

This is really a Part II of our effort to provide ideas to help transit operators. Our first article, "Is Transit in Trouble?" in the September issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER, covered some of the history of transit and how the private automobile has been its biggest competitor. Now we will take a close look at the one-seat ride and how it might help transit operators.

One of the oft-mentioned reasons for people not riding public transportation is that the buses do not go where the people want to go. To resolve this, some transit operators have been working on First Mile and Last Mile options and alternatives to help move passengers from their origin point to the bus or train and from the bus or train to their destination point. However we find that historically, passengers would prefer a one-seat ride. It is not only the most popular alternative for local trips, but it also seems to be the most successful and sometimes the most profitable alternative for bus operators.

Cost and Convenience

Why do people choose one form of transportation over another? There are actually some rather complex answers to this, but for our purposes we can look at cost and convenience. Cost would seemingly favor public transportation over private alternatives. However, it appears that those making this transit decision overwhelmingly are likely to place more emphasis on convenience than cost. I have seen numerous studies showing that passengers are unhappy about changing from one mode of transportation to another. Almost invariably, transfers cut down on ridership. Historically, the statistics show that the form of transportation with a one-seat ride or at least fewer transfers will win.

Records suggest that in 1902, something like 80 percent of local transit was provided by streetcars. Much of the remainder included walking, bicycles and even horses. However, 20 years later in 1922, more than 90 percent of transit trips had gravitated to the private automobile. While the automobile cost more to operate than riding streetcars, it offered a one-seat ride from home to work. Autos went to places where the streetcars and later buses did not.

This situation only got worse over the years as the pattern of local trips became less and less similar. In earlier years, many railroads, rapid transit lines, bus and streetcar lines served the central city as well as some major traffic corridors. As families, stores, companies and businesses began moving to the suburbs, we lost those defined corridors. Transit trips no longer followed major patterns and became very diversified. It became nearly impossible for fixed route buses to deal with this. As a result, we saw more people depending on their private automobile for their local transportation needs.

Looking for a One-Seat Ride

by Larry Plachno



While cost seems to favor public transportation over other modes, most passengers place a higher value on convenience. As a result, much of public transit has had to deal with America's love of their automobiles and their preference for a one-seat ride. This same trend to door-to-door service has been obvious in other areas including freight, retail sales and package delivery. MCI.

An interesting side note to this is that there were attempts to find ways to provide more effective suburban transit. Chicago has a railroad line through much of its suburbs that was originally built as a belt line to move freight around the city instead of through it. However, attempts to develop a system of shuttle buses serving railroad stations on this line proved to be somewhat unworkable. Travel times would be high because of the transfers required and the time it would take to complete the average trip using a bus, the train and another bus.

Buses and a One-Seat Ride

This brings us back to the concept of a one-seat ride. The overwhelming majority

of people have decided to use their private automobile for their transit trips. Some researchers have suggested that a measurable number have left public transit in favor of taxis, Uber, Lyft and other TNCs. There are statistics showing that 15 percent of local traffic in New York City has gone in this direction. One has to note that in addition to providing a one-seat ride, these alternatives also come to the passenger rather than expecting the passenger to come to the buses.

While many people might think that buses cannot provide a one-seat ride, that is not the case. Unlike streetcars, buses do not need to follow tracks and can go where they

are needed. The actual facts are that more buses provide a one-seat ride, or at least come close, than you might think. In addition (surprise!) the buses that provide a one-seat ride or come close tend to be among the most profitable.

For the most part, school buses provide a one-seat ride from home to school. In most cases it is the schools that pay for the service. While the actual routes and stops may vary slightly from year to year, basic service continues relatively unchanged. Although the numbers are smaller, there are numerous industrial routes operated by major corporations or government agencies. Most involve transporting employees to remote facilities or work sites. These can include mining operations and some rather rugged roads. It is interesting that MCI provides an optional heavy-duty package on its coaches for operations like this.

There are larger employers who run buses for their staff. Neoplan at Lamar, Colorado provided buses from nearby communities. The schedule was inbound to the factory in the morning and then back home after quitting time. The buses were driven by employees who worked at the factory. I know of several larger employers, including amusement parks, that provide bus service for their staff. A major expansion on this has taken place in Silicon Valley in recent years. Some of the larger employers, many involved with the Internet, operate employee shuttles to and from work. It helps in finding and retaining staff.

There are also some interesting variations to this theme. For example, some of the com-



There are several bus operations that provide transportation to specialized or remote industrial sites for workers. MCI even offers a special package on their coaches for operators providing this service over unpaved and dusty roads. It has recently become increasingly popular with major employers in the Silicon Valley area. MCI.

muter coaches going into New York City will serve the Wall Street area for those employed there. At one time there were also two bus operations that catered to the Jewish people who worked in a specific area in the Big Apple.

One question that I have been asked is whether it is possible to operate a one-seat ride bus service without the involvement of the employers or for multiple employers.

The answer is yes, and I have done just that. At one point I was involved with helping establish and run commuter buses to train stations in some Chicago suburbs. In discussions with commuters, I learned that many were dissatisfied with the need to change from bus to train and then back to a bus again to reach their place of employment. They indicated that the mode changes were both inconvenient and time consuming. Many said that they would give up the train ride in exchange for a one-seat ride.

When you actually look at the numbers, a surprising amount of bus operations provide a one-seat ride or come close. Virtually all of school bus operations provide a one-seat ride from home to school or come reasonably close. This photo shows a Thomas Saf-T-Liner arriving to pick up a group of children on their way to school. THOMAS BUILT BUSES.



As a result, we started a service called Executive Commuter Coach and sold seats on a monthly basis. We picked up passengers at suburban corners and transported them to downtown Chicago as well as up Michigan Avenue. There was a limited opportunity to switch to an earlier or later bus. While they gave up the train ride, they got reclining seats, reading lights and a restroom. Today they would also get Wi-Fi. The service was successful. While the coaches had to battle traffic on the expressway, the time difference compared with the train and two buses was less than expected because no time was lost transferring between modes.

Looking Beyond Transit

It is interesting if not downright sobering to realize that this movement to a one-seat ride and door-to-door service is not limited to the transit industry. It has appeared in many other places in our society including other transportation, freight operations, entertainment and even retail sales.

This same trend was obvious in other forms of transportation at the same time that

After losing some of their freight business to trucks, railroads were able to gain some of it back with piggyback or TOFC (Top of Flat Car) service. This combined the advantages of the truck for pick-up and delivery service with the advantages of the railroad for the long haul in between. Railroads have also developed a way to transport standard shipping containers that are used on ocean-going ships. 652234/5348 IMAGES.



it appeared in buses. Railroads and the early interurban lines carried most of the traffic between cities in 1902. As time went on they had the same problem as transit because passengers began moving to the private automobile. This only got worse for the railroads as better roads and then the interstate highways were built. Remaining interstate passenger service is now vested in Amtrak and requires a subsidy too.

Moving away from passengers, we can note that virtually the same thing happened to the freight industry in this same era. In 1902, essentially all freight was carried by the railroads or the early interurban lines. Smaller items like express and less-than-carload-lots (LCL) were transported in express and baggage cars. I might add that some railroads and interurban lines offered pick-up and delivery service; which would be the freight equivalent to what today is called "First Mile, Last Mile" in the transit business. By 1922, the shorter express freight movements were increasingly being taken over by trucks because they offered door-to-door service – the equivalent of a one-seat ride in transit. As time went on, and as roads and trucks improved, trucks took over more and more of this freight business just like private autos and Uber taking over transit trips.

It is interesting that eventually the railroads reclaimed some of this business back with truck trailers carried on rail cars (TOFC). This combination took advantage of the best attributes of each mode by using trucks for the pick up and delivery but the railroad for the longer haul in between. This works well because the freight does not complain about the extra time required to move the trailers on and off the train. It would be

interesting to see if someone could come up with a similar program for commuters. However, putting buses on railroad flat cars could be awkward and would probably take more time than what would be saved by using the train.

Could the concept of railroad piggyback service be applied to private automobiles? Yes, this does work. The best example I know of is the EuroTunnel rail connection between England and France under the English Channel. Automobiles are driven into special railroad cars for the journey and passengers stay with their autos. Other trains

carry trucks, but their drivers ride in a railroad passenger car. This works well with automobiles because competition is a slower ferry boat. It may not be as practical in commuter applications because of the additional time required to drive on and off the train.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Greyhound and other bus companies did a booming business in package express. As with everything else, the biggest problem was pickup and delivery service; the traditional "First Mile, Last Mile" concern. Eventually, a new company called UPS got started and took over much of this business by offering door-to-door service.

One of the best examples for transporting passengers along with their autos can be seen on the EuroTunnel operation between England and France. Special railroad cars are used that allow the automobiles to be driven inside the train and then off again on the other side of the English Channel. This photo shows automobiles being driven down the ramp leading to a train that is filling up prior to departure. ©AD MESKENS / WIKI-MEDIA.



You can see this same trend in entertainment. At one time people went to shows and theaters or movie houses for entertainment. This slowed down when you could rent VHS tapes and then DVDs to watch movies at home. Now, even the trip to the video store is no longer necessary because you can download movies right to your home.

You can also see this same thing in retail sales. In 1902 it was difficult for rural residents to get to the big department stores. Hence, the stores provided mail order catalogs so people could order what they wanted and have it delivered. Today, this has expanded to being able to order on the Internet and have things delivered to your door. People are increasingly expecting things to come to them.

Transit Thoughts and Questions

All of this brings up numerous thoughts and questions that might provide some ideas for transit operations in the future.

- It is obvious that an overwhelming number of passengers would prefer to have the transportation come to them instead of having them go to the transportation.

- Most passengers would prefer a one-seat ride over changing modes during their journey.

- Are our regular route buses going where the passengers want to go?

- Are our regular route buses going where the passengers not riding want to go?

- Instead of planning routes on a computer, it might be worth while to ask the passengers where they want to go.

- Would smaller buses or even vans make more sense in providing more personalized service? In some situations would subsidized car or van pools make sense and provide service more attractive to riders?

- Think outside of the box. Streetcars were big vehicles following a fixed route. Is that what people want today?



While on the EuroTunnel train, drivers and passengers ride along with their cars inside the rail cars so they can roll off easily at the other end of the line. Amenities are minimal but the duration of the trip is not much different than commuting. It would be interesting if someone could figure out how to apply this concept to commuters. IPIERRE.



This movement to door-to-door service has gone well beyond transit and can be seen in freight, retail sales and package delivery. Package express, once primarily carried by railroads and buses, has mainly shifted to other carriers because they provide both pick-up and delivery. Pick-up and delivery in freight and packages is the equivalent of "First Mile, Last Mile" concerns in transit. UPS.

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