

NOTES ON TRANSPORT

While all who have studied the subject are unanimous that the transport of a city should be under the absolute control of one body, it is a remarkable fact that so far only four cities throughout the world have reached that ideal. These four are London, Berlin, Sydney and Adelaide. It may be worth while to examine briefly the situation in each of these four cities.

Berlin was the first to put the idea of one transport authority for a city into practice. Up to March, 1927, Berlin depended for its transport on three companies - I will give you the English names, for if I gave the German titles you might think I was indulging in some hard swearing - The Berlin Trolley Company, the Berlin General Omnibus Company, and the Berlin Elevated and Underground Railway. All three were keenly competitive, and naturally all three were in some districts available for the one passenger, a state of affairs which is very nice for the passenger but not nearly so good either for the companies or their employees. Then the Berlin Traffic Company was formed to take over all three concerns, and the Berlin Municipality acquired a large block of shares. By December, 1928, all the shares had become the property of the Town Council, who thus owned a concern capitalised at £20,000,000. A Traffic Board was appointed by the Council, and this body is in supreme control of policy, while a Board of Management of five runs the business. The Chairman of the Traffic Board, however, is also Chairman of the Board of Management. The traways are the backbone of the transport system of Berlin. Motor buses (that is a general term meaning both petrol and crude oil buses) are kept to the suburbs, except for a few express services to the city, and used as feeders to the traways and on cross-suburb routes. The elevated and underground railways have their own special spheres, but here again they have to conform to traway running. To begin with the Traffic Company was far from successful. The scrapping of redundant services provoked a good deal of resentment and grumbling, while the minimum fare, against the advice tendered by the expert Board of Management,

was fixed too low, with the result that for the first two years the Company was unable to discharge in full the interest payments on the capital borrowed by the Council to acquire the shares. Adjustments made since 1930 have restored the position, and now the Berlin system is a good example of what can be achieved by a single controlling transport authority.

Long before the Berlin venture had been pronounced a success, traffic conditions in Greater London had become chaotic. Ninety-two concerns, ranging from the very large to the very small, were competing for the available traffic under the traffic regulations of almost as many authorities in addition to the police. Committee after Committee had investigated and reported and advised, but still the confusion and the congestion grew. The curious feature about this congestion was that it was worst in the centre of the city where trams were non-existent. To give you an idea of what can be seen any day in Oxford Street, I am going to distribute a few copies of a photograph taken by The Transport World. Then with characteristic thoroughness came action; the London Passenger Transport Act was passed, and on the 1st July, 1933, the London Passenger Transport Board took over the control of five railways, seventeen tramway systems, 62 omnibus concerns, four coach companies, and four subsidiary undertakings, the last including the Lots Road Power House in Chelsea, the concern which supplies a large part of the railways and tramways throughout the metropolitan area with electric current. Incidentally, the power houses taken over represented an investment of some £14,000,000, and in that fact lies the principle reason why the Board is converting the old tramways in the outer suburbs to trolley bus operation. The 92 concerns have a capital value of £109,000,000, and the business of the Board is now the greatest urban transport system in the world, the only one to combine the ownership of tramways, omnibuses, motor coaches, trolleybuses, and underground and surface railways, and it is also the only existing passenger carrying organisation to combine undertakings previously operating under both municipal and company ownership. It serves an area of approximately 2,000 square miles with a population of 9,500,000. Last year it dealt with almost

400,000,000 passengers. Every day it carries passengers who number more than the entire population of Canada, one and a half times the population of Australasia, and more than the population of Scotland and Ireland together. It is supreme in two counties, London and Middlesex, and reigns unchallenged in parts of other seven counties. It operates 227 miles of railways, 254 miles of tramways, 89 miles of trolley bus route, and 2,366 miles of coach and bus route. It owns 11,551 passenger-carrying vehicles, of which 5,405 are buses and 2,465 trolleys, not forgetting 3,156 cars which operate on the tube and electric railways, 464 motor coaches and 60 trolley buses. The staff numbers 72,000. The gigantic experiment has been a complete success. Order has taken the place of chaos, wasteful and unnecessary services have been eliminated, re-routing has provided services to districts previously badly served, the whole vast undertaking has been moulded into a unified and coherent whole. The public is being better served, and the conditions of the employees have been improved. It is true that financially the results have just been short of what has been necessary to discharge the full debenture obligations; but in such a period of transition that was scarcely to be expected. There does not seem to be any doubt, however, that after the present heavy capital expenditure due to the conversion of old, out-of-date tramway rolling stock has come to an end, that the undertaking will be a very prosperous one indeed.

Now we can come a bit nearer home, Adelaide, in fact. The South Australian Government was quick to realise and appreciate the mistakes made by the Victorian Government in the Motor Omnibus Act, and in 1928 passed a Bill which amended the Municipal Tramways Trust Act and repealed the Motor Omnibus Acts of 1926 and 1927. The Municipal Tramways Trust of Adelaide became under that Act the responsible transport authority, and now controls the whole of the street transport facilities of the metropolis. It has the power to run omnibuses, or if it thinks fit to license private owners to do so. It has co-ordinated the bus and tram services so that they are now giving the best service possible to the public. Motor buses which have been running to Port Adelaide and adjacent suburbs

having reached the end of their economic life are in the process of being converted to trolley buses, that course having been decided on so as to increase the load factor for the electric station owned by the Trust and so decrease the cost per unit of power. At the same time, consideration is being given to extending some of the existing tram routes.

Now for New South Wales. The Government in that State went much further than South Australia. In 1930 an Act was passed which created a Department of Road Transport and Tramways, and the Commissioner was given complete control of all road transport as well as the tramways of Sydney and Newcastle. Briefly, the Department of Road Transport and Tramways controls the tramways, privately-owned motor bus services, motor cab services, taxi cabs, commercial vehicles, motor registration and taxation throughout the State. The arrangement has given rise to much controversy, and in December last there was quite an uproar, the matter being ventilated in Parliament, when the Commissioner gave the requisite notice that he intended to take over certain bus routes from the first of this month and to cancel the licences of the private operators. In such cases, the Commissioner takes over the vehicles and stock of the operators at replacement value, plus compensation for the unexpired portion of the licence varying from 10 to 25 per cent of the amount which he estimates the operators would have earned in the period.

Now we can consider the situation in Melbourne and see how far the position has been altered compared with the intentions which inspired the passing of the Melbourne Tramways Act almost 20 years ago. Transport is pre-eminently a community service. It is, or at least it should be, a natural monopoly, even as the supply of gas, water, electricity and telephonic service are natural monopolies. When two or more authorities are charged with the same responsibility you inevitably get wasteful duplication. The declared intention of the Tramways Act was to constitute a transport authority which would take over the municipally and privately owned tramways, then growing haphazardly, weld them into a unified system, and plan their future development on a basis which would give the metropolis the best

possible service at the lowest possible cost. No sooner had the Board prepared its plan for the conversion of the cable system and the extension and unification of the electric systems than various private individuals, learning how profitable motor bus operation was proving overseas, rushed motor buses on to the streets. The routes for these vehicles were, of course, those already served by tramways. There was nothing to stop the invasion. No legislation by which the buses could be regulated was in existence; there was not even any provision to impose a seat tax on the buses and so form a fund from which municipalities could be compensated for the enormous damage done by these heavy vehicles to their roads. The insane competition which ensued benefited nobody. The shareholders in the various bus concerns lost all their capital, the creditors recovered only a fraction of what was due them, the municipalities had to spend large sums on the reconstruction of the roads, and the Tramways Board lost scores of thousands of pounds of revenue which it otherwise would have received. Regulation under the Motor Omnibus Act certainly took the place of unrestricted competition, but the worst feature of the Act was that it set up another authority with the right to plan street transport routes. It is true that the Bus Advisory Committee was appointed under the Act, but it has no power at all; all that it can do is to recommend a certain course to the Minister, who need not act on the recommendation. The only limitation imposed by the Act is that the Minister, before granting any bus route, shall satisfy himself that there are not sufficient existing facilities. Ministers of all parties have failed to follow that instruction. The buses from Middle Brighton and North Road illustrate this point. Every year the Advisory Board has recommended that these buses terminate at the Chapel Street and Commercial Road intersection; every year the Minister concerned has ignored that advice, notwithstanding the fact that it is impossible for any one to say that there are not sufficient existing transport facilities provided by the Tramways Board from that point. This illustration also shows how if the community gives some people a favour in next to no time the favour is regarded as a vested right.

The original licences for these buses were granted only for a year when the conversion of St. Kilda Road was started. Conversion was finished, but the licences were continued and are to-day a fine example in St. Kilda Road of quite unnecessary duplication of service. There is a third authority dealing with transport in Melbourne, the Melbourne City Council, which issues licences for all vehicles having a seating capacity of less than eight. In fixing motor cab routes, the City Council does not have to consult either the Tramways Board, the Advisory Board, or even the Minister. The result is that quite a large number of motor cabs are plying for hire in various parts of the metropolis, some in areas served by the tramways, in fact parallel to tramway routes, and in others parallel to motor omnibus routes. Here again there has been almost complete failure to distinguish between that which is convenient and that which is needful. Doubtless it is convenient for people who live a couple of blocks away from a tramway to have a motor cab run past their doors, but there is no necessity for it, and in fact many of these cab routes constitute decided community waste. Finally there is a fourth authority dealing with transport in the metropolitan area, the Transport Board, which concerns itself with those routes which while starting from the city terminate at points beyond the metropolitan boundary. The bus service from Melbourne to Warrandyte is an example of this sort of service. These buses parallel the tram from East Kew to the Cathedral, a distance of more than seven miles, and unquestionably constitute a quite unnecessary duplication. Again, commercial vehicles operating in Melbourne during the week are licensed by the Transport Board as passenger-carrying vehicles for the week-end, and thus compete with trams and motor buses.

Very few people have any idea of the extent of the competition offered the trams by these motor buses and motor cabs. Doubtless it will surprise most of you to learn that while the tramway routes cover approximately 138 miles, motor bus routes cover 285 miles and motor cab routes 60 miles. For the current year there are 85 prescribed bus routes, operated on by 188 buses, which are owned by 110 persons. The City Council has licensed 21

motor cab routes, upon which ply 71 cabs owned by 50 different people. That is a farcial position when you remember, as I pointed out earlier in my remarks, that Parliament meant the Tramways Board to have a monopoly of the street surface transport of the metropolis.

In another respect the Melbourne Tramways are at a grave disadvantage compared to their competitors, the railways and buses. The two latter have no extraneous payments of any kind to meet. The tramways, on the other hand, contribute largely to the upkeep of the Fire Brigades Board, the Infectious Diseases Hospital and the licensing Fund, though so far as the Fund is concerned the money never reaches there but is retained by the Government in office at the moment. The sums paid to those three things average £112,000 per annum. In addition, the tramways make and maintain that portion of the street lying between the rails and for 18 inches outside the rails at an estimated expenditure, including interest and sinking fund, of £167,226 per annum; pay £12,600 annually for interest and sinking fund upon £210,000 paid for such community improvement as bridges, road widenings, etc.; £8,000 annually for lighting 95 miles of streets; £6,720 annually for rates on the tracks; and £45,000 annually on free and concession fares - a grand total of £353,270 annually before the tramways get one shilling for themselves. Neither the suburban railways nor the omnibuses contribute one penny to these different objects; in fact, if the railways give a fare concession to, say, the blind or to incapacitated soldiers, they get a recoup from the Government.