 350 miles of routes. The standard type of tram is the Soviet version of the P.C.C. tram of the United States. As a matter of fact, the photograph of the Moscow car is so similar that it has to be looked at closely before it is realised that it is not the picture of a tram bought in St. Louis; probably in due course we shall be told that Russians invented the P.C.C. tram. In the peak hours, through the very broad Krasno-prudnaya Street, what is known as "train operation" is in force—which means that the trams are run in sets of three. Buses run on 64 routes covering 250 miles, while by next year it is hoped to have 280 miles of medium-traffic routes served by trolley-buses.

Generally, the principle governing the system is that which is observed in Chicago—the subway for rapid distance transport, the trams for heavy traffic within four miles of the centre of the city and then the trolleybuses and Diesel buses in that order.

THE NEWS BEHIND THE "NEWS."

Occasionally there is a somewhat marked divergence between what is said to the representative of a newspaper and what appears in print. Here is an example:

Early in August, the representative of "The Argus" stated that his paper had been receiving numerous complaints over the behaviour of school children and students, and that his Chief of Staff would like to know if any condition was attached to the concession tickets on which the young people travelled. The reply was that the holders of scholars' or students' concession tickets must not occupy seats while full fare-paying passengers were standing.

That was all—a simple question receiving a simple answer. But "The Argus" the following day reported:—"Manners and behaviour of Melbourne's teen-age school boys and girls have been criticised

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by officials of both the Tramways Board and the Railways."

"The Sun" pointed out the next day that no official of the Tramway Board had made any criticism, and that in point of fact no complaints had been received by the Board over the behaviour of the teenagers.

HEADWAY RECORDERS.

Device to Help in Maintaining Schedules.

One of the ideas brought home from the United States by the Board's engineer (Mr. H. H. Bell, Jnr.) was the headway recorder, a device which, when used in conjunction with two-way radio between the Head Office and patrolling motor cars, enables traffic interruptions to be spotted almost as soon as they occur, while effective steps can be taken to deal with the trouble in a fraction of the time now used by following the practices of 50 years.

Our Designing and Communications Engineer (Mr. Colin Steele) has with remarkable ingenuity improved, as we think, on the American apparatus, and the set he has fabricated has been demonstrated successfully, the movement of trams in Riversdale Road being conveyed over the existing telephone line from the Hawthorn Depot into the Head Office and exhibited on the chart by pen and ink. After giving a completely satisfactory display to the members of the Board, the decoder and recorder were transferred to Kew, where they were demonstrated for the information of the traffic staff. Plans for the use of the instruments for the trams coming into Flinders Street from Kew and Hawthorn, as a start, are for the moment being held up through inability to procure the necessary motor cars and radio equipment.

As the name implies, the recorder checks trams at predetermined points through contacts placed on the trolley wires. As soon as a tram passes under a contact point, a signal is transmitted to Head Office, where the pen and ink recorder marks the movement on the chart. So long as cars are running to time the orderly flow of the vehicles is there on the chart for all to see. If there is a traffic hold-up, then the gap on the chart increases gradually, indicating to the officer in charge, even if a bell did not ring or if the glowing of a red light did not direct his attention to the matter, that there was a traffic lag in the vicinity of the contact. It would then be for the officer to take action. Calling up the Inspector in charge of the area concerned by radio, he would instruct him to proceed to the scene of the

stoppage, the result being that that official would be able to deal with the trouble many minutes earlier than he could do so under present conditions, thus minimising the interruption to the service.

This idea of maintaining an even flow of traffic and of being able to take almost within seconds action to restore normal running is making great headway in the United States. All the lines in West Philadelphia have now been equipped with recorders, and the necessary work for the extension of the system to all the other major tram routes of the Philadelphian system is now in progress.

GOLF AT WATTLE PARK.

It is scarcely credible, but no fewer than 72,235 rounds of golf were played over the Wattle Park course during last year. Although the traffic was the heaviest on record, the course, thanks to the skilled attention given to it continuously by the staff, stood up well, and is at present looking a picture.

Another batch of gum trees have been planted in the rough between fairways, and the ultimate intention is to have a course the fairways on which will be completely enclosed.

OUR ARCHITECTURAL BRANCH.

There is a lot more to running a transport service than the mere acquisition of rolling stock, depots, drivers and conductors. Take our Architectural Branch, for example. How many classes of labour would you say are employed by the Branch? Apart from the inside staff of architects, draftsmen, designers, special clerks, and so on, the outside staff includes bricklayers, plumbers, carpenters, joiners, house painters, motor, tractor and horse drivers, gardeners, skilled labourers and labourers.

BUT HE DOES!

Wrote one of these know-all, letter-to-the-editor gentlemen to "The Age":—

"I am sure if Mr. Bell lived on a tram route—"

Mr. Bell's home for the last 26 years has been at 48 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn. And Riversdale Road has been on a tram route for 33 years.

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CHICAGO'S OPINION.

Trams for the Heaviest of Surface Traffic.

Frequently in these columns the similarity of the lay-out of the inner areas of Melbourne and Chicago has been mentioned. Chicago, it is true, has a population four times that of Melbourne; but the outlook towards transport appears to be identical.

Chicago is now entering the fourth year of its vast, comprehensive plan for the modernisation of equipment and the improvement of facilities. So far, 40,000,000 dollars has been spent out of the 152,000,000 dollars earmarked for the period which will end in December, 1955. The overall aim of the plan is to remove people rather than motor cars. Each vehicle is given the task best suited to its capacities. There are rapid transit cars for the long haul traffic to the outer suburbs, P.C.C. trams for the heaviest of surface traffic, trolleybuses for the medium traffic routes, and Diesel buses for the light lines and feeder services.

Five of the principal surface routes are now operated exclusively with P.C.C. trams—600 in all have been acquired in three years—while four of the medium traffic routes have been supplied with stream-lined trolleybuses. Of the trams, the comment is "that passengers find them fast, comfortable, quiet and odourless."

WORK ON THE PER. WAY.

Acquisition of Balts Giving Satisfaction.

Between the 1st July, 1948, and the 30th June last the Per. Way Department carried out surface patching alongside the rails over a length of 268,320 ft., patch topdressed over 646,360 ft., refastened rails over 18,741 ft. and repaired 4,536 rail joints.

Essential maintenance work was effected on 265,165 miles of single track, while on the construction side there were 2,932 ft. of single track between Victoria Parade and Spring Street, and 4,910 ft. along Latrobe Street to Spencer Street. It is hoped that the remainder of this work will be completed and the Latrobe Street line in operation before the end of the year. Labour, and the slow delivery of materials, has affected progress badly. So far as labour is concerned, this difficulty has been lessened in recent weeks by the acquisition of Balts. These new settlers are proving willing workers who are anxious to make good in their new home. For the time being they are housed at Broadmeadows Camp, and are carried to and from work by bus.

A 39-DAY TRANSPORT STRIKE.

Going on strike because the company refused to concede the fantastic claim for a wage rise of 29 cents. per hour, the Scranton Transit employees

went back after 39 days for an increase of 6 cents. per hour.

Plenty of them are now reflecting that it will take 133 weeks at these additional 6 cents. to recoup them for their 39 days of idleness.

LIGHTING IMPROVEMENTS.

An interesting sidelight on the economics of fluorescent lighting is furnished by our Electrolysis and Lighting Branch. The original incandescent lighting of the General Wages room at Head Office gave an output of 35,200 light units for a power consumption of 2,300 watts. The new fluorescent installation, on the other hand, gives an output of 108,000 light units at a power consumption of 2,775 watts, which represents an increase of 307% in lighting units for an increase of but 20.5% in power consumption.

IN BRIEF — FROM EVERYWHERE.

The New York City Transport is to purchase additions to its existing fleet of 100 P.C.C. trams.

Coventry gives five miles of travel for 5d., which is the fare for that distance in Melbourne. The minimum is three-quarters of a mile for 1½d., as compared with our mile and a quarter for 2d. A Coventry man now in Australia has been writing to a paper in the old home town complaining about "the much higher fares charged in Sydney." He should come to Melbourne and feel at home!

Pretoria's municipal transport system had a loss of £114,000 last year—a lot of money for a small place.

Out of our total tram mileage only 261 miles were lost through power failures.

Although over 100 picnics were held at Wattle Park last year, and many scores of thousands of visitors visited the place, only one minor accident was reported.

Asked to report on the Pittsburgh Railways Company, a New York firm of consulting engineers has advised that on less than 25 per cent. of the tram routes should Diesel buses take the place of trams.

The Singapore Traction Company has its own Flying Squad and anti-corruption detectives! Chinese will pay as much as £15 in order to get a job as a conductor—at a salary of approximately £8 per month.

Revenue drawn from tennis and putting fees at Wattle Park last year was the highest ever received.

Liverpool is to spend £675,000 on the renewal of tramway tracks within two years, a sum which will obviate any further expenditure if the 10-year plan for the conversion to buses goes through.