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Publication Date
2015

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Jitneys, Buses, and Public Transportation in Twentieth Century Los Angeles

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

James Nicholas Stroup

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If this dissertation were written all on my own it would be the first in history. I was heartened, encouraged, and supported by many people throughout the research and writing and I am indebted to them.

The University of California Transportation Center was gracious enough to provide a year’s worth of funding that helped supplement the researching portion of this work; I’m grateful that UCTC stepped outside of its traditional practice of funding scientific projects and took a chance on a humanities study, which they do every so often. I was also awarded the Haynes Lindley Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship to support the writing of this project, without which this dissertation would not yet be completed. The Haynes Foundation has for many years supported valuable work in urban history, spreading the wealth to lots of different kinds of interdisciplinary study. I’m humbled to have been selected to continue in creating the sort of scholarship that John Randolph Haynes would have been interested in reading.

I am grateful to Bill Heard of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority who gave me a communications job in transit and allowed me access to the universe that resulted in this study (although he never quite understood why I gave up journalism for academic work). At Metro’s archive, the Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library, Matt Barrett was extremely helpful both during my tenure as an employee and as a researcher, allowing me full rights to all of Metro’s collections.

At University of California Riverside, many people were encouraging in my study and wrote helpful letters that resulted in funding, without which I could not have finished
this work. Prof. Dana Simmons was always tremendously insightful, as was my advisor, Prof. Cathy Gudis. At California State University Fullerton, Prof. Pam Steinle could always be counted on for a leisurely, but somehow deep, discussion. Also at CSUF, Prof. John Ibson remains a close friend and a treasured well of encouragement—and was instrumental in helping me get to the point in my initial work to turn all the information I had into some kind of useful argument. At University of Illinois at Chicago, Prof. Robert Bruegmann was exceptionally kind to me and showed interest in my ideas from our earliest communication, which was humbling. His attention to my writing and arguments helped make this a better study and I can’t say enough good things about him.

Most academics are like aliens to their families, and I was no different. But all of my parents and extended family and in-laws were very polite about the process and understanding of why I didn’t yet have a “real” job. Hopefully I’ll get one soon.

My graduate study would have been impossible without the steadiest form of support from Stephanie, my wife, who allowed me to go off into books and discussion courses and teach undergraduates while she labored in the working world to support me and our son, Mason. Her attitude was always one of understanding, her editorial eye was always available, and her pretend interest in my work was always well-masked. No person on Earth has had to hear the word “jitney” more times than Stef and I hope my work here is validation of the faith she put in me to get through the process. Thanks for allowing me to stay in school and not be a full-fledged grown-up for a while longer.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Jitneys, Buses, and Public Transportation in Twentieth Century Los Angeles

by

James Nicholas Stroup

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
University of California, Riverside, March 2015
Dr. Catherine Gudis, Chairperson

This project uncovers the role of buses and their riders in shaping Los Angeles urban history in two crucial moments. First, while the private automobile inexorably altered American mobility, the bus quietly became the dominant form of public transit, replacing streetcars by the mid-1950s. I argue the jitney (the precursor to the bus, a short-lived owner/operator business phenomenon throughout the U.S. in the 1910s) directed the shift into automobile-based public transportation by giving riders a choice in transit, ultimately resulting in the end of interurban rail service. Secondly, the movement into public ownership of mass bus transit in the 1950s was inspired in part by riders, resulting in the municipally-directed systems we now find common. This decision to create publicly-owned public transportation occurred in the post-WWII context of Cold War fears of government oppression and socialism, marking transportation as something of an outlier in the cultural construction of social and municipal responsibility. Still, the limitations
placed upon transit by Angelinos in the form of funding and planning failures ultimately reinforces the skepticism of government as a provider of services.

The dissertation intends to prove that riders directed the movement into road-based public transportation in a quest for more efficient transportation that met their needs more effectively than urban rail. It further analyzes the moral and ethical implications of why 1950s Los Angeles—amid a historical moment actively promoting private mobility in the form of massive federal and state highway programs—chose to assume public control of an erstwhile private industry. Public ownership changed the sort of access into transportation planning and operation, allowing ethical and moral issues (such as the social effect of fare increases, union activity, and unprofitable route service into low income areas) to challenge the dollars-and-cents approach to transportation planning previously, and unsuccessfully, embraced by private ownership. Although the boundaries placed upon public transit by citizens of Los Angeles ultimately emphasize ideas of limited government (in keeping with other Cold War-period studies of American culture), the assumption of public transportation under public ownership in the 1950s was an important change in the cultural interpretation of transit as a social responsibility, rather than a private entrepreneurial opportunity.

In each step of this dissertation, riders are the primary catalyst, directing the changes in transit through market forces, through choice in the technology they preferred, or through funding of transit projects. Despite all the urban planning and top-down transit schemes—private or public—riders retained the ability to reshape transit in L.A. in the twentieth century through each moment of the city’s transportation history.
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This dissertation follows the growth of the bus system in Los Angeles County as it becomes the dominant form of public transportation. It details the development of the bus system from jitneys in the early twentieth century, to privately-owned motorcoach transit in the 1920s through 1957, and publicly-owned public transportation from 1957 through the mid-1960s. My argument is that the bus, not the automobile, promoted the demise of the interurban rail system present in Los Angeles from the late nineteenth century through the 1950s.¹ The bus is crucial to understanding Los Angeles’ urban historical development, especially as it pertains to how its riders, often working-class people of color, agitated on behalf of their rights to access and shape a city that would become known most famously as a center of automobility. By shifting attention from the private car to the public bus, I seek to set the discussion of public transportation in Los Angeles (and potentially throughout America) as part of the same sort of independence impulse that automobility is famous for promoting. Jitney service in the teens, public ownership in the 1950s, and the Bus Riders Union in the 1990s all argue for the continuing assessment of transit by users as a democratic path towards engaging more effectively with their surroundings by making demands of public transportation in Los Angeles. In this light, public engagement with mass transportation through the bus is no different than private automobility: a means of carving mobile independence through a space.

¹ The Pacific Electric Red Cars and Los Angeles Railway Yellow Cars were the dominant form of public transportation from the 1890s through 1915, when buses began to overtake use of trolleys in popularity. See: Spencer Crump, Ride the Big Red Cars: The Pacific Electric Story (Glendale, Calif.: Trans-Anglo Books, 1983); Jim Walker, Los Angeles Railway Yellow Cars (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2007).
Automobility uses cars. Users of mass transit use the bus. Although the vehicle differs, the ideologies behind it do not.²

To date, the bus has been largely ignored by historians as a means of inquiry into American culture. Indeed, transportation as a historical subject has often been relegated to secondary importance, as when it has been used to explain railroad technology as a crucial part of the larger historical topic of the industrial revolution in the United States.³ Several historians have also dealt with horse-drawn transportation, canal-building, and riverboats in terms of their importance to economic and social progress in American history—but in each work the focus is on other topics dependent upon transportation, rather than the transportation itself, or what the transportation says about culture.⁴ For example, Jane Curry’s work on riverboats is ethnographic concerning the memories and skill of its pilots. Similarly, Peter Way writes a history of labor issues in the era of canal-building in the United States. In both cases transportation is ancillary to the subject.⁵ Even when transportation seems to be the topic, it is typically used as a conduit to interpret other concepts in American history. For instance, Barbara Welke uses railroads to discuss changing perceptions and legal interpretations regarding women into the early twentieth century, while William Watson uses the construction of “Duffy’s Cut” to

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discuss labor and ethnic issues surrounding American treatment of Irish immigrants. Finally, a third mode of transportation history comes from the professional appreciators of the technology itself; those books that discuss the beauty, mechanical detail, and implementation of a form of transportation without more than a passing paragraph regarding how people who used it were affected. While this sort of transportation history has the greatest number of titles, it also tells us least about the development of L.A. and a public sensibility regarding mass transit.

When interpreting the value of these works, it seems clear that transportation can and should be dealt with in a way that contends with its cultural and social implications: its impact on people, places, and attitudes. My project does not center on the technological advancements of transportation leading up to the bus, nor will it use the bus as a means to discuss only one group of people. Rather, I seek to explore historically how space, class, ethnic background, and culture affected the placement, use, and interpretation of the transportation system in Los Angeles in the twentieth century as the bus became the dominant form of public transit. Space, as it relates to this dissertation, will take its cues from Henri Lefebvre’s interpretations of space as means to interpret how power is distributed in society. Power, as I conceive of it, is informed by Michel Foucault’s interpretation of power as constituting not only “the legitimately constituted forms of political and economic subjection but also modes of action, more or less

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7 This category has myriad examples to choose from. Your average bookstore’s “Transportation” section is filled with books glorifying the technological marvel of rail, automobiles, airplane, steamboats, etc.

considered or calculated, which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people.” When Lefebvre’s ideas on space are combined with Foucault’s ideas on power, for example, the incredible expense and placement of the federal highway system speaks to a national support of automobile dominance within society—and colors the actions and inactions surrounding that behavior. The 1924 *Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles* was equally supportive of automobility in transportation in the city space, meaning that decisions to institute street widening to accommodate cars are accompanied by decisions for what that meant to streetcar transit. Buses use the same space as automobiles, signaling at least a tacit acceptance of that form of transportation as the most valued form of public transportation. Meanwhile, the trolley system was diminished in its power by the continuing erosion of actual space it had access to and by the growth of shared but competitive space between automobiles and trolley cars (which, as the jitney period indicates, was more of a problem for fixed-route rail than for quick and flexible auto buses). When it comes to trolleys, I argue that users of mass transit were the initial holders of power; by making the early decision to support jitneys, they exercised whatever will they controlled, forcing trolleys into a new role in the overall transportation outlook of the city. And this choice eventually led to a vast change in the physical space of Los Angeles’ transit schema. When space is discussed, it will be in terms of how power is interpreted and trades hands. Indeed, Edward Soja has done as much regarding

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one of the major historical examples of this dissertation: how space was interpreted as privileging the privileged during the 1994 Bus Riders Union lawsuit against Metro.\textsuperscript{10}

In a general sense, this dissertation takes its lead from Jeremiah Axelrod’s \textit{Inventing Autopia}, Jane Jacobs’s \textit{The Death and Life of Great American Cities}, Kevin Lynch’s \textit{The Image of the City}, and Theodore Hershberg’s ideas about human beings interact with the built environment—that they both create and draw meaning from the spaces that they travel through and live within.\textsuperscript{11} With that in mind, the decision to support jitneys, the movement into public ownership, and the fight to end “transit racism” all become laden with meaning about how Angelinos wanted their city to be organized. And as the private automobile continued to remove Angelinos from public transportation, the decisions made about supporting or denying transit plans become overtly class-oriented and tinged with racial connotations, similar to what Raphael Sonenshein described as “biracial politics” in \textit{Politics in Black and White}.\textsuperscript{12} Although L.A. transit agencies were eventually able to gain some victories at the ballot box in terms of transit funding, the defeats indicate some unwillingness on the part of Angelinos to invest into public programs that would benefit L.A.’s urban cores, populated by lower-income and minority residents. This is supported by what Mike Davis referred to as “suburban separatism” and the “revolt against density”: at the very least, investment in publicly-

\textsuperscript{10} Edward Soja, \textit{Seeking Spatial Justice} (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
owned public transportation—especially rail projects—meant diverting money away from suburban car-oriented spending.\textsuperscript{13} So although public transportation was supported with public money beginning in the 1950s, the reticence of Angelinos to accommodate plans of rail-based rapid transit—whether it was conceived as monorail, elevated rail, or the reintroduction of light rail onto the streets of Los Angeles—speaks to both the power of automobile dominance and the lack of interest in developing the areas of the city populated by lower-income and minority residents.

My dissertation is a history of the organization of space affecting public transportation; how political and economic decisions influenced creation of transportation and service; what riders thought of the system and how they acted in response; and how the organization of transportation into publicly-owned agencies influenced the future of transit in Los Angeles. I will argue that the bus allowed transit riders a means to increase their power over transportation in the county as both laborers and consumers. Early jitney service speaks to that, as does the Bus Riders Union in the 1990s. As jitney service became incorporated into private bus agencies in the 1920s through the 1950s, a cooperative relationship developed between bus and trolley—especially among the workers of transit. Starting in the 1930s, working conditions, hours and overtime, and pay were constantly debated between owners and workers, often resulting in work stoppages and strikes.\textsuperscript{14} The municipal assumption of control of private bus lines (and remaining

\textsuperscript{13} Mike Davis, \textit{City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles}, 2006th ed. (London: Verso, 1990), 165, 173. Davis was discussing homeownership and land use, but the parallel usefully extends into transit.

\textsuperscript{14} Between the 1930s and the mid-1950s, there were literally dozens of strike threats or actual strikes of transportation employees. These four articles only serve as proof of long-term activity on the part of workers in the transportation industry. See: “P.E. Strike Voted; Pontius Says Pay Boost Impossible,” \textit{Los Angeles Times} (Los Angeles, Calif., November 22, 1934); “Strike Halts Beach Cities’ Bus Service,” \textit{Los
trolley lines) in 1957 speaks to the continuing difficulties private transit owners had in side-stepping the interests of AFL-CIO transportation workers, which was growing in membership among L.A.-based transit employees. But, contrary to the jitney period, the public assumption of ownership by Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (LAMTA) represents an ebbing of the influence riders had on transportation planning. Although buses had managed to keep passenger transportation solvent, and although Angelino transit-riders enjoyed the greatest access to their city that they ever had, LAMTA had bigger plans for its charge: mass rapid transit. And as the automobile increased its sway over the average Angelino, unsuccessful ballot measures for investment in publicly-owned rapid transportation illustrate the failure of a top-down approach to transit that stifled the ability of riders to wield their influence through the fare box as they had done during the jitney era or with a patchwork of privately-owned busing companies. Automobile ownership grew meteorically in all income groups throughout the twentieth century, from about one car per 10 citizens nationally in 1920 to a nearly one-to-one ratio at the highest income quintile and a 6-in-10 ratio in the lowest quintile. With this in mind, it is not a great leap of logic to assert that as the private automobile became a greater influence on all income groups, the concern about the nature and character of public transportation options was reduced, resulting in less interest in promoting public transportation—especially large-scale, costly projects like monorail or

_Angelos Times_ (Los Angeles, Calif., April 16, 1941); “Strike Halts Service to San Fernando,” _Los Angeles Times_ (Los Angeles, Calif., June 6, 1947); “Vote Authorizes Transit Strike, Union Reports,” _Los Angeles Times_ (Los Angeles, Calif., November 25, 1954).


even light rail—ultimately resulting in the failure of several ballot measures for rapid transit in Los Angeles prior to 1980.

This impulse on the part of planners to ask for large-scale projects, although not without altruistic and pragmatic benefits, was driven at least in part by what I have termed municipal egotism: an omnipresent desire to ensure that Los Angeles was able to keep up with growth into the future, retain its historic and characteristic pull as a magnet for migration and development, and stave off the fear that the city was losing pace to other American and international cities—especially pertaining to public transportation.\(^{17}\)

In 1954, the initial plans considered by publicly-owned transportation, notably a monorail project to travel above the Los Angeles River, were meant to place Los Angeles “in a class by itself…of all the great cities in the United States.”\(^{18}\) In another study commissioned in 1957, the Citizens Traffic and Transportation Committee for the Extended Los Angeles Area (supported by Mayor Norris Poulson) argued rapid transit was needed to keep Los Angeles from sliding into “mediocrity.”\(^{19}\) The 1968 SCRTD Final Report argued that “31 of the world’s largest cities operate[d] rail rapid transit systems” and that L.A.’s lack of one was a “serious handicap” to the economic and social

\(^{17}\) Kevin Starr, Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Greg Hise, Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). Both Starr and Hise present evidence on the characteristics that drew migration into California. Starr describes the early period of American migration from the East Coast and Midwest, while Hise focuses more specifically on post-WWII development of the San Fernando Valley north of Los Angeles.

\(^{18}\) Cloverdale & Colpitts, Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles (New York, January 15, 1954), 64, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.

transportation needs of the county. A major section of the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission’s report “Transit Options for Los Angeles County” in 1977 outlined the transportation developments in other American cities—indicating that L.A. was behind the eight-ball in both planning and funding areas, and that recent successful ballot measures to pay for public transportation in San Antonio, Atlanta, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, and throughout Massachusetts might serve as primers to encourage Angelenos to invest in their transit future. LA 2000: A City for the Future was a three-year study commissioned by Mayor Tom Bradley in 1988 that made comprehensive recommendations to control the process of municipal growth, arguing that if Los Angeles was to be “THE city of the 21st century” it was going to need to control how “demographics, jobs, education, arts, transportation, housing, environment, urban design, social services, law and justice, governance and finance” were planned by city and county officials. Kevin Starr wrote in the report’s epilogue, with a concerned but also hopeful tone, that unless city leaders took LA 2000 seriously it was in danger of forfeiting the historic urge for “futurity” that had made Los Angeles a “socially and culturally mature city” in the first half of the twentieth century. In a final example, now in the twenty-first century, L.A.’s most recent ex-mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, was firm in his belief that a “world-class transit system” was part of what Los Angeles needed to

20 “SCRTD Final Report,” May 1968, RTD–21, SCRTD Collection, Box 14, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
23 Ibid., 85.
maintain its position as a leader among cities both at home and abroad.24 Meanwhile, Los Angeles County was operating the country’s largest bus system that served its residents so well that it was given the honor of being named “America’s Best” by the American Public Transportation Association in 2006, beating out 49 other municipal transportation agencies based almost exclusively on Metro’s extremely reliable, large, clean-air bus fleet.25

The last chapter of this dissertation deals with the creation of publicly-owned public transportation—the shift away from private ownership. Shortly after the assumption of public control by LAMTA, the capitulation to union demands for higher wages and better working conditions resulted in the need to raise fares from $0.17 in 1957 to $0.73 in 1964, a 329 percent increase in less than 10 years.26 So while the workers of public transportation saw their demands answered by new municipal ownership, riders paid for it at the fare box. At the same time, any map of the available transportation provided by LAMTA after the consolidation of private busing companies details a truly remarkable increase in the access Angelinos had to their city through the system under a convenient single authority, complete with monthly transit plans at reduced cost and transfer opportunities. There was also a dramatic shift beginning in the 1950s in how Angelinos interpreted the role of government in providing transportation for its citizens…a discussion that LAMTA played a central part in mediating. In an era of

Cold War fears of socialism and collective behavior, public transportation managed to unify under public ownership in Los Angeles. Although this might be viewed as an easing of the staunch opposition to socialist activity, the limits in funding and resources placed on L.A.’s first publicly-owned transportation system indicate that while attitudes had shifted, the leash on government-controlled transit was short and held firm, indicating a restriction to the access riders had in making the system their own. If the “jitney craze” and the era of private bus companies illustrate a growth in rider’s access to how the system was shaped and how much it cost to ride, the initial years of public ownership show a grimmer picture for riders determining how public transportation would be shaped in Los Angeles. But, as the epilogue demonstrates, even planning committees and operations management were unable to drown out rider agency; an especially successful legal challenge by the Bus Riders Union in the 1990s is good evidence that transit patrons uncovered ways to combat the bureaucracy of public ownership and, again, mold the transportation system to their needs.

The bus is the most cost effective and efficient public transportation Los Angeles has ever used, and yet it is constantly threatened and paid short shrift. Bus riders continuously fight for more and better service at every Metro Board meeting because, in spite of their success in lobbying for a consent decree based on federal anti-discrimination statutes in the mid-1990s and in spite of national awards commending its bus service, Metro funds rail over bus. Compared to modern interurban rail’s limitations (fixed route, right-of-way intrusion on street space, excessive cost for creation, and maintenance of the system) the
bus is a superior option in terms of rider access, system size, and ease of use—which is why it was chosen over the original Red Car trolleys in the early to mid-twentieth century, first by riders for its transit advantages and eventually by providers for its economic ones. Despite this, Los Angeles’ bus system has become the secondary focus of public transportation planning and expenditures on a per rider basis in the city since the reintroduction of light rail in 1980. Many more dollars are spent on rail than are on bus. The 2012 Metro budget calls for $1.192 billion in bus-related costs and $1.16 billion in rail-related costs. In 2011, buses had an annual boarding rate of 357.3 million passengers, compared to 95.69 million on all Metro Rail. This works out to an average of $3 spent per bus rider versus a $12 subsidy for each rail rider. Rail service for vastly fewer riders disproportionately accommodates the upper classes, since light and heavy commuter rail lines are focused on transporting riders into the downtown area from sections of the city where home values are high. More than half of Metro’s budget is based on the sales tax (which affects the poor more so than the wealthy)—and this money is used disproportionately to fund transportation which privileges the privileged.

Despite a long history of activism and successful persuasion on the part of bus riders, transit agencies continue to give riders reason to fight for better service. This

28 Peter Marcuse, “Mass Transit for the Few,” Society 13, no. 6 (September 1976): 43–50. The recent Gold Line Eastside Extension into East Los Angeles to service Boyle Heights does indicate more attention for rail service into lower-income areas. But the fact that the costly Gold Line was initially placed to service wealthier San Gabriel Valley cities, especially Pasadena, and was only later expanded to service East L.A. denotes a clear pattern of privileging the privileged, as does the paths of Metro’s Red and Purple lines.
29 The regressive nature of the sales tax is an aging debate that, to my mind, is settled. This short article, while old, is the briefest example I can name to discuss the reasoning for why sales taxes influence the economic outlook of lower-income earners. See: Alfred Buehler, “The Sales Tax,” Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 88, no. 1 (June 16, 1944): 29–35.
dissertation is a history of triumph on the part of riders, but concludes that it seems to be an endless fight to convince transit owners to create transit which meets the needs of riders. From the beginning of the twentieth century, when nearly every Angelino was a transit rider, to the present, when less than five percent of the public rides, transit riders as a group have shifted in their demographic makeup.30 In 1922, the earliest year for public transportation records, there were nearly 16 billion trips for an estimated American population of 110 million people, or 136 trips per citizen.31 By 2011, the most recent year with compiled statistics, Americans took just over 5.5 billion trips with a population of nearly 313 million, or roughly 18 trips per citizen—a reduction of 86 percent.32 Simply, as automobile ownership increased, the use of public transportation became the purview of low-income residents of cities, including Los Angeles, who are also more likely to be ethnic and racial minority groups.33 What this means for this dissertation is that in each phase of the study, transit riders are not the same group. In the jitney era, transit riders can be safely associated with the greater population of Los Angeles, since almost

everyone used transit. In the era of private busing, riders were becoming scarcer but were still numerous enough to use their pocketbooks to alter the direction of public transportation.\(^{34}\) As car ownership grew dramatically in post-war Los Angeles, riders were increasingly those citizens who had the lowest incomes—and were increasingly made up of ethnic minorities. So while rider agency in the 1910s was about independence of mobility, freedom of choice, technological superiority, and a dash of progressive anti-corporatism, rider agency in the 1990s was aligned along the lines of racial disparity and social injustice. But however dissimilar transit riders looked from time to time, the desire to craft public transportation into a system riders liked and riders used to their benefit remained a steady impulse at the heart of this study. It is that sentiment that I believe serves as the glue holding these disparate eras and distinct groups together, and the foundation of Los Angeles public transportation history in the twentieth century.

While I am not researching this project to advocate for more bus transportation or less rail, the disconnection between what bus riders want and what Metro wants to give them inspires me to continue to study the system and the people who use it to get around; the devotion to rail over bus complicates an already complicated relationship between transit planners and transit users. In any case, the bus continues to be—as it was from the start—a site for increased agency for transit riders in Los Angeles.

\(^{34}\) This applies for the 1920s and 1930s. The 1940s are an aberration in terms of transit use because of war rationing.
Chapter One: The Jitney’s Influence on Public Transportation

In September of 1914, the City of Long Beach, California, experienced a massive increase of jitney service to the point that they “virtually swamped the city,” requiring city leaders to come up with a plan to regulate these “uninvited public utility institutions.”¹ By October, the threat to the trolley lines in Los Angeles—which had been in operation for nearly 20 years—was so great that the Pacific Electric Railway Company (P.E.) asked for an ordinance to limit the number, route, and schedule of jitney services. More than 130 jitney cars had caused a 40 percent reduction in P.E. profit in the city and the railway threatened to abandon their Ocean Avenue line if measures weren’t taken to curtail the unregulated “menace.”² The Long Beach City Council, fearful of what a loss of railway service might mean for the economy and residents who depended on streetcars for their transportation, acted quickly and passed regulations requiring jitney operators to have a $10,000 insurance bond in order to do business, as well as a $10 annual licensing fee.³ To Pacific Electric’s delight, the ordinances reduced jitneys in Long Beach to 41 cars—a 70 percent reduction of the “fare snipers”—and P.E. promised to retain the Ocean Avenue line.⁴ The streetcar victory was short-lived as jitney cars on Long Beach streets numbered near 100 after fulfilling the city ordinances. Despite P.E.’s vow to

¹ “Auto Busses Stir Trouble,” Los Angeles Times, September 20, 1914, sec. I.
² “Autos Slicing Rail Profits,” Los Angeles Times, September 5, 1914, sec. II.
³ The $10,000 bond was more than double the average cost of similar streetcar insurance, which could be had for $3,000 to $4,000 a year per engine. See: “Insurance for Electric Railways,” Electric Railway Journal 59, no. 2 (January 14, 1922): 77.
⁴ “‘Jitney’-Bus Ordinance Puts Many Off the Streets; Streetcars Have Increased Loads at Once,” Los Angeles Times, November 30, 1914, II6.
continue service, Red Cars quit the Ocean Avenue line before Christmas, finding it too unprofitable to operate.\(^5\)

Ocean Avenue would become a battleground yet again in spring of the following year when Pacific Electric, determined to stem the losses it had encountered from jitneys throughout Los Angeles County, regrouped and doubled streetcar service along the beach line.\(^6\) Long Beach residents continued to patronize jitney cars where available, however, and P.E. again canceled the Ocean Avenue line, finding its increased service had not inspired riders to return.\(^7\) In May, 1915, Pacific Electric was granted permission by the State Railroad Commission to permanently cease service on several east-west lines in Long Beach and reclaim the track.\(^8\) A year later, the use of Pacific Electric services in Long Beach was so limited that its president, Paul Shoup, said, “Your Long Beach city lines have fallen to the point where they do not only fail to pay ordinary operating expenses, but they do not even pay transportation expenses, that is, the power to move the cars over the tracks. Some of your tracks have disappeared, and others must go.”\(^9\) The City of Long Beach was unimpressed, by then in favor of jitney service; Pacific Electric lost its exclusive transportation rights and in November, 1916 the City of Long Beach awarded a franchise to a group of independent jitney operators who banded together to form the Long Beach Transportation Company. A 10-year contract allowed automobiles to provide the public transportation needs along Ocean Avenue and beyond.\(^10\)

\(^5\) “Another Line Lopped Off,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 13, 1914, sec. IV.
\(^6\) “Fight Jitneys for Nickels,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1915, sec. II.
\(^7\) “Plan to Oppose Pacific Electric,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1915, sec. I.
\(^8\) “Too Much Jitney Bus,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1915, sec. II.
Jitney bus service was a simple idea. Owners of automobiles place signs in their windshields reading “5¢”; if the car was going where the passenger is going, the passenger paid his nickel and was taken to or near the destination. The five-cent price was generally static and emblematic of jitney service throughout North America. There were no routinized stops. You got on by flagging a passing jitney down and got off wherever you desired. As its trade journals espoused, the advantages to the Progressive Era passenger were equally simple: the service was comfortable, quick, and convenient.11 Surely, Long Beach was an extreme example of how influential jitney service was in Los Angeles—and in the United States in general. But the story of jitneys in Long Beach illustrates the profound misery jitneys caused for traditional urban rail transit in many American cities in the 1910s. Long Beach was an extreme example of a preference for automobiles used for public transit purposes. But the eventual replacement of rail lines with organized jitney service in Long Beach was an early indication of the direction public transportation would make through the middle of the twentieth century: the steady and purposeful move away from urban rail into larger versions of jitneys called buses. Specifically, jitney service created three important changes that altered the course of public transportation planning, creation, management, and use in Los Angeles—indeed, throughout the United States.12

First, jitneys redefined the automobile. Although the increasing availability of the car and its use in American culture was on the rise through the 1910s, the jitney

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11 “Stand Up for Your Rights,” *The Jitney Bus* 1, no. 2 (May 1915): 35. Although there were no typical stops, jitneys did commonly follow routes streetcars traveled…but those were the thoroughfares.
12 Although this dissertation details the growth of the bus in Los Angeles, jitney activity was nationwide—even international. I chose to use include examples of jitney history from outside of L.A. because it seemed to allow for a more complete picture of the path to busing as a dominant form of transit.
repurposed automobiles into a technology that was not solely private in its operation. Coinciding with the use of the truck as a means of goods transport, the jitney increased the automobile’s potential uses by creating it as a means of public transportation.\(^\text{13}\) The jitney provided an important model that not only laid the groundwork for bus development, but trained audiences in the uses and values of multi-passenger automobility.

Secondly, the jitney fundamentally altered how providers of urban and interurban transportation conceived of their industry. Although the motor bus had been used extensively in Europe in the early 1900s, American street railway business interests were dismissive of the automobile’s potential as an effective means of passenger transportation. As the sole provider of urban transit and owners of a massive investment in rolling stock, powerhouses, wires, and rail, street railway interests were skeptical about the new technology.\(^\text{14}\) Once the jitney challenged the profitability of their model, railway men reviewed the potential of the automobile for mass transit and came to the economic realization that buses could be cheaper to operate than streetcars—especially for new service routes.\(^\text{15}\) With the demise of the jitney, streetcar companies began using buses to supplement rail transportation without irritating competition.\(^\text{16}\) Although streetcar companies initially encouraged jitney regulation as a way to eliminate road-based public


transportation, the successful elimination of most independently-operated jitney service allowed the electric railway to provide jitney bus service to municipalities throughout the country themselves. Bus operations begun in the late 1910s were corporate in character, grafting familiar streetcar business practices onto bus transportation. Where the low-margin jitney was crippled by regulation, corporate bus companies were able to meet costs by operating on larger scales. The jitney forced the railway industry to reevaluate its business model, leading directly to the eventual replacement of streetcars with buses.

Most importantly, the jitney shifted how users of public transportation engaged with urban transit, dramatically challenging the expectations placed upon public transportation in the United States. The immense growth of jitney service throughout America between the summers of 1914 and 1915 speaks to public support for the benefits automobile technology brought to transit.17 Riders opted to patronize jitney service—so much so that interurban railways lost millions of dollars throughout America. California railways lost nearly $3.5 million in profits in 1915 to jitney drivers with 5-passenger Fords. Los Angeles-area railway companies made up almost half of that total loss.18 Once riders had a taste of automobility, their preference crippled what had been a strong and immensely profitable industry. Users were given an alternative and their nickels provided all the votes necessary to alter the form of public transportation. The bus, in the aftermath of jitney service, grew into the dominant form of urban public transportation in the United States. Buses in American transportation represent choice for the rider—a position

of power riders claimed in establishing transit they wanted to have in their urban spaces actively chosen over streetcars. While growing numbers of Angelinos bought a private automobile amid the growing affluence of the 1920s and dropped out of the public transportation formula, many still required transit as part of their daily lives—and their choice of bus service aided in the reconstruction of the face of Los Angeles into a city becoming quickly redesigned to accommodate the onslaught of private automobiles.\textsuperscript{19} Just as the jitney had been, motor bus transportation was a service based on the kinds of things riders cared about: speed, comfort, quiet, cost. Rail became so costly that it was infeasible to replace equipment as it aged into disrepair, and largely contrary to the overwhelming cultural momentum shifting toward automobility as a part of everyday life.\textsuperscript{20} Jitneys set the stage for the dominant position of the bus in mid-century and post-WWII American public transportation.

THE RAILWAY

More than a decade before the jitney was even an idea, streetcars had fully established the parameters of the expansive urban area that would define the physical space of Los Angeles. Pacific Electric had laid out its tracks throughout the Los Angeles Basin long before automobiles were common enough even to serve as anything but a dalliance for the upper classes. Although the streetcar and interurban routes served as a public good in providing functional transportation within the County, the initial purpose of the system

\textsuperscript{19} Scott Bottles, \textit{Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City} (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1987). Bottles documents the disdain Angelinos had for the streetcar system, focusing his study on how this helped grow the use of the private automobile.

was to sell real estate. P.E. President Henry Huntington’s land ownership extended throughout Los Angeles and Orange counties and P.E. lines ran to places where Huntington and his associates owned property as a means of increasing the land value.

For instance, this ad ran in the *Los Angeles Times* on June 28, 1903 claiming that the Newport Beach area was ripe for investment. The ad reads: “There is every reason to believe that the present low price of lots will double by the time Mr. Huntington’s electric line is running to this resort.”

![Newport Beach Ad](image)

**FIGURE 1:** P.E. owners also owned the Newport Beach Company. “Display Ad 19 -- No Title,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1903, B7.

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21 William F. Friedricks, *Henry E. Huntington and the Creation of Southern California* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 1. While it seems odd to imagine that real estate interests alone prompted the placement of the rail lines, the migration West was at a fever pitch—and Los Angeles was being consciously created to bring people to the city. Huntington and his partners created entire sections of L.A. and surrounding towns out of nothing, and made them desirable by enabling transportation to those areas. Moreover, railway profits for passenger transport were considered a bonus; profits on rail paths were dependent on freight transportation.

FIGURE 2: Jeffrey Moreau, *The Pacific Electric Pictorial, Volume One* (Los Angeles: Pacific Bookwork, 1964), 15. This map is circa 1910, illustrating how vast the Red Line system was, and early.
Huntington’s P.E. lines—known as “Red Cars” because of the distinct color of the cars—became a major source of public transportation in the region for nearly 50 years. By 1903, P.E. reckoned it had “11,000 tons of steel lying in the streets of Los Angeles” at an estimated cost of $54 a ton, or nearly $600,000 all told. In 1911, P.E. and seven local independent passenger rail companies in Southern California merged to fully consolidate the passenger rail in Los Angeles, finalizing the massive Red Car system.

The sprawling interurban network set Los Angeles apart from other American cities by its mere size alone: more than 1,000 miles of track made it the largest metropolitan system in the world in 1911. Historian Kevin Starr has argued that Los Angeles was incessantly self-promoting in the early twentieth century, touting the engineering marvel of the Los Angeles Aqueduct designed by William Mulholland and later the film industry. Robert Fogelson argues similarly, describing Los Angeles as purposefully established by entrepreneurial boosters in the hopes of creating a metropolis to profit by. Respectable cities had things like world-class harbors and industrial capabilities, so, too, must Los Angeles. Within the market economy, the ability to produce meant economic stability and growth, so the municipal interest in securing those qualities necessitated creating the systems that promoted it; the Port of Los Angeles

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24 “Huntington Coming Early Next Week: Things May Be Doing on Street Railroad Lines,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 27, 1902, 7. That figure is equivalent to $15.1 million in 2012 dollars.
stands as one of Fogelson’s primary examples, citing the tremendous increased in shipping and revenue generated by the city as a result of its outlay of capital to build the port.\textsuperscript{28} The largest interurban electric railway network in the world was another piece of this self-conscious boosterism that helped Los Angeles grow from a pueblo of 3,500 people in 1850 to a burgeoning metropolis of 790,000 by the time jitneys entered into the fray.\textsuperscript{29} The shape of Los Angeles was determined as much by placement of the electric railway paths as any other factor.

**THE AUTOMOBILE**

So what happened to cause the demise of a form of transportation that 90 percent of the early twentieth century’s urban-dwelling Americans employed?\textsuperscript{30} In an urban environment created using the streetcar as a backbone, its use was perfunctory. There were no other options in Los Angeles of 1910. The streetcar was the exclusive form of transportation for almost everyone. Certainly the private automobile ultimately had the greatest influence on public transportation in Los Angeles but the root of L.A. transportation was public transit trolleys. In 1900 there were 780 cars registered in all of California. By 1910 that number had increased to 44,120.\textsuperscript{31} Los Angeles itself witnessed a tremendous growth of private automobility through the late 1950s. In 1920, Los Angeles County had 175,896 registered automobiles with 5.7 persons per vehicle. By

1958, 2.7 million cars were registered in the county, with 2.2 persons per vehicle.\textsuperscript{32} But despite this phenomenal increase in private automobile use in L.A. (mirrored throughout the United States), the national rates of public transportation ridership remained relatively constant between 1920 and 1942: between 11 and 17 million passengers annually.\textsuperscript{33} The period between 1920 and 1950 shows the complete reversal of streetcar domination to bus domination. In 1922, less than 500,000 traveled by bus while the remaining 15 million national passengers took a streetcar or subway. By 1942 those numbers were nearing parity: 7 million bus riders and 11 million railway/trolley coach/subway riders.\textsuperscript{34} By 1950, nearly 8 million passengers opted for streetcar while 9.4 million were now on buses. In 1960, there were only 2.5 million fixed-route riders and 6.4 million bus riders.\textsuperscript{35} But this clear trend toward busing rather than railway transit had to come from somewhere. And I believe the jitney is responsible for the initial movement into buses that results in the bus-based public transportation system Los Angeles now depends upon.

In the early days of automobiles, a great amount of cache was associated with owning, operating, and riding in a car. The initial cost of early motor vehicles was prohibitive, limiting use to the upper classes and elite of America. In 1905, of 67 models offered by 22 popular manufacturers, nearly 70 percent cost more than $1,000 and a third

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 4.
cost more than $2,000.\textsuperscript{36} In 1901, the average American household income was $769, while the average family size was 5.3.\textsuperscript{37} Following World War I, wages had risen to $1,518, but family size remained high at 4.9.\textsuperscript{38} Until 1917 the average American family would have spent either more or nearly all their average annual income to purchase many models of new car. The cost alone created an association of wealth and status. But organizations aided in the correlation of automobiles with elites. The Automobile Club of America, for example, was started in 1899 by automobilists and was “said to have more millionaire members than any social club in the world,” and of 77 aspiring applicants to the clubs hallowed membership, less than 40 were accepted.\textsuperscript{39} Even the Model T Ford, which Henry Ford so famously decreed would be affordable to his own workers, was $850 in 1908 and $950 in 1909. Although prices dropped very quickly to $360 by 1916, the Model T was still a costly investment for a family in Progressive Era America.\textsuperscript{40} A particularly influential architectural critique of the machine’s influence on humanity interpreted the automobile as the quintessential artifice of an era defined by technology which separated mankind from its traditionalist roots—and that this token of power was “delivered into the hands of the elite, rather than the masses,” encouraging further separation between those with wealth and those without.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{36} Flink, America Adopts the Automobile, 255.
\textsuperscript{38} Chao, 100 Years of Consumer Spending, 11; Jacobs and Shipp, “How Family Spending Has Changed in the U.S.,” 22.
\textsuperscript{39} Flink, America Adopts the Automobile, 145.
\textsuperscript{40} Bruce McCalley, Model T Ford: The Car That Changed the World (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 1994).
In a justification of their expense, automobiles embodied a new sort of freedom within the built and natural environments. The technology reformed what it meant in the early twentieth century to be modern and free in America. Contemporaries of the time believed the automobile in California:

broke down isolation, diffused population, encouraged rural and suburban life, relieved urban congestion, greatly increased the inflow of tourists, opened the mountains and deserts to endless throngs of visitors, made the beaches universal playgrounds, acquainted Californians with the beauty and varied resources of their own state, carried them far afield into other states, and radically affected styles, dress, customs, manners, culture, and morals.

Pundits interested in automobility were equally taken with how the car enabled the metaphysical potentials of exploring the American landscape—but in a more romantic sense, describing how auto travelers had braved the less tamed areas of the United States in a trip from San Francisco to Salt Lake City, or camped to experience forests and lakes with the necessary assistance of their reliable Fords. Marguerite Shaffer has described the behavior the automobile encouraged a “national tourism” that reinforced ideas of citizenship and American exceptionalism in a period when the United States was consciously separating itself from its European roots—sort of a more technologically-driven version of the same impulse described by John Sears in *Sacred Places*.

By 1914, the middle class was beginning to own automobiles in greater numbers. Much of this was due to the increasing affordability of used automobiles. A company

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called L.A. Auto Brokers, for example, advertised more than a dozen makes and models of used cars under $500—including a Duro Roadster for $150.\textsuperscript{46} But none of the cache of elitism or wealth was diminished from owning or operating a car. Few enough people owned automobiles that they remained objects of envy even as they became more affordable. And it was in this space—where cars were becoming more reasonably priced yet still scarce and emblematic of elite culture—that Los Angeles found itself at the forefront of a road-based revolution in public mass transportation in America.

**JITNEYS BY REGION**

The jitney began in the summer of 1914. L.P. Draper, an unemployed owner of a five-passenger Model T, gave rides throughout Los Angeles to people who were “going his way.” For this privilege, passengers paid Draper five cents—or a “jitney.”\textsuperscript{47} What Draper started out of economic need and boredom catapulted into a national phenomenon with vast numbers of jitney cars in every major American and Canadian city and many small and mid-sized towns. Most jitneurs tended to be out-of-work; an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* suggested that there was “considerable unemployment. A good many men had cars but no particular jobs,” and that this inspired the initial jitney drivers into the business.\textsuperscript{48} Contemporary estimates indicated there were 750,000 jitneys operating in America and that its initial classification as a “fad” was being rethought as service

\textsuperscript{46} “Classified Ad 46 -- No Title,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 1, 1914, sec. I16.

\textsuperscript{47} “Father of the Jitney Bus Tells Why He Quit,” *The Motor Bus* 2, no. 4 (July 1916): 502. While Draper might not be the first person to ever charge for a ride in his car, his behavior was the catalyst for the jitney movement that swept North America after 1914. However true or false it is that he was “first,” contemporary trade journals and newspapers publicized Draper as the origin point of the idea.

continued to rise.\textsuperscript{49} This estimate is suspect, as historical evaluations suggest between 62,000 and 66,000 jitneys operated throughout North America at the height of service between January and June, 1915.\textsuperscript{50} What is beyond suspicion is the widespread nature of the jitney phenomenon within an astoundingly short period of time. Separated into four broad areas of the United States (West, Midwest, South, Northeast), jitney service was strongest in the West. Los Angeles at its peak had 1,800 jitneys\textsuperscript{51} and San Francisco had 2,300.\textsuperscript{52} For the short period between 1914 and WWI, San Francisco jitneys were such a part of the city that a comedic film starring Fatty Arbuckle and Mabel Normand featured a shot of them as part of how visitors were catching the World’s Fair. The intertitle reads: “A Jitney Bus Brigade. These five-cent taxi-cabs are found throughout the entire west and the streets of San Francisco swarm with them.”\textsuperscript{53} Charlie Chaplin also weighed in on the jitneys in \textit{A Jitney Elopement}. The film revolves around a pre-Tramp Chaplin in love with a girl betrothed to another man by her father. In the end, Chaplin and the girl abscond in a jitney, using the absolute freedom afforded to automobiles to take them away from the confines of a preordained and mundane existence to the excitement of the open road.\textsuperscript{54} Portland and Seattle had nearly 1,500 jitneys between the two cities.\textsuperscript{55} In

\textsuperscript{52} “Gone Jitney Mad,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, February 25, 1915, sec. I5.
\textsuperscript{53} Fatty Arbuckle, \textit{Fatty and Mabel Viewing the World’s Fair at San Francisco} (Keystone Film Company, 1915).
\textsuperscript{54} Charlie Chaplin, \textit{A Jitney Elopement} (Essanay Studios, 1915).
Portland, especially, the jitney was initially supported by the public with heavy patronage and regulated by local authorities with an understanding that it should be encouraged but managed with public safety in mind. In order to deal with inspections and licensing of jitneys the city hired a dedicated inspector to ensure jitneurs were aware of regulations and that their equipment was well maintained.56

In the Midwest and Northeast jitney use was sporadic, concentrated in only a few cities. Larger cities, such as Philadelphia, Minneapolis, and Chicago, embraced the phenomenon with strong jitney service.57 The Midwest tended to have between 20 to 50 jitneys in lots of towns, where the Northeast was largely without concentrated jitney service due to difficult weather circumstances much of the year. Providence, Rhode Island, however, stood out among its northern sister

cities, amassing 650 jitneys by April 1915. The sole, short-lived trade journal of jitney transportation, *The Jitney Bus* (later changed to *The Motor Bus*) was skeptical of how well jitney service might fare in heavy rain, sleet, or snow. Many how-to articles informing would-be jitneurs placed weather conditions as a primary factor of how much money might be made. In “Can I Make a Jitney Bus Pay?” the journal assured jitneurs that city centers would always be profitable, suggested ideas for off-peak hours (zoos and parks), warned that harsh weather would only slow drivers down, and that time is money. In New York, independent jitneys were an option to service areas of Manhattan not serviced by the street railway. Alfred J. Talley, an attorney representing the People’s 5-Cent Bus Corporation, arguing for his client said, “People all over the country want buses. That desire lies behind the amazing growth of the jitney idea. Riding in an automobile beats riding in a street car every time, in the popular opinion.” The New York State Legislature quickly passed the Thompson Law in November, 1915, however, which regulated jitneys to the extent that companies providing service were required to get permission from the State Board of Estimate as well as a certificate of “convenience and necessity” from the Public Service Commission. Local authorities did not deem the plan to allow 1,000 5-Cent Bus jitneys necessary, but did allow the Fifth Avenue Coach Company to continue operating double-decker buses along 5th Avenue in New York, which it had been doing since 1907 as a subsidiary of the Interborough Rapid Transit

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Company—the same company that owned the subway and elevated streetcar lines throughout New York City.  

But even in New York, where the necessity of jitney service was questioned due to a confluence of transportation choices thanks especially to a subway system already placed throughout Manhattan and in the Bronx, the interpreted value of the jitney went beyond its mere ability to transport people to and from destinations.  

A New York Times

FIGURE 4: “The First Jitney Bus,” The Jitney Bus 1, no. 4 (July 1915), 92. L. P. Draper is behind the wheel.

editorial called the jitney “fever” a “guerilla of public service” that was “inspiring a sort of lyrical rhapsody in some neighborhoods” thanks to its appeals to “radicals” and its interpretation by the “popular mind as a new emblem of freedom.”64 Even where the jitney was unable to hold ground as a business the meaning of jitney service was apparent to those who looked into why it had popped up and why it was so attractive to so many Americans. In New Hampshire, in a hearing on whether or not an interurban jitney line should be allowed between Somersworth and Dover, the state Public Service Commission determined that the jitney was an as-yet unproven form of transportation—and could therefore not be allowed as the sole form of transportation linking these two areas. The Commission did say, however, “Whether the people of Somersworth are reasonable or unreasonable in their attitude towards the railroad does not alter the fact that they are ‘sore’ and apparently indifferent to its success or failure. They are in such an inflamed state of mind that they nothing good to say for the railroad and some even go so far as to say that they would not object to having the tracks taken up.”65 These two examples—even in areas where jitney service was not prominent—illustrate how jitney service was valued as access to transportation independence, often from the constraints of a streetcar service riders felt was inadequate.

Massachusetts was another Northeastern area that fully embraced jitney service. Nearly 2,000 jitneys operated across the state, with almost 1,000 in Fall River and Springfield alone. The sentiments against an inadequate streetcar service inspired every

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city of size throughout the state to allow a jitney service, even at the expense of putting local streetcar companies out of business. In Salem, a department store purchased $29,000 worth of automobiles to institute streetcar service along the main thoroughfare in direct competition with streetcars.66

Southern cities were quite attracted to jitney service as a whole, especially in Texas. Houston had nearly 1,000 within six months of Draper’s creation of the business idea, and Dallas had at least 350.67 Texas municipalities maintained a generally positive outlook on jitney service in their cities. In fact, most southern cities allowed the jitney to

![FIGURE 5: Boston’s First Jitney Bus, 1915, Boston Public Library.](image)

operate unregulated. In Dallas in April, 1916, an ordinance aimed at banning jitney service altogether was defeated by voters. Any successful municipal regulations on jitney operations in Texas were generally ordinary and inoffensive to jitneurs, such as additional automobile registration requirements or licensing fees for drivers. In Houston, a jitney ordinance enacted requiring a $10,000 insurance bond be purchased in order to provide transportation service was declared unconstitutional by the 55th District Court on the grounds that it posed an unreasonable and discriminatory burden on jitneurs—one that streetcar drivers were not required to meet. My only explanation for Texas’ lack of regulation is to chalk it up to its history of anti-government sentiment, a ceaseless frontier mentality, and adherence to the idealism of individual liberty.

In the South, the issue of greatest concern surrounding jitneys was almost always segregation, with mixed results. In Mobile, Alabama black Americans were said to prefer “Jim Crow jitneys”: “Negroes take this form of transportation wherever it has been established Down South as they have always disliked being segregated in the street cars and trains. The colored jitney solves the problem, and instead of being cooped up in a small section of a street car they can travel comfortably in automobiles.” In Houston “Jim Crow jitneys” were the “most profitable of all.” Reports were that African Americans preferred the use of jitneys owned by blacks to get around town rather than take the streetcar and its segregated sections or cars, largely because of the “humiliating

treatment of the street car company and conductors.” In some areas, jitneys became a way for African Americans to escape segregation—however superficially—by riding in jitneys rather than streetcars. Moreover, jitneys provided a business opportunity for black entrepreneurs.

But jitneys served to divide in other Southern cities. In St. Louis, local jitneurs refused to carry black passengers, depriving them of a transportation alternative to the streetcar. Undaunted, an African American who was rebuffed by a jitney diver said, “Street cars are good enough for us anyhow.” The discrimination didn’t stand however, when Judge Granville Hogan declared, “You can not Jim-Crow the Negroes while I am on the bench” after ordering the release of six men who were arrested under a charge of disturbing the peace for refusing to pay $5 each to a jitney driver who had driven the men across town. Hogan ordered that St. Louis jitney services were “run for the public” and that blacks had a right to ride them—“if they were orderly.” In South Carolina, the Charleston City Council passed an ordinance regulating jitney service along common lines (road rules, licensing requirements, and a $5,000 insurance bond). The final section of the ordinance, however, required that, “Persons operating jitneys shall furnish separate jitneys for white and colored people, which jitneys shall be placarded designating whether for white or colored,” codifying a segregation requirement into jitney operation. When black riders in Charleston, West Virginia were treated to segregatory

76 *Year Book: Mayor’s Annual Report, With the Annual Reports of the Public Departments and Institutions* (Charleston, S.C.: City of Charleston, S.C., 1915).
practices in jitney service they tried to institute a city ordinance requiring African Americans’ admission onto jitneys in operation. They were unsuccessful.77

Outside the South but dealing with the same issue, in Los Angeles the black newspaper California Eagle advocated diligently against jitneys on the grounds that they sought to reinstitute segregation in California. Reports were that jitneurs in L.A. were “boldly Jim Crowing” black passengers, and that jitney drivers had been picking up black passengers only to falsely claim their car was experiencing trouble after half a block in order to let them out.78 The paper argued that jitneys were an unregulated menace, and that Pacific Electric and the Los Angeles Railway had spent millions on the city, treated patrons equally, and deserved the loyalty of black Angelinos.79 In 1917, when a city ordinance was proposed to ban jitneys from the downtown area, black residents were aghast at the jitneurs’ arguments for why it should be defeated. Prior to the June 5 election, the Jitney Bus Association handed out flyers asking voters to retain jitney service downtown because on a jitney “your wife and daughter are not compelled to stand up while negro men and women sit down.”80 Pacific Electric and the Los Angeles Railway were also among California Eagle’s most reliable and frequent advertisers, encouraging a sense of fealty toward the streetcar system from the editors, no doubt. But in no way did it negate the clearly racist behavior African-American Angelinos were given by L.A. jitney drivers—who the California Eagle wrote had “directly, harmfully,

80 George Shurman and Nat Harding, “Evils of the Jitney Bus,” California Eagle, June 2, 1917, Vol. 30, No. 16 edition, 1. Quick service and a comfortable ride were the other two points of the Jitney Bus Association’s flyer as to why jitney service should be retained.
predjudicedly violated the statute laws of the great State of California by refusing trade and travel accommodations to all citizens alike.”

By May of 1915—not even one year into its existence—the jitney was a daily component of many American cities. A monthly professional journal, *The Jitney Bus*, had formed with cooperation from Kansas City and New York jitneurs. A jitney convention held in Missouri with representatives from 30 cities occurred between May 4 and 6, 1914, and automobile manufacturers and labor activists were scheduled to speak, including: Henry Ford, president of Ford Motor Company; Walter White, president of White Motor

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**FIGURE 6:** “Seeing Things,” *The Jitney Bus* 1, no. 3 (June 1915), 67.

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81 Ibid. The paper of record for the region in general, *Los Angeles Times*, was pro-streetcar for certainly the same reason that some of their income was tied to P.E.; corporate patronage is difficult to overcome.
Car Company; E. K. Benson, president of Studebaker Company; and Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor.\textsuperscript{82} Although only Studebaker Company actually attended the convention, the interest paid to the nascent collectives of jitneurs by large and influential American institutions speaks to the attention the jitney was drawing. An organizer for the convention, Kansas City Jitney Livery Traffic Manager E.K. Carnes, said: “No man can say at this time what the near future will develop, but we feel sure this is a pioneer movement destined to revolutionize the transportation problem and the carrying of people in our cities and suburbs. The people flocking to us by the thousands to avail themselves of the quick, pleasant mode of transportation we are offering is conclusive evidence of the above fact.”\textsuperscript{83} Beyond the economic advantage to automobile producers, manufacturers interpreted jitneys as a changing force in how public transportation would occur in an advancing American society.

**UTILITY**

Proponents of jitney service were constantly blaring the advantages of road-based transportation versus urban rail. Speed, in particular, was the greatest advantage for passengers using jitney service, as cars were able to travel an average of 15 mph—a 150 to 200 percent increase over contemporary urban streetcar service.\textsuperscript{84} Even the streetcar companies, who often referred to jitneys as a “menace” or “blight” or a “novelty,” were forced to concede that the jitney traveled at a “somewhat higher speed.”\textsuperscript{85} Eustace

\textsuperscript{82} “Jitney Convention.”
\textsuperscript{84} Eckert and Hilton, “The Jitneys.”
Horniby, a fan of jitneys, argued that the “motor bus is welcomed wherever it has been introduced because it is needed everywhere,” and that the “plain truth” of its value lies in its superior speed and comfort.\footnote{Eustace Horniby, “Is the Motor Bus a Fad?,” The Motor Bus 1, no. 8 (November 1915): 242–45.} Riders who used jitney service always discussed it in terms of its value in speed versus streetcar service.\footnote{Tom Fitch, “The Tickly Bender: Or the Joys and Jars of the Jitney.,” Los Angeles Times (1886-1922), January 8, 1915, sec. Pictorial City/Editorial Section, II4.} The hasty adoption of jitney service by cities in the United States was interpreted by some railway men as a consumer mandate from citizens for quicker service: “Experience is showing is that the public demands faster service. The time for romance and platonic consideration of conditions is
past... The problem of whether the public wants motor service is answered by decreased receipts.”

“Decreased receipts” was a mild description of the economic influence jitneys had on urban street railway. In 1915, the California State Board of Equalization reported that state railway companies had lost $2.5 million “as a direct result of the competition of the so-called jitney and autobus,” and that $4.5 million in earnings were lost in 1915 “as a result of the same cause.” The state was concerned that it had lost tax revenue on such a large figure—and that the legislature should concern itself with providing a “tax on the class of utility referred to sufficient to reimburse the state for its losses.” This dramatic loss of profits incurred the ire of streetcar companies throughout the state, and for good reason. The losses were felt hardest in Los Angeles. In 1915, Pacific Electric lost $554,000 (dipping earnings from $7.5 million in 1914 to $7 million in 1915) and the Los Angeles Railway lost $550,000 (from $6.6 million to $6 million). Additionally, smaller local railways (the San Pedro, Los Angeles & Salt Lake Railroad, and the Glendale & Montrose Railroad) combined to lose an additional $80,000. The roughly 10 percent losses attributed directly to jitneys by both the State and the railway companies amounted to most, if not all, profit, reducing street railways in California to break-even businesses.

90 Ibid., 12.
91 “Buses Cripple California Railways.” The total loss for all California railways in 1915 was $3.4 million. Although the rural area loses were generally attributed to private automobiles, urban loses were mostly blamed on jitneys “sniping” would-be railway customers.
The speed of jitneys coincided with a cultural shift in Americans in terms of how they positioned themselves regarding time—a commodification of time, where time became a product to be collected, saved, and spent. Lewis Mumford described this idea as a move from “time-keeping” to “time-saving” or “time-accounting.” E. P. Thompson linked this change to the rise of industrial capitalism during the Industrial Revolution, where “passing the time” became an affront when division of labor demanded synchronization of activity, creating a need to routinize activity based on a common use of time that he called “clock time.” This shift in how time was perceived aided in the distinct separation between work and leisure, between “socializing and working,” in a burgeoning segmented existence where life was split into three categories: work, sleep, and leisure. Within this context, jitney service—with a potential for cutting transportation time to and from work by 50 percent and meaningfully increase leisure time—was an attractive feature compared to the lumbering streetcar. Jitney service was constantly advertised as “quick,” reflecting the increasingly heightened sense of attention being paid to punctuality and time in general. As a jitneur explained, “In the residence districts, many of the passengers…take the buses in preference to the street cars because they deliver them to the business district of the city from 5 to 10 minutes quicker than the

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94 Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 40. A common slogan in the late nineteenth century eight-hour-day labor movement was “Eight Hours for Work, Eight Hours for Rest, Eight Hours for What We Will.”
street cars do.” Community meetings discussing jitney regulation generally agreed that allowing jitneys to operate without restrictions seemed unwise, but also agreed that jitneys were “more convenient and save time.”

In addition to speed, jitneys were viewed by patrons as more comfortable than riding the streetcar. General Counsel for the Public Utilities Commission in Washington D.C. said, “While I think the popularity may to some extent be accounted for by local dissatisfaction with the street railways, yet this of itself is insufficient to explain the large popular support the jitneys are receiving… The jitneys have been welcomed by the public

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97 “Agree on Regulation but Disagree on Kind,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1915, sec. III.
because they are cheap and comfortable and quicker than the street car service." The relationship between jitney drivers and passengers was viewed as symbiotic, where jitneurs provided a service to the “satisfaction and comfort of the passengers carried” and passengers paid the same rate as the streetcar charged, representing value for money.

The lack of available seats and rude streetcar conductors were constant themes for promoters of jitney service, insisting that “straphanging” on streetcars was a thing of the past if riders opted for jitneys. As an early proponent wrote: “Dare we lift our heads and hope the day of strap hanging is past? Instead of being jammed into a subway train with myriads of other suffering sardines, are we to lean back against the leathery cushions in the automobile that is temporarily ours of the small sum of 5 cents, and be whisked home from work?” The Electric Railway Journal printed pictures of crowded jitneys with passengers hanging to the side of the vehicle and standing on the running boards; while this might have diminished the idealistic image of a seat for every passenger that jitneurs were trying to sell, if anything it merely brought jitneys down to an equal footing with downtown streetcars where overcrowding was a normal occurrence. And although jitneys had not proved their usefulness to all railway managers, none disputed that jitneys were being used—at least in part—as some form of “slight payback” for slow travel, overcrowding, inattentive conductors, dangers in alighting, and fixed routes.

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100 Lynde, “Can I Make a Jitney Bus Pay?”
102 “The Cost of Bus Operation.”
A technical benefit jitneys held over street railway service was route flexibility. Although the general rider might not have been specific about how valuable this trait was, industry analysts discussed this ability many times. Luther Nash of Stone & Webster Engineering, a Massachusetts-based engineering firm involved in several railway construction projects in the early twentieth century, wrote that jitney operation was “in most cases at least, quieter and more attractive, with the further advantage of flexibility of routing to avoid obstacles, street repairs, etc.”103 To be fair, almost any form of conveyance was more flexible than a set of rails permanently fixed into the ground upon which you travel, but until the automobile no other form or urban transit had been as quick or leisurely as the streetcar.104

The final draw for riders of jitneys was the cultural cache associated with automobile transportation. In the 1914 song “Take Me Out in a Jitney Bus,” writers Joe Garrahan and Charles Ruddy attached travel in a jitney with wealth, freedom, and leisure:

Take me out in a jitney bus and pose as a millionaire,
I know a man with a limosine (Ford machine)
Who will take us anywhere;
We can see the sights of the city
And have loving here and there,
You don’t need to feel blue for a nickel will do
When you’re out in a jitney affair.105

104 Although taxi services did exist, they were costly (as they are now) because they involved point-to-point, specific, individualized transportation for one person or group. Jitneys were less expensive because they employ what we’d call “ridesharing,” which reduces the cost by removing the individualized component, and by sharing transportation space with strangers in collective fashion.
105 Take Me Out in a Jitney Bus (Eastern Music Co., 1914). Even if this is a tongue in cheek portrayal of the unwitting perception of jitney service, or the false promise of riches, it still validates the cultural perception of jitney service as upscale and debonaire.
Jitneys were also heavily portrayed in popular music as a way for working class people to escape their dead-end jobs and create wealth as jitneurs. In “Father is Driving a Jitney Bus,” both Father and Mother drive jitneys, so while the “bank account is getting fat,” and they’ll soon be “millionaires,” the townspeople cry “let us ride with you!” and “bid a fond adieu” to the trolley. In “Jitney Jim,” all the people in town “think a lot” of their local jitney driver, who welcomes passengers with a “happy smile, and in less than half a minute they have gone ten miles,” triumphing the speed and good service available on jitneys. The artwork accompanying the songs was equally positive. On “Mister Whitney’s Little Jitney Bus,” a car filled with well-dressed, smiling passengers passes by astonished onlookers whose hats have flown off with the rush of the jitney’s speed. The lyrics of “That Jaunty Jitney Bus!”

FIGURE 9: “All Aboard for that Old Jitney Ride.”
Charles S. Pecker and Al Berube. 1915.

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106 Father Is Driving a Jitney Bus (San Francisco: Buell Music Co., 1915), Charles Templeton Digital Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.
argue that waiting for streetcars subjects people to unpleasant language of angry and impatient trolley riders, but that “We smile so sweet when we take a seat in the jaunty Jitney Bus,” and that the streetcar companies have “had your way, you’ve had your sway, and without further fuss/We greet the day when it came to stay, that jaunty Jitney Bus.”

Not every song was positive. “Gasoline Gus and His Jitney Bus” is a woeful tale of crammed seating, dangerous driving, and rickety equipment which ends when a jitneur is found consorting with the Devil’s wife on the hood of his car. “I Didn’t Raise my Ford to Be a Jitney” is equally critical: “I didn’t raise my Ford to be a jitney bus/So don’t humiliate my poor machine/Henry Ford made walking a pleasure/But don’t take my little treasure/Or I’ll run out of gasoline/You’d better take the street car right away, sir/You’re the meanest man I’ve ever seen/You’re in an awful pickle/Take back your goll darned nickel/I didn’t raise my Ford to be a jitney bus.” Despite these few exceptions, most of the songs of 1915 and 1916 written about jitneys are positive reviews, touting speed, comfort, and good service. Jitney service was associated with the same sort of class-oriented independence, leisure, and mobility attached to upper class use of the private automobile.

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112 Mississippi State University, “Charles Templeton Sheet Music Collection,” Digital Collections, accessed August 20, 2013, http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/SheetMusic. Although there are several titles not available in this online archive, the 13 songs maintained in this collection are a good representation of the general thrust of songs regarding jitneys written in the period.
“CLASS AND MASS” OR: “THE WAR ON THE JITNEY”

From its inception, jitney service was argued by its proponents to be equal parts business opportunity, technological excitement, and independence from streetcar monopolies. Julian Chambliss has argued support of jitneys was largely based on a populist Progressive Era dissatisfaction with entrenched power structures.113 Certainly, this was a part of the sentiment jitneurs emphasized when discussing regulations placed in their path with the support and backing of railway companies, who referred to the streetcar companies as “having no soul...no morals”—a “Frankenstein” without values or decency.114 Pasadena socialite Clara Burdette suggested that the Orange Grove Avenue jitney service was a great convenience to the community, and that jitneys provided citizens “a club to fight the Pacific Electric into line, relieving the public of that very evident necessity.”115 By January of 1915, railway companies were working with the Los Angeles city council and Mayor Henry Rose to craft legislation meant to curb jitney activity in the city. Potential mechanisms to “level the playing field” of jitney competition with commensurate street railway requirements were: route limitations, increased licensing fees, and a $10,000 indemnity bond.116 The California State Legislature heard testimony the same month on the presence of the jitney throughout California. San Francisco municipal critic Edward P. E. Troy—who the Los Angeles Times described as a “sirocco”—argued that the committee hearing testimony was

114 “Street Congestion and the Bus,” The Motor Bus 1, no. 6 (September 1915): 157–58.
“packed” with legislators in the pocket of railway companies. According to the railway companies, their greatest objection to the jitney bus was that it “operates over streets on which we already have franchises.” While California railway companies were surely dismayed at what they perceived as a lack of parity within the general rubric of common carriers of passengers, they were likely unhappier with the loss of $2.5 million dollars in only six months attributed to jitney competition. In addition, railway journals published a series of articles detailing the economic inefficiency and impossibility of profit for owner-operator jitneys: jitneys were on railway turf and couldn’t make a profit at that, so what was the point of keeping them around? Jitney advocates argued that railway companies were constantly opposed to jitney service not because it was an upstart or a doomed business model, but because it was a threat to the continuing monopoly enjoyed by urban railways. Railway men determined that the jitney’s popularity was a fad due to the “spectacular features that appealed to the inexperienced and unthinking part of the population.”

A campaign to impugn jitney service maintained several sorts of arguments for why jitneys ought to be outlawed or restricted. Jitneys were reportedly responsible for a

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massive increase in automobile accidents—22 percent in Los Angeles.\footnote{Nash, “History and Economics of the Jitney,” 363.} Nationally, the jitney was blamed for a 25 percent increase in street accidents between 1914 and 1915.\footnote{Locke, “The Jitney Bus and Its Future.”} Neither of these studies accounts for the increased number of private automobiles on the roads, but it is certain that jitney transportation could not have helped but to increase accidents. The *Electric Railway Journal* accepted that jitneys provided a novel form of travel (which would “soon wear off”) and that it traveled faster than streetcars, but pointed to the “utter irresponsibility” of drivers and the gross increase of accidents in cities nationwide as cause to restrict jitney service.\footnote{“Traffic and Transportation: Portland Company on ‘Jitney’ Bus.”} The *Los Angeles Times* seemed to revel in printing stories about jitney-involved accidents with salacious headlines: “Nickels Ahead, Blood Behind,” “‘Jitney’ Joy Ride is Disastrous,” “‘Jitney’ Strikes Aged Man,” “Woe in Wake of ‘Jitneys,’” and “Hit by ‘Jitney,’ Carried a Block.”\footnote{These stories appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* from November 1914 to February 1915.} The streetcar appeared to have no accidents at all within this period—at least, according to reporting by the newspapers of record, which recommended streetcar transit as the safe, traditional choice compared to the jitney.

Yet as Barbara Young Welke has demonstrated, streetcar transportation “dramatically increased the risk of daily life” and was in no way a safe activity. Alighting—the act of entering a streetcar, often while it was moving—resulted in half the total number of injuries in any given year, as recorded by the Interstate Commerce Commission. In 1902, out of 5 billion street railway passengers nationwide, there were
approximately 33,000 injuries and just shy of 2,500 deaths.¹²⁷ By 1917 street railway in the United States carried 11 billion passengers, and showed decreased numbers of deaths; 2.3 per 100,000 passengers. Automobiles showed a death rate of 5.9 per 100,000—a higher rate than streetcars—but at a lower overall use level, accounting for a severe difference in the total number of injuries and deaths. Moreover, the increased rate of automobile accidents was not so rapid as “that of the number of machines in use.”¹²⁸ The growth of accidents in public spaces and the social changes accompanying train

technology were the strongest impetuses for “safety-first” campaigns at the turn of the century, which had helped in reducing the overall number of injuries and fatalities.\(^ {129}\)

Immorality and impropriety were other favorites discussed regarding the dangers of jitney service. In February, 1915, the *Electric Railway Journal* was overwrought with the desire to see the “serious menace of the ‘jitney’ from the standpoint of morality” rectified by their destruction; as it queried, why would a city allow something that allowed the “insult and mistreatment of girls in crowded ‘jitneys’”?\(^ {130}\) Detractors argued that the closeness of men and women within the same space in a jitney was bound to lead to a “familiarity” that led to indecent behavior.\(^ {131}\) In Los Angeles, the president of the City Mother’s Bureau, Aletha Gilbert, “declared war on the overcrowded nickel chasers” and said, “while not all male passengers would stoop to take such an advantage, those who care to have ample opportunity in the unlighted and overcrowded back of a 5-cent bus.”\(^ {132}\) The City Mother’s Bureau, while progressive in the sense that it aided women in need of assistance in any sort of trouble in the strictest confidence (such as substance abuse or prostitution), was also created to police the morality of Los Angeles by inserting itself into daily life—by chaperoning dances, for example, or, in this instance, opining on the potential hazard of jitney travel.\(^ {133}\) The Auto Bus Association (which represented the few standard point-to-point taxi services in Los Angeles) gathered women to enlighten them to the perils of jitney travel, where women would be subjected to: sitting between strange men, pipe and cigar smoke, and sitting on men’s laps when the jitney was


\(^{131}\) Fitch, “The Tickly Bender.”


overcrowded.\textsuperscript{134} The Los Angeles City Council mandated that jitneys must be lit in some way in order to “prevent spooning.”\textsuperscript{135} To discourage the potential for rude or indecent behavior, \textit{The Jitney Bus} advocated for jitneurs maintaining control of their passengers by rebuking any such behavior occurring in their cars.\textsuperscript{136}

In many instances women found the jitney to be an empowering device, encouraging the female entrepreneurial spirit and promoting independence. In Pawtucket, Rhode Island, Mrs. S. Edith Dohring began a jitney service after learning how to drive from her husband’s chauffer as she accompanied them along the daily commute to his work. She was satisfied with the success of her venture, proclaiming jitney driving as the “most practical occupation for business women.”\textsuperscript{137} In San Leandro, California, the Alta Mira Club for women raised money to purchase and operate a “high-class” jitney service throughout the city to help citizens get where they needed to go. Expensive cars owned by wealthy women involved with the club, including early limosine models, were

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\caption{“Mr. Wad Says the Jitneys Shouldn’t Be Allowed on the Streets Where His Wife Is.” \textit{Los Angeles Times}. January 21, 1915. Pg. III3.}
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\begin{enumerate}
\item[135] Dixon, “Jitney’s Rise to Popularity.”
\item[136] Fahnestock, “Some Jitney Thoughts.”
\item[137] Livingston Wright, “Lady Jitney Driver,” \textit{The Jitney Bus} 1, no. 2 (May 1916): 41.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
commandeered for the project. Women jitneurs were reported in San Francisco, St. Louis, Dallas, and Seattle. Mrs. Elmer Sutton was one of two known female jitneurs in Los Angeles; when her jitney caught fire while fully loaded, passengers reported she “displayed remarkable nerve” in dealing with the situation and got all aboard off to safety. Unimpressed, the Times wrote, “Every vocation is open to women and female jitney drivers are the latest. They will soon be trying to cultivate bass voices.” The International Jitney Association—the short-lived and only national association for jitneurs—specifically included both men and women jitney drivers as potential members.

REGULATION: UNITED STATES

Railway companies were incredibly successful at inspiring municipalities throughout America to create legislation that essentially ended jitney service in many places. The president of Willys Overland Automobile Company, John N. Willys, argued the “tremendous political influences exerted by the electric street railway interests” were successfully retarding the natural growth of jitney services in America—which had already reached from Los Angeles to Portland, Maine by March, 1915. Most commonly, municipal authorities placed a $10,000 insurance bond requirement on each

141 “Pen Points: By the Staff,” Los Angeles Times, March 24, 1915, II4.
142 “Constitution and By-Laws,” The Jitney Bus 1, no. 3 (June 1915): 65.
jitney driver under their jurisdiction, under the auspices that jitneys were inherently unsafe and required potential liability coverage commensurate with damage they might inflict.\textsuperscript{144} Jitneurs were largely agnostic on the question of whether or not the bond was a good idea. Their major issue with the bond requirement was that railway companies—who also transported passengers for profit—were placed under no such obligation by municipal authorities. There was also no bond requirement placed on trucks.\textsuperscript{145} Jitney promoters believed that the regulations existed for the sole purpose of eliminating jitney competition. The loss of revenue for streetcars was directly affecting municipal and state tax revenue collection. In Los Angeles, between the Los Angeles Railway and Pacific Electric, the railway believed its losses amounted to a total of $200,000 in lost state tax revenue—and since taxation is on profits, and since jitneys were a very low-margin business model, that the state and local government would simply have to do without…unless the jitney was stopped.\textsuperscript{146} Jitney advocates argued: “At worst the laws are usually devised and enforced to promote purely corporate non-social interests. At their best, the laws are passed in a hap-hazard, slapdash attempt to control a new factor in public service which the law-wrights have not studied, about which most of them are completely ignorant.”\textsuperscript{147}

\textsuperscript{145} “Stand Up for Your Rights”; “To Bond or Not to Bond,” \textit{The Jitney Bus} 1, no. 5 (August 1915): 143–44.
Court rulings on inevitable cases filed by jitneurs in light of regulation were decided inconsistently, but almost all claims based their cause of action on a violation of 14th Amendment rights to equal protection. In May, 1916, Houston’s 55th District Court Judge William Masterson determined the $10,000 bond requirement placed an unreasonable and discriminatory burden because it required jitneys to have it and did not ask the same of trolleys, although they were essentially the same business.148 The same month, a court in Seattle held the opposite view, ruling that the $2,500 bond required for jitney drivers in that city was within the purview of municipal authority.149

In Illinois, the question of lost taxes was the essential issue in

**Jacksonville Railway**

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Company vs. L.F. O’Donnell Doing Business As The Motor Transportation Company. Judge Owen P. Thompson ruled that jitneys fell under the jurisdiction of the Illinois Public Utilities Commission as a transportation “common carrier”—and that since tax revenue was a public interests, and since the IPUC was allowed to regulate common carriers for the good of the public interest, it could limit jitney service as it saw fit, even if it determined to ban the practice altogether.\(^{150}\) In Fort Worth, Texas, I.W. Sullivan was arrested and convicted of operating a jitney after failing to pay the $10 licensing fee required under city ordinance; Mr. Sullivan also attacked the $10,000 bond requirement placed on jitneys by the city. The court ruled 2-1 that it was the duty of Fort Worth to regulate for the public good, that jitneys were not the same as streetcars and could be legislated separately, and that his 14th Amendment rights had not been violated. The dissenting judge believed strongly that carrying passengers was carrying passengers and that Mr. Sullivan had been deprived of his 14th Amendment rights. Furthermore, the dissent argued that the ordinance was “intended to be prohibitive” of jitney service.\(^{151}\)

Two federal cases determined that municipalities had the right to tax and regulate new businesses as new conditions determined. In Memphis, Tennessee, jitneurs claimed their 14th Amendment rights had been violated when municipal regulations required taxes and bonds not required of other common carrier transportation businesses. The panel ruled that although jitneys performed the same service as streetcars, they did so under conditions different enough that a separate tax and bond requirement was not


\(^{151}\) *Ex parte Sullivan* (Court of Criminal Appeals of Texas 1915).
arbitrary or discriminatory. The case against Felix Lutz in New Orleans was much the same but with an interesting twist: Mr. Lutz was a German-born American citizen and claimed that a treaty between Germany and the United States granted him unfettered use of his property, which the New Orleans jitney regulations had curtailed. The district court disagreed. Although the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals rejected his claim upon appeal,


152 Nolen v. Reichman, Sheriff, et al. (District Court, W.D. Tennessee 1915).
153 Lutz et al. v. City of New Orleans (District Court, E.D. Louisiana 1916).
the hubris of a German in America during the height of World War I claiming the rights of treaty and international cooperation is entertaining.\textsuperscript{154}

By October of 1915, of 163 cities with confirmed jitney service, 112 already had regulations—with 15 more considering implementing ordinances of some kind.\textsuperscript{155} Commonly, these regulations included a $10,000 bond requirement which most jitneurs were unable to secure due to the high cost, which essentially ended jitney service in many municipalities.\textsuperscript{156}

**REGULATION: LOS ANGELES**

From nearly the beginning of jitneys in Los Angeles, municipal leaders were on record calling them a “public menace” and interested in regulations that would curtail the practice in the city.\textsuperscript{157} Mirroring the railway’s early century efforts to decrease potential injuries, the Auto Bus Owners’ and Operators’ Association (an L.A. jitney advocacy association) said it wanted to work with local police and elected officials to establish a “safety first” program, including the strict adherence to traffic laws, educational exams for jitneurs, elimination of irresponsible drivers, and an agreement to limit passenger levels and stem overcrowding.\textsuperscript{158} By the end of January 1915, the Auto Bus Owners’ and Operators’ Association was convinced that municipal regulation in Los Angeles aimed to end jitney service, not to provide the city with safer streets or better businesses. Altering their tactics 180 degrees, an association jitney driver said, “We are utterly opposed to this

\textsuperscript{154} Lutze v. City of New Orleans (5th Circuit Court of Appeals 1916).
\textsuperscript{156} “Insurance Does Not Promote Public Safety,” *The Motor Bus* 1, no. 7 (October 1915): 187.
\textsuperscript{157} “Call Jitneys a Public Menace,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1914, II3.
\textsuperscript{158} “For ‘Safety First,’” *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1914, II3.
regulation stuff… I don’t see what business anybody has got to interfere with our business.”\(^{159}\) Other cities in Los Angeles County had already passed some regulations; Venice Beach, for example, required a special license and a $10,000 insurance bond from each jitney driver.\(^{160}\) In all cases, the regulation served to severely limit the number of jitneys in operation—at least, until jitneurs managed to find ways to work around the ordinances. L.A. Mayor Rose and several city council members responded to the prompting of lobbying by streetcar interests by publicly opposing unregulated jitney service and arguing for a $10,000 bond along with route limitations and a licensing fee.\(^{161}\)

From February to June in 1915, Los Angeles grappled with what sorts of regulations were suitable to bring jitney service in the city under the supervision of appropriate municipal authorities. Fearful that strong jitney regulations would influence their reelection chances due to the popularity of jitney service, the L.A. City Council passed a milder version of previously discussed regulations with only a $5,000 insurance bond required in order to operate. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the Realty Board were dissatisfied with the failure of the City Council to pass an ordinance with more teeth and Mayor Rose called the ordinance “insufficient, incomplete and not calculated to remedy traffic conditions” just prior to a veto of the ordinance.\(^{162}\) The city council disagreed with the mayor’s assessment and overrode his veto, reestablishing the $5,000 bond requirement in order for jitneurs to operate within the city limits; voters

\(^{162}\) “Veto Jitney Ordinance or We Will Make One!,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, March 1, 1915, II2; “Non-Regulating Bus Ordinance Is Vetoed,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, March 4, 1915, III.
would get the chance to vote on the ordinance on the June 1 ballot. Unwilling to relent, the Los Angeles Realty Board, Chamber of Commerce, Merchants’ and Manufacturers’ Association, Municipal League of Los Angeles, and Mayor Rose asked voters to defeat the whitewashed jitney ordinance so they could establish a stricter one, which voters did by a count of 46,002 to 34,599. But whether or not Angelenos voted against it because they thought it weak or thought it contrary to entrepreneurship is speculative at best—we can only know that these opposing forces had common cause to defeat this particular ordinance.

Cities throughout California were dealing with jitneys through municipal ordinances, but none in exactly the same way. To equalize this process statewide, in April of 1915 the State Assembly voted 44-23 to require jitneys to apply for franchise rights in cities under the same methodology practiced by street railway companies. State officials were concerned that jitneys were detrimentally limiting tax revenue to Sacramento—and, besides, said Assemblyman Grant Conard of San Diego, “the motor busses are irresponsible and their service is inadequate.” California Governor Hiram Johnson was worried that local conditions varied widely throughout the state and that a one-way answer to jitney regulation wasn’t the proper solution; after the bill worked its way

through the State Senate, Johnson refused to sign it and jitney regulation remained an issue for local determination.\textsuperscript{166}

When statewide jitney regulation died, in August 1915, the L.A. City Council again passed an ordinance to limit jitney service. This time, with the blessing of new Mayor Charles Sebastian and the “teeth” former Mayor Rose had been eager for, a strict ordinance was passed. It called for an $11,000 bond, restriction of passengers to seats (no standing or riding on the running boards), route restrictions, and pickup/discharge limitations of 50 feet from intersections. Failure to comply would result in a six month prison term, and/or $500 fine. Jitneur J. M. McClasky filed for an injunction to halt the implementation of the ordinance, but Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Leslie R. Hewitt sustained the City’s demurrer, allowing the regulations to go into practice.\textsuperscript{167} The bond requirement effectively ended legal owner-operator jitney service in Los Angeles, forcing jitneurs to improvise in order to remain in business. Both Pacific Electric and the Los Angeles Railway, as well as Pacific Light & Power (which Henry Huntington also owned), “mounted a vigorous campaign to convince the electorate” of the wisdom of jitney regulation.\textsuperscript{168}

To survive the ordinance, jitneys in L.A. consolidated their businesses to continue operating in the city; they remained marginally profitable and continued to compete with streetcar companies. The legislation Los Angeles had set remained in force when the state

\textsuperscript{168} Friedricks, \textit{Henry E. Huntington and the Creation of Southern California}, 122.
Board of Public Utilities—which also managed streetcar behavior—assumed control of jitney fares and taxation in early 1916.169 The situation remained static in L.A. for a year, until Pacific Electric and the Los Angeles Railway organized an anti-jitney ordinance through the city council, which still had the ability to control transit routes; they asked Angelenos to restrict jitney operation within the downtown area. Jitneys were ruining the electric railway’s ability to earn a profit, they argued, which endangered the companies’ ability to retain service throughout the county. Although a private, for-profit business, P.E. leaned on the citizens’ fear of losing critical interurban streetcar services which the company argued was only provided on the back of downtown trolley profits to create a protective bubble of transit monopoly. On June 6, 1917, voters passed the P.E./LARY plan, forbidding jitney service in the downtown area of the city, largely on the rationale that the streetcar had “contributed so much toward the upbuilding of Los Angeles and Southern California,” and deserved rider loyalty, at the very least downtown.170 As of July 1, 1917, jitneys would be banned in downtown Los Angeles.

Los Angeles Motor Bus Union secretary W. A. Hagans—a former streetcar conductor who had switched sides early in 1915171—was granted a temporary restraining order to halt the implementation of the downtown jitney ban.172 His case was heard and his arguments, citing discrimination and a lack of equal protection, were unconvincing to Judge Charles Monroe, who ruled the jitney ban would go into effect as of October 10,

170 “Election Results--Amen,” Los Angeles Times (1886-1922), June 7, 1917, sec. Midweek Illustrated Section.
171 Payne, “The Jitney Juggernaut.”
172 “Jitney Bus Men Start Suit for Injunction,” Los Angeles Times, June 30, 1917, III.
1917. Undeterred, Hagans filed an initiative petition with the City Council to rescind the downtown ban. The City Council refused to place the initiative on the ballot, ending jitneurs’ hopes of returning to their most profitable business area and establishing City Ordinance No. 36676 as law. Owner-operator jitneys dwindled to fewer than 50 cars in the months after the City Council refused Hagans’s initiative.

LABOR

American labor interests were mildly divided on how the jitney was to be treated by organized workers. The railway men had provided a solid base of early collective bargaining for groups like the American Federation of Labor, which had been the industry that provided the “hardest contested battle ever fought by our people in America” according to Motorman and Conductor, the trade publication of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees of America, and the “fiercest struggle ever waged by the organized toilers anywhere” according to Samuel Gompers, president of the AFL. Streetcar laborers had been a staple of early union activism in America and the AFL was torn in its interest in the upstart jitney which might cause railway men grief; potentially competing constituencies was troublesome for the AFL.

176 “Would Kill Jitney Bus as a War-Economy Measure,” Los Angeles Times, July 9, 1918, III.
Union activists throughout the United States reported steadily over a period of two years whenever JITNEURS had mobilized into any sort of organized body. Even through late 1915, organizers were split on how the JITNEY should be treated. The streetcar union chapter in Portsmouth, Ohio had actually proposed an ordinance to regulate JITNEY service into non-competitive areas to city leaders for consideration. By 1916, however, organized labor seemed to be ambivalent or firmly aiding JITNEURS in attempts at organizing. In Heybrook, Washington, for example, AFL organizer Charles J. Belton was outraged that the state legislature had required a $2,500 bond in order to operate a JITNEY. He wrote, “Organized labor is not sitting down quietly and taking this unwholesome mess” and indicated that a series of legal challenges were being devised to “combat the oligarchy.”


178 “From District, State and Local Organizers,” American Federationist 22, no. 11 (November 1915): 984.
179 “From District, State and Local Organizers,” American Federationist 22, no. 4 (April 1915): 300.
Teamsters and jitneurs in Palestine, Texas had organized in cooperation.\(^{180}\) And in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in December, 1916 organizer W. J. Kromelbein secured a writ of supersedeas on behalf of the AFL in the enforcement of local jitney ordinances, allowing jitneys to operate without a bond requirement.\(^{181}\) Generally, jitney unions were small and localized, such as the Jitney Drivers’ Union based out of San Francisco.\(^{182}\)

Wilkes-Barre is especially interesting because just one year prior, it had been the site of a railway strike led by the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees over working conditions and pay. The Wilkes-Barre Railway Company hired temporary workers to continue streetcar service. Rather than serve as the scab-ish transportation company for locals who had no alternatives in the face of a closed streetcar system (thereby depowering the strength of the union’s attempt to limit transportation), jitneys became transportation in support of strikers by transporting passengers instead of the streetcars being operated by non-union temporary workers. Jitneurs even donated a day’s worth of pay to the union treasury in support of their cause.\(^{183}\) For their part, railway men were incensed that their attempt to undermine the Wilkes-Barre strike via temporary workers was itself undermined by jitneys.\(^{184}\) In Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in August, 1916, the streetcar union again cooperated with jitneurs when striking the Harrisburg Railways over pay.\(^{185}\)

\(^{180}\) “From District, State and Local Organizers,” American Federationist 22, no. 10 (October 1915): 870.
Often, though, jitneys served to complicated matters for streetcar transit strikes. In March, 1916, a streetcar strike was negated by an army of jitneys servicing in the place of trolleys. A Springfield, Massachusetts strike in spring 1915 was completely disrupted by capable jitney service for the community, much to the serious irritation of striking railway workers. In any event, jitneurs and railway men were uncertain, if successful, collaborators.

**AVOIDING REGULATION**

Stunted by local ordinances erected throughout 1915 that required bonds of operation jitneurs could not afford, drivers throughout the United States crafted clever ways to avoid regulations. The earliest trick was to form a “club” akin to automobile appreciation clubs prominent in the early twentieth century. In Philadelphia, the “People’s Automobile Club” required a dues membership of 25 cents; for their dues they would receive one ticket worth five rides in a club car, which traveled along common jitney routes in cars that had formerly been jitneys. Ninety such jitneys, rendered unprofitable by bond requirements, were appropriated as club cars. In Rochester, New York, the Eighteenth Ward Social Club was formed to avoid the Thompson Law and had at least 500 members. In Memphis, Tennessee, jitneurs were legally restrained by local police from transporting members of the Rapid Transit Recreation Club; members received privileges to ride in club cars on a five-cent ticket purchase. New Orleans jitneurs formed the

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188 Information Annul, 1915: A Continuous Cyclopedia and Digest of Current Events, 346.
“Jitney Patron’s Club” to avoid the $10,000 bond requirement and continue collecting their five-cent fares in the form of dues payable for each trip in a club car.¹⁹¹

In January 1916, former jitneys in Oakland were augmented with placards reading “O.P.C.” for the Oakland Pleasure Club. The O.P.C. allowed membership—which was free—on the understanding that donations to the club would be five cents or greater for each ride. The by-laws for the club stated: “It is the first object of this organization to induce owners of automobiles to donate their cars to the association to the purpose of enabling its members to obtain a glimpse of Nature’s beauties, a breath of God’s fresh air


and a little place in the sun among the pleasures reserved for the rich.” And as if their avoidance of Oakland ordinances wasn’t enough, the club said their “political object” was to “obtain for the people the same use of the public highways which is enjoyed by the rich and powerful.”

To increase their public appeal in combatting police and municipal authorities, which had been threatening to dismantle the “subterfuge,” the O.P.C. gave 500 school children free rides in a parade of more than 100 club cars. By late February, 1916, Oakland police had arrested 16 club drivers on the charge of violating the anti-jitney ordinance.

The most successful tactic in complying with jitney ordinances was to band together. Jitneurs in Los Angeles joined forces to work out affordable deals with insurance companies to meet the bond requirements placed by the city council. Thirty-two jitney drivers—who had been idle since the end of July—were able to go back to work in September when an insurance company wrote a policy covering the lot of them. By April, 1916, Los Angeles jitneys had returned to service in their former numbers (between 500 and 750 jitneys in operation) by collectivizing. Jitneurs in these nascent cooperative groups maintained their independence by owning and operating their own automobiles, but these alliances were the initial versions of small businesses that would define jitney service through 1918. In cities throughout the United States, jitney companies cropped up which were more corporate in character. Instead of owner-operator jitneys plying their trade as they wished, jitney companies routinized the cars.

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used in service, uniformed their drivers, created routes and timetables, increased and decreased headways to meet demand, and set-up regular maintenance and replacement schedules for their machines.¹⁹⁷ Along with creating a more typical transportation business structure, modeling the lines of traditional streetcar companies, jitneys increasingly grew in passenger capacity. The five-passenger jitney was altogether passé by the fall of 1916.

TECHNOLOGY

The standard five-passenger touring car jitney models popular in 1914 and early 1915 began stretching into 7-, 10-, and 40-passenger jitney buses by late 1915.¹⁹⁸ Modification packages for jitneys to increase passenger carrying capacity were commonly advertised in The Jitney Bus and The Motor Bus. Applying the logic of streetcar design to jitney transportation, jitneurs determined that more passengers meant more revenue. Along with greater carrying capacity, larger bodies were built to better withstand weather conditions, as well as provide more comfortable seating, better lighting, and more space between passengers.¹⁹⁹ Increasingly, jitney advocates argued that larger passenger models were better suited to a thriving business for owner-operator jitneurs.²⁰⁰ By the summer of 1915, the words “jitney” and “bus” become interchangeable, referencing the same sort of road-based transit regardless of whether than transit was owner-operator, a small conglomerate

¹⁹⁸ “Large Motor Buses with Capacities of Ten to Forty Passengers Coming Rapidly Into Use,” The Jitney Bus 1, no. 3 (June 1915): 68–72.
¹⁹⁹ Fahnestock, “Some Jitney Thoughts.”
²⁰⁰ Metzger, “How a Successful Line Was Started and Is Operated.”
of independent drivers, or jitneys operated by streetcar companies—which became increasingly more common into fall of 1915.\textsuperscript{201}

By Christmas, jitney bus design began to look like what has become a traditional bus: single entry doorways at the right front of the vehicle, permanent fareboxes stationed beside drivers, row seating with a center aisle, and emergency exits at the rear.\textsuperscript{202}

In Massachusetts, although overall jitney bus service had dropped from the high of early 1915, the average passenger capacity of each bus rose by more than two, from 7 to 9.5, equating to an overall gain in potential passenger capacity statewide.\textsuperscript{203} And although the new buses with higher passenger capacities averaged three times the cost of a touring car ($440 to $1,500),

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\textsuperscript{201} “Year’s Effect of the Seattle Jitney,” Electric Railway Journal 49, no. 6 (February 10, 1917): 115–154.
\textsuperscript{203} “Progress of the Bus Movement,” The Motor Bus 1, no. 3 (December 1915): 259–62.
the passenger load was generally five times greater—or more—in larger buses, increasing overall profitability. The larger capacity buses also ate away at the costs of many passenger-oriented regulations. In Oakland, on top of the bond requirement, a $60 fee was required to operate a jitney of any size; more passengers reduced the sting of that business cost substantially. In San Francisco, the fee to operate scaled, but not evenly. A $40 fee was leveled for a 5-passenger jitney, while any jitney over 16 passengers was charged $100.

Advances in jitney technology, the lowering of automobile prices in general (as well as the manufacturing of ready-made buses of 16 or more passengers), the dropping price of incidental costs associated with automobiles (such as gasoline and tires), and the lower tax burden on jitneys (versus franchise taxation on streetcars companies) encouraged streetcar companies to reevaluate what role the jitney bus might play in urban public transportation.

**STREETCAR JITNEYS**

Some railway men viewed the jitney’s flexibility and lower start-up costs as positive traits that might allow jitneys to serve as a legitimate form of urban transit moving into the future, most especially as a feeder transport between already established rail lines. Calling it a “motor coach” to distinguish itself from jitneys (which it was working diligently to discredit), a subsidiary of Pacific Electric quietly placed two six-wheel jitneys into operation in Fresno, California to experiment with so-called feeder lines. “It

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is believed that this coach combines the good points of the jitney, such as low operating cost, curb loading, quick get-away, comfort of riding, with the good points of the trolley car—greater capacity, responsible management, and free transfers to existing lines.” And although the jitney had already been outlawed in Fresno by August of 1916, these jitneys were allowed and counted as “railway equipment.” In Los Angeles, after jitneys were banned from the downtown area in 1917, jitneurs attempted to sway public opinion back on their side by promising to “standardize their vehicles and abandon the touring-car models so common in former days,” indicating the sea change in opinion regarding jitney size and character.

Many believed streetcar companies should “outjitney the jitney” by providing less expensive jitney service to undermine independent operators, even if at a loss, to reclaim full control of transportation in American cities. “Bus lines operating under electric railway conditions would not be permanently profitable,” others argued, but inter-terminus feeder service “would be a welcome addition to the transportation needs of a community and might prove, in many cases, profitable to the operators.” General Manager James Hewes of the Albany Southern Railroad argued that the real flexibility of jitney buses lay in their initial cost, which was 10 percent or less of the $35,000 price tag for establishing a streetcar service. Buses might be useful, he believed, in expanding into growing suburban areas and into regions earlier deemed unprofitable—but first streetcar companies must “organize our capital to prevent organized capital from entering the field.

207 “Jitney Bus Petition Filed With Clerk.”
of competition; we must combine our legal talent to have enacted such laws as will place our competitors on an equal basis with us; and we must enlist the combined talent of the electrical engineers and the car builders to give us a vehicle that will place us on an even footing with the jitney bus competitors. ²¹⁰

Those streetcar companies interested in competing with jitneys on jitney terms instituted service that was road-based but operated like streetcars in terms of schedule, transfer tickets, uniformed drivers, and common equipment styles. In the summer of 1915 in Alton, Illinois the Alton Granite & St. Louis Traction Company placed several 10-passenger buses into service at 10 minute headways to directly compete with privately-owned jitneys.²¹¹ In June 1915, streetcar companies in Seattle, Washington and southwest Missouri implemented motor coach service between existing trolley termini, using jitney-like service to support streetcar service.²¹² In Seattle, the streetcar jitneys were 12-passenger models; in Missouri, they were 20-passenger coaches. As 1915 ended both jitney advocates and streetcar interests were arguing that larger-capacity motor coaches could end the strife between private jitneurs and trolley companies—especially as an “auxiliary, a link, a feeder for other transportation systems.” More people started to argue that jitneys and streetcars might work in congress, enabling “trips that could formerly be made only by much inconvenience and loss of time...by reason of the fact that the bus transports the passengers from farms and outlying sections of the cities to the railroad or trolley station at low cost.” Moreover, in its larger version, with routinized stops,

²¹⁰ “Tracks vs. Tires,” 146.
²¹¹ “No Title -- News Snippet,” The Jitney Bus 1, no. 4 (July 1915): 114.
uniformed employees, and common equipment, the bus was “a civilizer in that it promotes intercourse among the people, makes it possible for friends and relations to meet oftener, and in doing this work it inevitably aids in other forms of transportation while it also promotes the prosperity of the country at large.”213 The speed with which these trolley companies reacted to jitney competition—only months after it began—is indicative of the popularity and power of jitney bus service. The bus was being redefined as a social benefit, rather than a “menace” with only morally obscure value.

Longer trips between more distant points were also being rethought in terms of motor coach potential. Commuter train service between California cities was available but generally slow and often uncomfortable along heavy grade track also used for freight transportation. By fall of 1916, “super-jitney” service—15- to 20-passenger motor coaches—had been created to compete with train travel between Los Angeles, Bakersfield, San Jose, Fresno, Oakland, and San Francisco which was hours shorter than taking a train. Automobile transportation along the “King’s Highway” was reportedly faster and more comfortable than available railroad transportation—and similarly priced.214 By early 1918, interurban motor bus service was becoming an indispensable component of area transportation networks. The A.R.G. Bus Company started with 26 buses in March and expanded to 56 in September, 1918 providing service between Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside, as well as San Diego and La Jolla.215 When

Chas. Stern & Sons Cannery near Riverside advertised job openings, they directed people to “take A.R.G. bus to Wineville, leaving Fifth and Los Angeles Streets every hour.”

The most powerful evidence of acceptance of motor coaches by railway companies was the gradual easing of local legislation restricting jitney service nationwide. Above a certain passenger capacity, licensing and bond requirements were reduced in force or eliminated altogether, as were route restrictions. Small bus companies were cropping up throughout America—many founded by former railway men—which worked in conjunction with streetcar service or ran non-competitive routes on streets where trolley companies had no presence. A perfect example of this was the Pasadena Autobus Company, which ran north-south routes throughout Pasadena, California, cooperating with streetcar lines that operated along major streets running east-west. Streetcar companies increasingly recognized that increased passenger jitney models were more cost-effective than new streetcar service. And while still unimpressed by touring car jitney service, trolley executive H. B. Weaver of Manhattan & Queens Traction


Corporation said, “The jitneys have not proved their own value, but they have shown the practicability of motor buses.”

By 1917, the *Electric Railway Journal*, the streetcar trade journal most dedicated to arguing against the jitney with its moral perils, its economic infeasibility, and its dangerous nature, ran fewer articles decrying the dangerous jitney. From 1917 forward, *ERJ* published stories on how to usefully apply motor buses into service.

**WWI AND THE END OF OWNER-OPERATOR JITNEYS IN L.A.**

Jitney service both ended and remained active sporadically throughout the United States. In Detroit, Michigan, owner-operator jitney service remained strong with 1,000 cars through 1926; the City of Detroit did not regulate as severely as other large cities and the city’s streetcar company did not attempt to run its own motor bus service to undercut the jitney presence. In the end, the city itself instituted motor bus service as soon as it outlawed owner-operator jitney service. In some areas, regulation successfully hindered jitney service. Other cities instituted motor bus service, undercutting jitneurs by employing the technology that had so captivated riders’ attention—that caused the public to flock to them “like ducks to water” and eroded streetcar company profits, in many cases down to nothing. From late 1916 through 1918, bus costs (such as gasoline, tires, and even initial purchase price) continued to drop and streetcar companies increasingly

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218 “The Cost of Bus Operation.”
found more profitability in motor bus service than in streetcars.\textsuperscript{222} Crude oil prices showed a surge in pricing from 64 cents per barrel 1915 to $3.07 per barrel in 1920—equivalent to $13.50 and nearly $33 in 2009 dollars—largely as a result of the tremendous use of machines powered by fossil fuels during WWI.\textsuperscript{223} So gasoline was not less expensive, but neither was electricity, which also rose in price during the same period from 8 to 10 cents per kilowatt hour.\textsuperscript{224} By 1931 prices were back down to 63 cents a barrel (which, with inflation, was actually 25 percent cheaper than the same dollar figure in 1915) and did not exceed $2 a barrel in actual price until 1970, indicating the generally reliable value of gasoline was an inexpensive energy source. Tire cost fell in the 1910s, defying the inflation trend of post-WWI America. A tire and tube cost $47.55 in 1910 that cost $28 in 1920—a 41 percent reduction in price. Moreover, the 1920 tire was rated to travel three times the distance of the 1910 tire, meaning the true cost was a reduction of 80 percent.\textsuperscript{225}

Los Angeles was a mixture of all of these. Regulation largely failed to contain jitney service until a voter-approved ordinance banned jitneys from downtown in the summer of 1917. Meanwhile, PE had incorporated motor bus service into its transportation network, and more and more private bus companies were servicing non-competitive urban and interurban routes, such as the Pasadena Autobus Company and

\textsuperscript{224} James McNerney, Jessika E. Trancik, and J. Doyne Farmer, \textit{Historic Costs of Coal-Fired Electricity and Implications for the Future} (Santa Fe, N.M.: Santa Fe Institute, December 16, 2009), 13. Prices in this report are adjusted to 2006 prices.
\textsuperscript{225} Ralph Busby, “What Statistics Show About Tire Prices,” \textit{Motor Record} 8, no. 3 (September 1920): 11.
A.R.G. The final blow to the owner-operator jitney was swift and resulted in no protest from L.A. jitneurs, who had been among the most adversarial jitney drivers in America. In May, 1917, the Motor Carrier Act placed automobile transportation (along with commercial truck transport) under the purview of the California State Railroad Commission; the Act allowed municipalities to regulate automobile behavior if it occurred “wholly within the limits of incorporated cities,” but detailed that interurban traffic—even between adjoining cities—was under state control. However, if municipal ordinances were in opposition to state regulations, the Commission had the power to void municipal codes.  

In July, 1918, the Railroad Commission abolished jitney service in Los Angeles entirely along routes where existing transportation already existed as a wartime rationing measure. The rationale was simple: it was a waste of precious resources—especially gasoline, rubber, and metals—to allow competitive service in transportation and California was interested in wartime rationing. Although jitney licenses would be granted to operate on non-competitive routes, the profitability of the owner-operator jitney business model had been largely eliminated once restricted from the downtown area, and there is no record of an individual being granted a license to operate an independent jitney following the Board’s wartime ruling.  

Riders seemed not to notice. The explanation for this is simple, I think: wartime rationing was a justifiable reason to limit competitive services, and transportation wasn’t the only sacrifice being made to support the war in Europe. Moreover, small companies

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227 “Jitney Busses Are Abolished,” Los Angeles Times, July 16, 1918, III.
and existing streetcar companies had been instituting motor coach service throughout Los Angeles County, so many riders still had access to the benefits of road-based transportation at the consistent rate of five cents per ride; even better, many of these companies offered transfers to streetcars or other buses, increasing overall transportation value and trip potential, something owner-operator jitneys were either incapable or unwilling to offer. Although the owner-operator jitney was the victim of regulation aimed at ending the practice entirely and economically challenging to sustain outside the concentrated central business district, the value to riders had been replicated in the growing amount of motor bus service being offered in Los Angeles. Equally important, the economic value of road-based transportation had been demonstrated to railway companies throughout the United States, which, in turn, promoted bus technology by instituting it first in so-called feeder lines and interurban routes, and then in new service routes. By the time the war ended and the jitney could potentially return to its place as an alternative to streetcar transit, buses were even more common. Additionally, the unemployment spell in America that inspired the initial movement into jitney service in 1914 was—for a decade after the end of WWI—no longer a relevant inspiration in the relatively fair economic times of the so-called Roaring Twenties.\textsuperscript{228}

Despite its general demise (with some notable exceptions, such as Detroit), the jitney craze of the late 1910s is a substantial moment in American transportation. Riders opted

for jitney service as an alternative at a moment when no alternative had previously existed. Their longing for speed, comfort, social status, independence, good service, and choice challenged the erstwhile ability of streetcar companies to dictate the form and sort of service urban Americans would receive. Through simple patronage, despite loud protests and political finagling, Progressive Era transportation riders managed to breathe life into a transit alternative that resulted in a major shift away from rail-based urban transportation toward road-based transit—a shift that determined the course of the remainder of the twentieth century’s public transportation outlook in the United States. The bus owes its existence to the jitney, and the jitney was supported by riders who changed American transportation merely by giving their nickels to jitneurs instead of streetcar conductors.
Chapter Two: The Adoption of Buses

In the wake of the railway industry’s efforts to legislate the jitney into obscurity at the end of the Great War, buses were quietly and steadily introduced into American urban transit systems. From 1918 through the mid-1950s, the use of buses in Los Angeles eventually resulted in a wholesale replacement of the existing public streetcar system with road-based technology.¹ The movement into busing and away from streetcars in the 1920s by the corporate trolley companies allowed the entrance of small-time operators into the market (running non-competitive routes at first), which served to slowly shave away at Pacific Electric and Los Angeles Railway’s market share, ultimately resulting in a network of independent busing companies that diminished the control of Angelino transportation by the entrenched transit providers. Adding to the overall transportation network, bus technology and implementation allowed riders access to areas of Los Angeles and of California² that had been relatively isolated, improving the transit potential of all Californians.³ Buses continued to drop in price compared to perpetuating

² “Jitney to Motor Bus: Development in This Phase of Transportation Has Been Rapid in Past Ten Years,” Los Angeles Times, September 21, 1924, F8.
³ The more isolated and suburban areas of the United States are a testament to this fact. In large metropolitan areas, street railway was the large majority of available transportation, representing 75 percent or more of the total transit potential. But in cities smaller than 500,000, even by 1925 buses were half or more of the available transit. In very small cities of 50,000 or fewer, buses represented 75 percent or more of the total transit potential. See: American Transit Association, The Transit Industry of the United States: Basic Data and Trends, 1942 Edition, 2.
streetcars, aiding in the continued replacement of rail by bus. Meanwhile, public complaints of service and routes encouraged the movement of all passenger transportation into public ownership, rebranding transit as a public service rather than a private industry available for profit. As costs rose and union activity increased the small busing companies merged to stay operational, culminating in a consolidated transportation system of mostly busing and some streetcars owned by large-scale operators, such as Metropolitan Coach Lines— which bought out the remnants of Pacific Electric’s transportation holdings in 1953 and worked to end the remaining streetcar lines in Los Angeles.4 Buses increased access to Los Angeles for riders and allowed fares to remain static at 5 or 10 cents for 50 years, creating stability in public transportation that urban rail technology was finding difficult to profitably provide.


The period between 1920 and the mid-1950s is a process of slow but dramatic change in Los Angeles—and indeed, national—forms of public transportation. As the chapter will show, busing allowed private passenger transportation companies to retain profitability for as long as possible as they dealt with ridership losses attributed to the private automobile as more and more cities planned, built, and oriented themselves to accommodate the increased use of the car. Los Angeles stands out as a prototypical example of a municipality supporting the use of automobiles within the urban space, as the city-adopted *Major Traffic Street Plan* of 1924 indicates. The bus, while also cost-saving and more route flexible, met the needs that planners and politicians had in adjusting the face of Los Angeles to encourage road-based transportation. And as far as much of the transit-riding public was concerned—as private automobile rates indicated, as well as the “jitney craze” of the 1910s—busing was an improvement over streetcars, or at the very least an incredible assistant to the major streetcar routes.

**EARLY DAYS**

Streetcar companies nationwide were hesitant to fully invest in buses in the late teens and twenties, so most initially used buses as feeder lines to supplement the existing rail network. In Southern California, Pacific Electric began running an experimental motor coach feeder line on its Fresno lines in 1916. Although jitneys had been made entirely illegal in Fresno, because the Fresno Traction Company (a P.E. subsidiary) owned the jitney buses they were counted as railway equipment and exempt from the municipal

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codes regarding jitney service. In L.A., the Los Angeles Railway was hailed for its use of buses as feeders between rail termini as “one of the most important points of the past year’s development for the yellow car system.” In 1923, P.E. and LARY formed the Los Angeles Motor Bus Company (LAMBC) as a means of placing buses into regular operation along their lines with 10 buses made by Moreland.

That same year, voters defeated a proposition which would have allowed the city to grant 21-year franchises to bus transportation companies and return regular motor bus service to the downtown district, indicating an unwillingness to part with streetcars completely. In a divisive campaign, the People’s Motorbus Company argued that “the bus system, if permitted to be established, will be successful as people will prefer the faster service… If the time for street railway service is past and is to be replaced by motor bus service, now is the time to find out.” The proposal would have immediately placed 125 buses into the downtown area which Marco Hellman, president of the People’s Motorbus Company, maintained would relieve traffic congestion just as buses had managed to do in London, New York City, and Detroit. Counter arguments by Pacific Electric and LARY detailed the historical investment Los Angeles had in streetcars, indicated that railway jobs would be lost, and suggested that the “East Coast investors” were trying to take advantage of the city with an unworkable scheme to place

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7 “Pacific Electric Experiments with Motor Bus Feeders.”
9 “New Busses Are Fine,” Los Angeles Times, August 26, 1923, V16. The Moreland buses were described as extremely safe, built with Plymnl steel frames which were “flameproof and impervious to injury from ordinary collisions,” and “unbreakable” Pyralin glass which “does away with the liability of injury from flying fragments.”
10 Road-based public transportation was outlawed in the Downtown district by voter ordinance in 1917. See: “Jitney Bus Petition Filed With Clerk,” II2.
11 “Car Officials Fight Bus Line,” Los Angeles Times, January 26, 1923, III.
buses into a central business district that was already well-serviced by streetcars.\textsuperscript{13} P.E. and LARY swayed the electorate, earning a defeat of Proposition 5, which would have rescinded Ordinance No. 36676 (banning motor transport for profit in the CBD), and Proposition 6, refusing a franchise for the People’s Motorbus Company.\textsuperscript{14}

But in the aftermath of the failed proposition, the County Board of Public Utilities granted LAMBC (through P.E. and LARY) the right to operate buses as they saw fit within the region of their franchises—including downtown. This allowed LAMBC to fulfill a promised $6 million expansion of streetcar services with motor coaches, resulting in a dramatic increase of the use of buses by streetcar companies.\textsuperscript{15} A year later, LAMBC added 30 double-decker buses between P.E. and LARY termini.\textsuperscript{16} By 1925, the company had an additional 150 buses, covering 225 miles of route and carrying 19 million passengers annually—a figure the \textit{Los Angeles Times} interpreted to mean that “busses appear to have a certain popularity.”\textsuperscript{17} In perspective, LAMBC passengers had increased by 465 percent in 1925 (from 3.4 million bus passengers to 19 million). Compared to 346 million annual rail riders in L.A., bus transportation was still a meager 5 percent of total service in the basin that was being used in a limited support role but the path toward a bus-dominated L.A. was becoming clearer by the year.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} “A Parallel Statement of Facts Issued by the Los Angeles Railway and Pacific Electric Railway Company,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, April 21, 1923, I5.
\textsuperscript{16} “New Type of Bus to Operate,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, April 20, 1924, A7.
\textsuperscript{18} Kelker, De Leuw & Co., \textit{Report and Recommendations on a Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan for the City and County of Los Angeles}, To the City Council of the City of Los Angeles and the Board of Supervisors of Los Angeles County (Chicago, 1925), 46. These numbers represent Pacific Electric, Los Angeles Railway, and LAMBC buses only. Small bus companies added riders to the bus total, of course,
Los Angeles was at the forefront of a national movement to more routinely incorporate bus service into streetcar companies’ transportation presence. The managing director of the American Electric Railway Association, Lucius Storrs, visited L.A. in 1925 to evaluate the use of buses by P.E. and LARY; he rated bus use and frequency in Los Angeles “ideal,” saying that he was determined to see “the magnitude of these operations duplicated in other sections of the country.”\footnote{“Trolley ‘Czar’ Visitor in City,” Los Angeles Times, July 31, 1925, A1.} The railway industry, once firmly opposed to road-based transportation of any kind, had changed its tune in the midst of an aging rail network that was expensive to replace and now welcomed a cheap substitute in buses. In 1922 the Electric Railway Journal, the staunchest opponent to

![Los Angeles Motor Bus Company No. 610, 1924, Fageol Double Decker, Dorothy Peyton Gray Library and Archive.](image-url)
jitneys and buses as a form of mass urban transit, began publishing Bus Transportation as an insert. The articles were typical trade journal fare in support of bus transit: “It is obvious, we believe, that the best interests of electric railways, bus transportation organizations and the public are identical.” Some planners, such as New York City Plants and Structures Commissioner Grover A. Whalen, were emphatically supportive of busing, arguing, “Let me say emphatically that the trolley can be relegated to the limbo of discarded things, along with the stage coach, the horse car and the cable car; that the motor bus is the vehicle best adapted to the requirements of surface transportation in cities, that the motor bus is superior in speed, adaptability, safety and comfort, and it figures less than the trolley car in cost.” He continued: “The jitney has been a failure, but not without its lessons to those who have been willing and able to analyze the situation. Its wide use showed a need and demand for this kind of service.” The passenger capacity of buses adapted to scheduling and routing patterns familiar to railway men was altering hearts and minds nationwide.

Increasingly, streetcar companies were investing into bus technology for three reasons. First, it was an effort to give patrons transportation they liked to ride. The bus “most closely approximates” the “pleasure” of driving in an automobile, according to cultural observers and economists, alike. Secondly, the average cost per mile to provide

bus service was 26 percent lower than the cost to provide streetcar service. By 1925, bus service was an average of 24.61 cents per mile and streetcar service was 33.5 cents per mile.\textsuperscript{23} The bus also allowed transit providers to service sparsely populated rural and suburban areas cheaply and profitably—which was impossible with the heavy investment costs in rail placement, rolling stock, and electrification necessary for streetcar service.\textsuperscript{24} Finally, entering bus service was a protective measure to retain market share in light of the competition from the increasing number of small bus companies that were cropping up throughout Los Angeles (and the United States, entirely).\textsuperscript{25}

**SMALL BUS COMPANIES**

The jitney did indeed serve as an education to would-be operators of small, independent bus companies, such as Bay Cities Transit Company. Jesse Anderson—who owned and operated the bus company that serviced Redondo Beach, Torrance, Santa Monica, Venice Beach, and Manhattan Beach—began his career in transportation as a jitney driver in 1915. After regulation ended jitney profitability Anderson started Bay Cities Transit in 1921, recognizing a hole in the transportation network in the South Bay where P.E. had little presence.\textsuperscript{26} The company was popular and profitable in its first year with its early routes between coastal cities, prompting Anderson to expand his company’s service to


\textsuperscript{23} Slater, “Motor Transportation in the United States,” 146.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 144.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 146.

\textsuperscript{26} “Rites Tuesday for Bus Pioneer Jesse Anderson,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, April 6, 1952, 22.
cover the entire city of Santa Monica, which it did in 1923. Bay Cities Transit carried South Bay Angelenos for 30 years until it was eventually bought out by the City of Santa Monica, which hoped it could keep rising operation costs down and maintain the fare schedules to which riders were accustomed. Bay Cities Transit was an example of the introduction of bus service into areas of L.A. that lacked comprehensive streetcar service as well as the useful lessons of former jitneurs importing their wisdom onto bus services.

Pacific Electric ran a streetcar line along Pico Boulevard which linked Bay Cities territory into the larger rail network, meaning Bay Cities Transit was not in direct competition with existing services. But in 1924 P.E. replaced the Pico Boulevard streetcar with a bus and increased the fare on that line from 5 to 6 cents, prompting the City of Santa Monica to begin the operation of L.A. County’s first municipally-operated service: the Free Bus. Santa Monica mayor J.C. Steele organized the Chamber of Commerce, the American Legion, and the Lions Club to donate (along with the city) enough to operate a free-to-ride bus along Pico Boulevard to operate between the Palms neighborhood and downtown, linking Bay Cities buses with LARY streetcars in an end-run around Pacific Electric. Donations were accepted, but not required. The Free Bus ran in protest of P.E.’s increased fare and carried 75,000 people a month once it was extended into Venice. Several companies—including Bay Cities Transit—went before

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28 Rising materials and labor costs had forced Bay Cities Transit to increase fares over the previous several years to maintain profitability. Bay Cities Transit Company will feature in the following chapter on union organization in the 1940s and 1950s. The Santa Monica Municipal Bus Lines continues to this day as the Big Blue Bus. See: “Santa Monica Council Votes for Bus Deal,” Los Angeles Times, August 29, 1951, 2.
30 “Extend Free Busses to Venice,” Better Busses 2, no. 7 (July 1924): 34.
the State Railroad Commission to petition for the certificate to operate a for-profit service along Pico Boulevard; the contract was eventually granted to LARY at a fare of 10 cents one-way under its Los Angeles Motor Bus Company subsidiary (meaning Pacific Electric shared in the profits and operation). The Free Bus continued to run in protest until Pacific Electric successfully ended the service in late 1924 by suing in Superior Court on the grounds that the Free Bus had received no franchise to operate on Pico Boulevard and was, in fact, not charging people—jeopardizing the profitability of LAMBC’s duly licensed 10-cent bus franchise on the same route.

Bay Cities Transit was also instrumental in dismissing the authority of City Ordinance No. 36676 (renumbered 58198 in 1927), which ultimately resulted in the opening of the downtown area to any private transportation company that successfully petitioned the State Railroad Commission for a permit to operate motor vehicles as a public conveyance. In 1939, Bay Cities Transit bus operator Everett Willert was charged with violating the L.A. City ordinance barring bus passenger transportation in the downtown district without the approval of the City Council—which had authorized P.E. and LARY to run buses, but no other companies. Affirming the lower court decision, the appellate court of Los Angeles County Superior Court ruled that the California State Legislature had invested the authority to regulate transportation services in the State Railroad Commission under the Motor Carrier Act of 1917, removing the power of any city ordinance which might serve to counter a decision made by that body. Since Bay

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Cities Transit had received the proper permit to operate bus service in Los Angeles from the Railroad Commission in 1935, the court determined that restricting bus services downtown was in conflict with the State’s superior authority to allow bus companies to operate.\(^\text{33}\) Despite this ruling, the City of Los Angeles again attempted to restrict the operation of Bay Cities Transit on the grounds that their operation was in violation of City Ordinance No. 58198 by obtaining a demurrer from the Superior Court and forcing the stoppage of Bay Cities buses. Bay Cities Transit appealed and was granted relief from the demurrer on the same grounds as the case in the previous year: the State Railroad Commission had granted Bay Cities the right to operate through a permit which superseded the right of Los Angeles to restrict bus services through city ordinance.\(^\text{34}\) Although the Railroad Commission did occasionally deny applications for bus service on the grounds of competitive service with existing rail or of a failure to demonstrate need for bus service in a particular area, in general those companies that applied were given permission to operate, indicating a clear acceptance and appreciation on the state level for the value of road-based public transportation within the urban environment.\(^\text{35}\) For Los Angeles, these decisions encouraged the further erosion of P.E. and LARY’s weakened hold on urban transportation business in the city and the growth of independent operators’ market share.

Long Beach is an example of an early challenge to urban rail in the Los Angeles region. Originally granted a franchise to operate five-passenger jitneys for public

\(^{33}\) People v. Willert (Superior Court, County of Los Angeles 1939).
\(^{34}\) Bay Cities Transit Co. v. Los Angeles (Superior Court, County of Los Angeles 1940).
transportation, the Long Beach Transportation Company had switched to larger buses in the early 1920s to transport more than 4 million riders annually; the company was running a profit of $200,000 each year.\(^{36}\) In light of this profit, in 1926 the City of Long Beach seriously considered operating the bus system itself by purchasing Long Beach Transportation Company’s equipment with an $850,000 bond, but instead opted to grant a new bus franchise to Pacific Electric on the terms of a citywide 7-cent bus fare with transfer rights onto P.E. streetcars throughout Los Angeles County.\(^{37}\) Pacific Electric operated the buses in Long Beach with a renegotiated fare of 5 cents until 1940, when the Lang Transportation Company took over with a contingent of 90 buses to completely replace P.E. equipment in Long Beach, including the few remaining streetcar lines, which were torn up and re-deeded to the city.\(^{38}\)

Redondo Beach quietly established the first municipally-owned bus service in the Los Angeles Basin, although it did not operate the system itself, opting to contract initially with Eyraud & McIntyre in 1918 and later with Interline Bus Company in 1928. These bus lines served to connect Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, and Torrance to the greater L.A. bus and streetcar system.\(^{39}\) In 1928, Culver City was given approval by the Los Angeles Board of Public Utilities to operate a city-owned bus line from the beach to

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\(^{38}\) “Long Beach Will Get New Buses,” Los Angeles Times, January 11, 1940, 7.

\(^{39}\) “Redondo Authorizes Jitney Bus Service,” Los Angeles Times, October 5, 1918, I15; “Bus Line Thru Torrance, Plan,” The Torrance Herald, August 23, 1928, 1. A.J. Eyraud, the bus contractor who operated the Redondo Beach line and later Interline Bus Company, eventually became the head of the first municipally-owned and -operated transportation system in Los Angeles, Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, during the 1960s when it collapsed.
the east side of Culver City along Venice Boulevard. Pacific Electric protested the line to no effect. 40 These few episodes serve as exemplars of the increasing use of bus service in greater Los Angeles. Between small companies operating on the periphery and Los Angeles Motor Bus Company (renamed Los Angeles Motor Coach Company in 1928) increasing bus service throughout the areas that had been previously serviced by streetcars, Los Angeles was quickly becoming a bus city instead of a streetcar city. The greatest evidence of this is twofold.

The first and simplest piece of this puzzle is the growing use of buses through the mid-1950s. In 1925, national bus service was 1.5 billion passengers compared to 13 billion on urban rail. 10 years later, buses carried 2.75 billion passengers, while streetcars were reduced to 7.25 billion. 41 In 1945, there were 9.9 billion bus passengers and 9.4 streetcar passengers, the first time bus transportation beat out streetcar service in a year where public transportation surged. By 1950, streetcar passengers were 3.9 billion while buses were maintaining passenger levels at 9.4 billion. 42 Certainly, as other have argued, the private automobile accounts for the general decrease of total public transportation riders—especially in an era when American population was increasing dramatically. 43 This is a national trend that can be applied directly to Los Angeles, which was on the leading edge of establishing bus transit into the urban public transportation scheme. By

43 “Resident Population Data (Text Version) - 2010 Census,” accessed December 16, 2013, http://www.census.gov/2010census/data/apportionment-pop-text.php; Flink, The Automobile Age, 19. According to Flink’s research, from 1920 to 1950, the American population increased by 42 percent from 106 million to 151 million. Transportation passengers were nearly 16 billion in 1922 and climbed to only 17.2 billion in 1950, despite the surge in population. By 1960, the population was at nearly 180 million and transit passengers were at a recorded low of 7.5 billion.
1945, reports on transit recommendations for Los Angeles detailed the irreplaceable nature of bus transportation and suggested expanding bus service by introducing rapid bus routes throughout the city.\footnote{DeLeuw, Cather & Company, Harold M. Lewis, and Joe R. Ong, \textit{City of Los Angeles Recommended Program for Improvement of Transportation and Traffic Facilities in the Metropolitan Area}, December 1945, 22.}

Secondly, another excellent indication of the privileging of bus transportation is the lack of new streetcar service implementation by Pacific Electric into growing suburban areas. As Greg Hise demonstrated in \textit{Magnetic Los Angeles} and William Fulton discussed in \textit{The Reluctant Metropolis}, interwar and postwar suburban growth in Los Angeles was so tremendous that housing was insubstantial for all the people who wanted to live there—especially in the San Fernando Valley, in coastal cities, and suburban developments southwest of the central business district, such as Westchester and Leimert Park, placed in proximity to manufacturing and industrial work.\footnote{Hise, \textit{Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis}, 117–215; Fulton, \textit{The Reluctant Metropolis}, 1–20.} Despite this monumental growth into sparsely-populated or completely undeveloped areas of Los Angeles County, no new track was laid in L.A. after 1922. Between 1922 and 1939, P.E. and LARY established bus routes equal in mileage to the established rail network, and buses serviced those growing suburban regions, either by LAMC, P.E., or independents.\footnote{Garfield Sorensen, \textit{History of the Los Angeles Railway Corporation and Its Predecessor Companies, 1874-1938} (Los Angeles, Calif.: Los Angeles Railway Corporation, January 27, 1939), 47, 73-DGPTL, Box 29/53, Folder 27, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.}
AUTO STAGES

If Bay Cities Transit’s Jesse Anderson was the shining example of how jitneurs successfully translated their skills into urban busing, Thomas E. Morgan was the equivalent for the interurban automobile stage business. A traveling salesman with a long-distance route in the Imperial Valley, Morgan quit selling goods and started selling transportation between Calexico and Imperial, Calif. in 1911, originally taking passengers in his 5-passenger touring car. In 1914 he incorporated to become United Stages, Inc. and by 1925 was operating more than 100 20-passenger buses. He was an inaugural board member of the National Motor Bus Association, an early champion for the use of buses.

There is almost nothing in secondary literature dealing with auto stages, save for a few corporate histories of Greyhound Bus Company. Mentions of stage lines are few and far between, despite the important role this transportation played in increasing transit access—especially for rural residents.

in long-distance transportation. In 1926, United Stages was leased-to-own by Pickwick Stages, a competing interurban auto stage provider.

Auto stages presented an additional facet to the increased use of buses in transportation in the aftermath of business-ending jitney regulation. Those jitneymen who were unable to operate in the cities were given free reign and complete encouragement to provide service long-distance between cities. As one journalist wrote, “the legislated-against, much condemned jitney has at last come into its own,” becoming “the aristocrats of motordom” in their ability to open access to the California frontier. Los Angeles was the hub for a variety of auto stage companies that, combined, provided interurban bus service throughout California. The Union Stage Depot at 5th and Los Angeles streets was the departure point for Motor Transit Company (for services in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties, including Big Bear and the Imperial Valley), White Bus Line (north Orange County), Pickwick Stages (Orange, San Diego, Kern, Marin, Contra Costa, San Joaquin, and Shasta counties), El Dorado Stages (Kern County), Mt. Wilson Stages, and United Stages (San Diego and Orange counties). By 1929, most of the auto stage carriers in Southern California had merged under the banner of Motor Transit Co., which was subsequently purchased by Pacific Electric and rolled into its Los

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48 “California Operator Gave His Friends What They Wanted,” Better Busses 3, no. 9 (September 1925): 29. This incarnation of the NMBA morphed into the Motor Bus Society, which published a printed trade journal until the mid 2000s (called Motor Coach Age) when it moved to an online-only format.
49 “Pickwick Will Lease United Stage Lines,” Los Angeles Times, November 16, 1926, 14.
50 Mark Wilcox, “California Capitalizes the Jitney,” Illustrated World 29, no. 5 (July 1918): 733, 736.
51 Eli Bail, From Railway to Freeway (Glendale, Calif.: Interurban Press, 1984), 33–68. The Motor Transit Stage depot allowed easy access to downtown LARY streetcar and bus lines, about four blocks southeast of Pershing Square.
Angeles Motor Coach division under a new name: Motor Transit Lines.\textsuperscript{52} By 1939, Motor Transit Lines routes had been fully incorporated into P.E.’s existing LAMC services and the plain Pacific Electric bus system.\textsuperscript{53} In 1930, the remainder of the small auto stage companies operating in California (including: Pickwick Stages, California Transit Co., Peninsula Rapid Transit Co., Pacific Auto Stages, Golden Gate Stages, Pacific Coast Motor Coach, Motor Transit Co., Kern County Transportation, Southern Pacific Motor Transport Co., and Calistoga-Clear Lake Stage Co.) were merged to create Pacific Greyhound Lines in order to consolidate interurban stage services, end duplicate routes, and increase profits.\textsuperscript{54} Nearly 25 years later, California regional auto stage lines were merged into its parent, Greyhound Corp., finalizing a national bus network.\textsuperscript{55}

Prior to the advent of air travel, regional auto stage service provided the most cost-effective and flexible method for experiencing “California’s famous natural beauty”—or so wrote R. Willard Bronson in his promotional song, “Motor Transit Stages Take You Thru,” written in 1926.\textsuperscript{56} Auto stages were also an early adherent to the concept of listening to a radio while traveling in a car. The early incarnations of this were crude, with obvious antennae attached precariously to the stage, but the spectacle was worth the trouble so passengers could pass the time on trips with music as a distraction.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 94–96.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{54} “Coast Bus Merger,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, April 14, 1930, 7.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Motor Transit Stages Will Take You Thru} (Los Angeles, Calif.: Motor Transit Company, 1926), Charles Templeton Digital Collections, Mississippi State University Libraries.
Generally the stage services offered in California were routine and reliable, based on first-person accounts of the transport.\textsuperscript{57} Throughout the period of small, independent stage operations, however, the nagging problem of “wildcat” stage services was present. Wildcatters were unlicensed by the state commission and operated illegal, cut-rate interurban service. Unlike jitney service in the previous decade, wildcatters purposefully avoided existing regulations which dictated legal auto stage operation; jitneys in the 1910s were radical, perhaps, but until municipalities enacted laws limiting their behavior jitneys were not flagrantly evading established codes. In Los Angeles, the Board of Public Utilities was especially concerned with wildcat operations, as L.A. was the major hub of auto stage services for the state. When Harold Brown and Emil Busk were caught

\textsuperscript{57}“Stage and Truck Lines Bulk Large in California,” \textit{Better Busses} 1, no. 6 (January 1924): 11.
by Los Angeles police running a wildcat service between L.A. and Oakland, a judge sentenced the men to 160 days in jail.58 Two Texas girls were driven from Dallas to Los Angeles and headed on to San Francisco when the wildcat driver—paid in full for the entire journey—abandoned the passengers, which was the commonest complaint against wildcat stage services.59 The Travelers’ Aid Society, a national organization which helped those in need while away from home, arranged for the Texans to make it safely to San Francisco and incorporated their story for use in its campaign to end wildcat services entirely.60 The Los Angeles Police Department coordinated with Travelers’ Aid and the Board of Public Utilities to form a special unit devoted to arresting wildcatters operating out of the city, resulting in at least five arrests in 1927 and fines ranging from $25 to $400 for the operation of unlicensed auto stage service.61

MUNICIPAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Between 1924 and 1927, national electric railway-operated bus mileage increased from 1,300 miles to 15,000 miles annually (on average), representing an increased use of buses by more than 1,000 percent. By 1924, the largest fleets of buses in the United States were operated by streetcar companies, although the majority of total bus ownership was retained by a network of overlapping small businesses with regional routes.62 By 1926, buses were responsible for 15 percent of electric railway passenger miles and growing

59 .“Two Bilked in ‘Wildcat’ Stage Trip,” Los Angeles Times, Spetember 1927, A2.
60 .“Wildcat Bus Drive Begins,” Los Angeles Times, April 27, 1927, A11.
steadily each year. In Los Angeles, P.E. and LARY were both purchasing buses under the Los Angeles Motor Bus Company label, as well as independently, and had ceased laying new track for streetcar service. Beyond this growing acceptance and use of buses in Los Angeles by transportation providers, 1924 was a year that encouraged the future of automobility in Los Angeles like none other with the adoption of the Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles. Submitted by consultants Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., Harland Bartholomew, and Charles Henry Cheney—all renowned urban planners—the Major Traffic Street Plan was designed to reshape the face of Los Angeles to provide a “broad, practical, well-balanced scheme for handling traffic toward which the city can advantageously grow.”

Among the chief causes of the growing traffic concerns in Los Angeles, the report argued, was a lack of grade separation leading to the “promiscuous mixing of different types of traffic.” To assuage this ailment, the report suggested it was “desirable to the utmost practicable extent to provide opportunities for segregation of…street traffic.” The Plan called for a general sameness of behavior from streets and road rules, initially with a massive street widening that was the subject of a city proposition vote in the election of November, 1924. Proposition A passed by a vote of 141,945 to 39,053, a huge level of support to reshape Los Angeles to accommodate the future. The $5 million bond secured under Proposition A was put to work immediately in service of rectifying

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63 Slater, “Motor Transportation in the United States,” 143–145.
64 Sorensen, History of the Los Angeles Railway Corporation and Its Predecessor Companies, 1874-1938, 47.
66 Ibid., 11.
67 Ibid., 14.
68 “Council to Get Vote on City Plans,” Los Angeles Times, November 7, 1924, A5.
the traffic “promiscuity” Olmsted had outlined. To fit the vision of the “segregation of the streets, some primarily for carlines and some primarily for automobiles and free from carlines,” within three weeks of the vote the streetcar lines on Figueroa Street were scheduled to be removed and its trolley customers shunted to Flower Street; Figueroa was to be the first major artery dedicated solely for automobile traffic—including bus service by the Los Angeles Railway.\(^{69}\) By spring of 1925, the bus line on Figueroa Street was so popular that residents wanted it extended further south from Slauson to Manchester avenues. LARY would have obliged but it did not have “sufficient bus equipment at this time to enable the company to make such an extension.”\(^{70}\) Wilshire Boulevard was another suggested “strictly vehicular thoroughfare connecting through the eastern part of the city” and by May, 1928 streetcars on Wilshire were entirely replaced by buses operated by LARY.\(^{71}\) In fact, the \textit{Major Traffic Street Plan} called for the gradual limitation of streetcar transportation to only east-west routes and only every few blocks in downtown (First, Third, Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Eleventh, Pico, Sixteenth, and Washington streets).\(^{72}\)

Throughout the study, Olmsted privileged the eminency of the automobile, and with every removal of a streetcar line came the silent endorsement of bus transportation to fill the need for public transportation still required for that shrinking number of Angelinos without their own cars. Although the \textit{Plan} rarely discusses the bus in detail, it 


\(^{71}\) Olmsted, Bartholomew, and Cheney, \textit{A Major Traffic Street Plan for Los Angeles}, 28; Bail, \textit{From Railway to Freeway}, 75.

mentions the widening of streets will generally accommodate the bus which was a “necessary and desirable” portion of transportation in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{73} The Olmsted plan outlines the tremendous growth of automobile registration in Los Angeles County, far surpassing all the rest of the registration in the state, and the increased use of automobiles in downtown as the primary reason for traffic congestion. Limitations and route restrictions set upon streetcars were absent from bus transportation, which increased in

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\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 18.
the downtown area as a result of the *Major Traffic Street Plan* and enabled the future of Los Angeles as a city where the vast majority of public transportation would occur in a bus rather than a trolley.⁷⁴

Following the Olmsted report, in 1925 Kelker, DeLeuw—a Chicago-based engineering firm—submitted the *Report and Recommendations on a Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan for the City and County of Los Angeles*, a substantial work which was created to direct the growth and types of a countywide transportation systems under the premise that L.A. was populated by 3 million people rather than the mere 1 million of 1925. The Kelker-DeLeuw report was also critical of Los Angeles’ failure to segregate different types of traffic, mimicking the *Major Traffic Street Plan*. For its part, *Rapid Transit Plan*’s suggestion to alleviate the traffic was not only segregation but rapid transit lines—specifically a subway system or series of elevated structures—which would travel at a separate plane from automobile traffic, enabling the free flow of both sorts.⁷⁵ Although the *Rapid Transit Plan* had adequate political and investment interest to spur the project forward (including city councilmen countywide, *Los Angeles Times* owner Harry Chandler, Pacific Electric President Paul Shoup, and philanthropists like John Randolph Haynes) objections in crucial places thwarted the efforts at a municipally-planned and municipally-funded train network either above or below ground.⁷⁶ Citizens in Highland Park (through which the modern-day Metro Gold Line runs) objected to the assessments being rendered for their property value—in the event the County bought

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⁷⁴ Ibid., 11.
their homes to create the rapid transit line—and to the project in general, arguing it would “saddle on the city at a tremendous cost to the taxpayers subways and elevated roads.”  

Glendale citizens, for opposite reasons, believed the Kelker-DeLeuw report would remove commerce-generating traffic through their city by creating a path over Cahuenga Pass, shunting San Fernando Valley traffic through Hollywood instead of Glendale. Citizen protests and escalating costs of construction meant the rapid transit elements of the Rapid Transit Plan stagnated. By 1933 estimations by Donald M. Baker and Stuart M. Bate (who had been hired by the Los Angeles Traffic Association to conduct an independent report on a potential subway) reached as high as $72.5 million (including construction and equipment costs) for only four of the original 14 routes proposed by Kelker-DeLeuw. The report eight years prior had estimated $133.3 million for a countywide network of subway and elevated rapid transit. By 1935, lack of rapid transit was again called a “vital city problem” and advocacy groups were angling to have the Federal Government participate in a survey in the hopes of seizing Washington’s attention and funding sources.

Meanwhile, the street widening and streetcar segregation from the Major Traffic Street Plan encouraged the use and increased the number of buses driven throughout the County for public transportation. In 1925, buses were only a small part of the public

78 “Glendale Up In Arms,” Los Angeles Times, November 16, 1925, 10.
79 Donald M. Baker and Stuart M. Bate, Report on a Rapid Transit System for Los Angeles, California (Los Angeles Traffic Association, November 15, 1933), 68.
80 Kelker, De Leuw & Co., Report and Recommendations on a Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan for the City and County of Los Angeles, 16.
transportation value in Los Angeles. The following 15 years represented a major shift toward busing in Los Angeles. Bus transportation was most present in areas where the streetcar was not—as on the Westside in Santa Monica, Redondo Beach, Manhattan Beach, and Torrance serviced by Bay Cities Transit Co.—and in areas where streetcars had been actively rejected, such as in Long Beach. By 1933, the Baker-Bate report classified bus transportation as “furnishing excellent service,” arguing bus lines in L.A. are generally “desirably located and heavily used.” Rather than a competitive or upstart form of transit incapable of meeting the demands placed on urban rail, Baker and Bate discuss the increasing use of buses—rather than streetcars—to complement a strategically-placed rapid transit system amid a general transit demand that was falling from a ridership high of nearly 300 million in 1927 to an all-time low of 180 million in 1932. From 1928 through 1937, Los Angeles Motor Coach Co. added 142 buses to its roster. And when Los Angeles hosted the 10th Summer Olympiad in 1932, bus service was integral as part of the planning for transporting athletes and spectators to and between competition fields. On the opening day of the ceremony, 68 buses carried nearly 2,000 athletes to the Olympic Stadium (now called Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum) from city ports and air fields across the Basin. Over the two-week course of the games, buses provided daily transit for Olympic officials and participants, covering

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83 Baker and Bate, *Report on a Rapid Transit System for Los Angeles, California*, 27.

84 Ibid., Plate 9: Rail and Bus Riders—Los Angeles City 1920–1932.

85 Bail, *From Railway to Freeway*, 91.


83,360 miles at a level of service which the committee said “set a high mark for speed and efficiency.”88 Beyond their value as a daily commuting mode of transportation, buses were being used to service special events in ways impossible to streetcars, further proving their worth to riders throughout Los Angeles—and even to the world.


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88 Ibid., 317.

The dark lines without dots represent recommendations for bus lines, especially present in North Los Angeles areas such as Hollywood, Burbank, and Glendale.
The *Major Traffic Street Plan* of 1924 was the singular device that encouraged a municipally-supported boost to bus transportation following the end of owner-operator jitney service and into the era of corporate bus service. The delineation and segregation of streetcar routes increased the overall use of buses by Pacific Electric and Los Angeles Railway through the late 1930s, both under the Los Angeles Motor Coach moniker and with their own proprietary bus routes. Additionally, the successful incorporation and increased use of buses in daily life—in the downtown areas by streetcar companies, on the peripheries by independent bus companies, and under special circumstances (such as transportation for the 1932 Summer Olympics)—indicates an acceptance of, and often times a preference for, busing by Angelinos. Finally, rapid transit schemes developed in the 1920s and 1930s show an evolving value associated with bus service by planners and municipal authorities. In 1925, Kelker-DeLeuw had in mind a sprawling countywide rapid rail system that treated buses as incidental to the master rail system. By 1933, Baker and Bate cut down rapid rail planning to a simplified core system in favor of established, functional, inexpensive busing systems. Twenty years later, DeLeuw again weighed in with an abbreviated version of his 1925 plan, this time expounding the importance of grade separation for any street rail present in the system (and eliminating those lines still operating at grade with road-based transportation). He suggested bus rapid lines on major thoroughfares throughout the city and proposed rail rapid transit with private right-of-way along only four routes built in conjunction with expressway construction, opposing his earlier proposal of 14 rapid rail routes. 89

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89 DeLeuw, Cather & Company, Lewis, and Ong, *City of Los Angeles Recommended Program for*
ASBURY, LOS ANGELES TRANSIT LINES, AND “MODERNIZATION”

Starting in about 1940, small busing companies that had been happy to provide service at the outskirts of Los Angeles and in the burgeoning zones of new development pressed into streetcar company territory. The Los Angeles Railway had retained much of its streetcar transportation in the central business district (limited along the routes suggested by the Major Traffic Street Plan), but into 1940 Pacific Electric was steadily replacing rail routes with buses. In 1925 busing represented 5 percent of P.E. and LARY’s total transit responsibility. By 1936 that number had grown to 13 percent; annual bus riders had more than doubled from 19 million to 46 million, while streetcar ridership had dipped from 330 million to 309 million. Most of this is represented in the increasing reliance P.E. had placed on busing, as almost 25 percent of Pacific Electric’s entire annual ridership was using buses. So when smaller bus companies began to horn in on P.E. and LARY’s traditional service areas, the shift received no objection from Angelinos and resulted in the eventual end of their historic dominance.

The Asbury Transportation Co. was among the first to challenge P.E. territory. Formed in late 1935 by brothers Jesse T. and Frank H. Asbury, who had experience in interstate trucking, this transit system was the merger of several local and interurban stage lines spanning from Pasadena to the San Fernando Valley in north Los Angeles. In 1939 they changed the name of their company to Asbury Rapid Transit System and bid

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*Improvement of Transportation and Traffic Facilities in the Metropolitan Area, 19–21, Figure 2.
90 Kelker, De Leuw & Co., Report and Recommendations on a Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan for the City and County of Los Angeles, 46.
92 Ibid., 9.
93 Bail, *From Railway to Freeway*, 152.
to take over Pacific Electric’s east-west bus route on Olympic Boulevard through the middle of the city.\textsuperscript{94} Smelling a change in the winds, Bay Cities Transit Co. also petitioned the State Railroad Commission for the Olympic line.\textsuperscript{95} Although Pacific Electric prevailed through its Los Angeles Motor Coach division, it only did so with the promise of purchasing expensive new buses with more seats and greater passenger comforts.\textsuperscript{96} Asbury Rapid Transit began having more luck before the Railroad Commission in late 1940 when it took over a P.E. route connecting Los Angeles to the San Fernando Valley (and the bulk of Asbury’s passenger transit network) beginning at Fifth and Los Angeles streets via what is now the 134 Freeway.\textsuperscript{97} Asbury’s success was due in large part to the growth of the aerospace industry in the years leading up to and during WWII. Lockheed Corporation and Vega Aircraft Corporation were centered in Burbank, directly in the middle of Asbury’s primary service zone.\textsuperscript{98} And during the war, Asbury expanded its coverage area to funnel workers from Van Nuys directly to aircraft manufacturing plants in Burbank and Pasadena. Asbury again expanded its zone of coverage when it pushed service into Arcadia, initially to transport Japanese-Americans to Santa Anita Racetrack in 1942 for internment processing.\textsuperscript{99} Asbury—like Pacific Electric, Los Angeles Railway, and Bay Cities Transit Co., among others—was instrumental in transporting those Angelinos of Japanese descent on the first leg of what

\textsuperscript{95} “Third Olympic Bus Application Up Today,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, October 17, 1939, 10.  
\textsuperscript{97} “Permits for Three Bus Lines Granted by State Rail Board,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, December 5, 1940, 17.  
\textsuperscript{98} Hise, \textit{Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis}, 126–129.  
\textsuperscript{99} Bail, \textit{From Railway to Freeway}, 157.
would be several years of imprisonment at the hands of the American government during World War II.\textsuperscript{100} By 1942 Asbury Rapid Transit controlled most of the bus service in north Los Angeles throughout the San Fernando Valley and much of the San Gabriel Valley.

As the war wound down in late 1944, Los Angeles Railway and its portion of the Los Angeles Motor Coach Co. was sold to American City Lines, a holding company of National City Lines. LARY and its bus stock were reorganized into the Los Angeles

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{“Buses Line the Street at 23rd Street and Vermont Avenue waiting for a group of 600 Japanese to be moved to the temporary internment camp at Santa Anita Assembly Center.” Gordon Wallace. \textit{Los Angeles Times}. May 1, 1942.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{100} “Santa Anita Track to Be Alien Station,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, March 21, 1942, 1.
Transit Lines (LATL) providing service along the same routes. Within six months LATL announced a plan to replace all of the streetcars under its control with “modern” buses, had received 37 new buses to begin this process, and had ordered 200 more from White Motor Co. and General Motors. The “modernization program” resulted in a profitable first year for LATL with a growth of nearly 2 percent despite the capital outlay for new coaches and conversion of streetcar depots to bus depots. The National City Lines purchase of LARY through LATL was part of what has come to be known as the Great General Motors Streetcar Conspiracy under the theory that GM, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, and Standard Oil (investors in National City Lines, among others) bought up streetcar companies in 47 American cities in order to replace a highly-functional, financially-solvent transit system with buses they could build using tires they made and powered by gas they refined. Sued by the U.S. Government, National City Lines was indeed convicted of “conspiring to monopolize certain portions of interstate commerce” but was acquitted of the more serious charge of organizing companies in a “conspiracy to secure control of a substantial number of the companies which provide public transportation service in various cities, towns and counties of the several states, and to eliminate and exclude all competition in the sale of motor busses, petroleum products, tires and tubes.” Conspiratorial angles aside, from the early 1920s bus transportation was less expensive to institute than streetcars. As the trolley system aged, the cost of repair outweighed replacement with buses. When LATL replaced trolley with

101 “Yellow Car Sold to Chicagoans,” Los Angeles Times, December 5, 1944, 1.
104 United States v. National City Lines (United States Court of Appeals Seventh Circuit 1951).
buses it was only the culmination of a process started 20 years prior. E. Roy Fitzgerald, president of National City Lines, argued that he had no ulterior motive beyond improving transportation with what he saw as a superior service: “Ever since 1920, when my brothers and I first began running busses in the Iron Range in Minnesota we have met competition by improving service. The policy of National City Lines has been to acquire and modernize urban transportation systems through the extensive use of busses.”

As Scott Bottles argued, the streetcar companies throughout America had tried every business tactic they could manage to maintain profitability. Although Los Angeles Railway had maintained full ownership of its company (rather than merging with utilities companies, as many streetcar companies had done in the 1930s), its ability to last had been supported by LARY’s decision to adopt buses into its network under the Los Angeles Motor Coach Co. subsidiary. Despite its staying power, LARY, too, crumbled under the decaying streetcar equipment it was unable to replace and finding difficult to keep repaired.

LARY’s inability to turn a profit was indisputable: from 1913 through 1939, the Los Angeles Railway Corporation had been unable to pay dividends on stock. A good example (among many) was a petition in early 1941 by LARY to the utilities board to replace rail service with buses on four major north-south routes in downtown, which would immediately result in a savings of $28,000 annually. Busing as a replacement for streetcars was a solution to insolvent urban rail passenger

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106 Bottles, Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City, 238–242.
transportation meant to continue vital public transit systems, not a conspiracy to sell buses, tires, and gas to otherwise uninterested municipal transit providers.

In 1949, Pacific Electric, too, reorganized passenger transportation and instituted its own “modernization program” to replace its remaining rail not used for freight with bus service. Along with cheaper operating costs for equipment and repair, moving to buses saved P.E. 50 percent in employee costs. Voices in the public were mixed. Those who disputed Pacific Electric’s choice to eliminate its passenger rail services cited how the changes to P.E.’s transportation network would “throw hundreds of older men of many years’ work out of work,” that the investment in rail should not be done away with so


casually, or that perhaps the public should buy out Pacific Electric and run it under municipal ownership. Many citizens believed, however, that eliminating rail rights-of-way along the same grade as automobile traffic would reduce traffic congestion and allow for smarter city growth. Comments such as: “I can’t understand why anyone wants to keep rail transportation,” “The modern age calls for bus transportation instead of street cars for passenger service,” and “I much prefer buses to street cars and would favor the elimination of rail service and substitution of buses” crowded out the opinions of those who wanted to keep the Red Cars. Those citizens in sections of the city that used Pacific Electric’s interurban passenger services: Pasadena, Monrovia, and Temple City residents—who took a streetcar routinely over long distances—preferred buses. A public survey conducted by American Research service found that among those who did not use the system, the opinion was split 50/50 between rail and bus preference. Those who used the streetcars regularly believed buses were superior by a 60 percent margin. And when asked if fares might go up to retain streetcar service or stay the same with new bus service, 62 percent of all respondents believed buses would be a smart investment. The sentiment expressed about the replacement of rail with bus was no lamentation and is encapsulated well here: “The old, once-beloved ‘big red cars’ will be missed when their obsoleteness is complete and rubber-tired highway horseless carriages take their place, casually, or that perhaps the public should buy out Pacific Electric and run it under municipal ownership.”

111 “PE Trolleys or Busses?,” A4.
113 American Research Service, Opinions of Residents of the Area Between 85th St. and East L103rd St., Los Angeles, California, Regarding the Proposed Substitution of Motor Coaches for Existing Rail Passenger Service. (Los Angeles, Calif., November 1954), 01-DGPTL, Box 3/9, Folder 19, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
but they have served us long and well.”\textsuperscript{114} When P.E. received approval from the State Public Utilities Commission (the new name for the Railroad Commission as of 1946, reflecting the changing nature of the state’s transportation network and the diminishing role railroads had to play in utility management), it spent $5.2 million on new buses and the conversion of rail cars for one-man operation.\textsuperscript{115} In 1950 and 1951, P.E. introduced bus service on two of its lengthiest and oldest lines: Los Angeles to Glendora and Los Angeles to Venice. When introduced, an advertising pamphlet was produced to accompany the rollout, detailing the replacement of streetcars and explaining the benefit to passengers: “More frequent service,” “Forced-air ventilation,” “Convenient routes,” and “more spacious seats.”\textsuperscript{116} By 1953, only six Pacific Electric passenger rail lines remained.

**SMOG AND TRACKLESS TROLLEYS**

The replacement of rail with bus transportation might have occurred relatively unnoticed by citizens without the growing and deepening concern about automobile exhaust as a pollutant and irritant. Smog was among the chief concerns for citizens who were uncertain about what would happen to Los Angeles’ transportation potential if buses replaced rail. Smog became noticeable in L.A. around 1940, when people started to complain of eye and throat irritation after spending the day downtown. War manufacturing and the dramatic increase of automobiles were the culprits of the majority

\textsuperscript{114} Chapin Hall, “What Goes On?,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1939, A.
of the problem, but buses were soon placed to blame, as well.\footnote{Marvin Brienes, “Smog Comes to Los Angeles,” \textit{Southern California Quarterly} 58, no. 4 (Winter 1976): 515–32.} By 1950 the number of private automobiles in Los Angeles County was 2 million. To compare, buses throughout the county numbered only 1,800 in 1953, so the automobile was clearly more responsible for smog production between the two.\footnote{Western Transit Systems, Inc., “Master Agreement. March 10, 1953.,” March 10, 1953, 70-DGPTL, Box 12/12, Folder 8, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.} But the reality did little in terms of public opinion, albeit a minority of voices. Protesting citizens called the buses “ill-smelling” and detailed how bus exhaust left a “heavy black film” on windows and curtains.\footnote{“PE Trolleys or Busses?,” A4.} When investigating the link between buses and smog, Los Angeles Motor Coach fleet captain Fred Patton was the first to admit that “the worst thing about a diesel bus is that it just plain stinks.” Patton said that while gasoline emissions produced more smog-inducing carbon monoxide, people were “used to” the smell of gasoline exhaust and only found diesel unpleasant because of the odor caused by the production of aldehydes.\footnote{Ed Ainsworth, “Bus Link to Smog Spread Analyzed,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, December 3, 1946, 1.} In 1947, the city established the Los Angeles Pollution Control District to measure and control smog and air quality—the first agency of this sort in the United States.\footnote{Carlos A. Gonzalez, “Urban Growth and the Politics of Air Pollution: The Establishment of California’s Automobile Emission Standards,” \textit{Polity} 35, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 225.} Among the first actions this body took was to work toward a county-wide refuse collection system to replace the common practice of backyard incineration.\footnote{Ed Ainsworth, “What Every Citizen Should Know of Smog,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, December 17, 1949, 4.}

Working to stem the association of buses with smog, LATL placed into downtown service a series of “trackless trolleys” or “trolley buses,” powered by an electric engine fed from two overhead wires. The trolleys were an attempt to merge the
best of both worlds. With an ability to maneuver in traffic like a bus (14 feet on each side of center) but wider and longer for greater passenger capacity, LATL hoped the trackless trolleys might be a way to get ahead of the smog situation developing in the Basin.123 Despite their intentions, LATL was still criticized—not for their attempt to cut down on smog, but for where the attempt was being made. Dave Waxman, a concerned citizen, argued the claims made by LATL were spurious on two fronts. First, streetcars were also electric, so replacing them with electric trolleys was a trade-off, no more—an accurate assessment, as the smog complaint was against buses, so trackless trolleys were indeed an electric-for-electric swap. But LATL was replacing streetcars with buses elsewhere, so in reality the trackless trolley was a calculated move to keep the public transit emissions neutral rather than simply placing buses on those routes. Secondly, Waxman argued the smog problem was not that bad downtown, but increased as one traveled into the suburban areas, such as up Hill Street toward the San Gabriel Valley, where buses had made the air on the street “almost unfit for human consumption.”124 The misconceptions about how smog functioned, what caused it, and why Los Angeles suffered from it so desperately were all a product of a science that was still developing. But even in the late 1940s those studying air quality and smog knew that the sea and mountain boundaries of the Los Angeles Basin made it challenging for the smog to escape, and that smog reduction in one place in the Basin helped smog reduction everywhere.125 Still, the sight of black smoke pluming from the tailpipes of large buses—diesel or gasoline powered—

created an association with buses that they were “dirty” and “smelly.” By 1955, citizens were used to the trolley bus and some preferred it to both streetcars and motor coaches, describing them as “clean, smooth, and run so close together most people have seats” and suggesting a trolley bus ought to run along Wilshire Blvd. to service traffic between downtown and the Westside.

Transit companies went so far as to have the exhaust from diesel buses tested to determine their share of the growing smog epidemic, especially as more and more were brought in to replace streetcars and aging gasoline buses. In 1954, Metropolitan Coach Lines (MCL) announced a “clean bill of health” for diesel-powered motor coaches as far as smog contribution was concerned. In connection with a public hearing regarding the replacement of streetcars with buses along Hollywood Blvd., the Los Angeles Board of Public Utilities asked MCL to test its diesel buses for air pollutants and carbon monoxide. Smith-Emery Company and Consolidated Engineering Corporation independently concluded diesel engine exhaust was free of smog-related particulates. The report went further, claiming that not only were diesel buses clean, but that each bus “help solve the smog problem” by removing 40 cars from the road—the beginning of a now-common strategy to encourage ridership by linking public transportation with environmental responsibility. Smog, as a developing problem in urban areas caused by the dramatic increase of automobile use, was unfairly blamed on buses due to their size and more visible exhaust. It was in the 1950s that a nostalgia for trolley services was developed (by

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128 “Metro Diesels Don’t Cause Smog,” Metro Coach News, April 1954, 12, 01-DGPTL, Box 4/9, Folder 10, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
a generation who were less likely to ride on streetcars due to increased use of private automobiles and increased use of buses); combined with the smog issue, buses were becoming interpreted as a hindrance by Angelinos, however unfairly.

At mid-century, Pacific Electric was struggling to turn a profit. Its freight business was well in the black but its passenger service was losing more than freight was making, placing P.E. in an annual deficit of $400,000.\(^{129}\) P.E. had modernized and replaced rail lines with cheaper bus routes and reduced streetcars to one-man operation to save on manpower costs but was unable to turn a profit with fare limitations imposed by the State Public Utilities Commission. In 1952 Pacific Electric buses operated 22 million miles of bus service compared to 5.6 million miles of passenger rail.\(^{130}\) Pacific Electric actually began to privilege freight travel, even allowing it during the day, which contributed to the

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\(^{130}\) “PE Passenger Service Sold for $8,000,000,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, March 5, 1953, 1.
“doddering slowness” of remaining streetcar lines in the city. A self-appointed “railfan” reviewed streetcar service in the summer of 1951, calling out each line as “slow and clumsy,” “fantastically slow,” “generally shabby,” and accompanied by passenger comments: “none favorable, of course.”

In light of this financial dilemma, an offer to buyout Pacific Electric’s passenger service was an opportunity P.E. President O. A. Smith was more than happy to accommodate. For $7.2 million and an additional $800,000 in lease agreements for streetcars and property, Western Transit Systems, Inc. bought approximately one-third of all public passenger transportation in Los Angeles—the bulk of which was represented in 695 motor coaches, depots, and repair yards scattered throughout the county. Western Transit Systems, Inc. named its transportation company in Los Angeles Metropolitan Coach Lines, which immediately assumed P.E. service without a break. As part of the agreement, MCL and Pacific Electric agreed to “prosecute diligently and vigorously all such applications so as to replace rail passenger service with motor coach service in the shortest practicable time after closing date.” MCL wanted P.E.’s passenger transportation services but believed it could only be operated profitably if its entire system was composed of bus service. By placing buses into service on the remaining six P.E. streetcar lines, MCL estimated the $400,000 shortfall would turn into a $62,000 profit. But the decision was not merely financial; MCL believed bus service “is today the most important mode of mass passenger transportation in the country and has, over a

133 Ibid., 9.
period of many years, proven its ability to the fullest satisfaction of the industry and in
many cases carries a volume of traffic equal to that transported by the heaviest rail
lines.\footnote{134} Over the next five years, MCL successfully petitioned the PUC to replace the
Hollywood Blvd. and Glendale-Burbank rail routes with buses but was unable to
convince the Board to allow the elimination of the San Pedro, Bellflower, Watts, and
Long Beach lines.\footnote{135} Much of this was based on a speed tests performed by the PUC
showing that buses were slower on those southern routes thanks to the especially
beneficial rights-of-way on those segments.\footnote{136} Soon enough, however, by using a route
on the newly constructed Santa Ana Freeway, Metro Coach got approval to replace the
Bellflower line with buses on Valentine’s Day 1957, leaving only three operational
passenger rail lines in the city.\footnote{137} The long-term use of rail was not in MCL’s original
planning; they had been renting rail equipment and facilities from Pacific Electric. With
the decisions of the PUC regarding the southern lines, MCL bought the equipment it had
been renting at the end of 1956, formally cutting any remaining links between Pacific
Electric and passenger transportation.\footnote{138}

Like Pacific Electric, Asbury Rapid Transit System was having a difficult time
maintaining profitability on passenger transportation due to PUC-mandated fare
schedules, even though Asbury was a motor-coach-only network. In 1945 Asbury was

\footnote{134} Estimated Financial Results of Operation Resulting from Proposed Replacement of Passenger Rail Lines with Motor Coach Service on Southern District Lines (Los Angeles, Calif.: Metropolitan Coach Lines, July 24, 1954), 01-DGPTL, Box 3/9, Folder 19, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
\footnote{135} Bail, From Railway to Freeway, 175–177.
\footnote{138} “Contract with Metropolitan Coach Lines,” December 26, 1956, 70-DGPTL, Box 12/12, Folder 9, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
running a 10 percent profit but 1947, 1949, and 1950 were all years operated in the red. Income increased over that five year period from $957,000 to $1.23 million—a healthy 28 percent gain—but Asbury was unable to overcome the general increase of costs due to inflation and especially unable to deal with the salary demands of drivers and mechanics, the company’s single largest continuing expense.\(^{139}\) Between 1945 and 1953, driver wages went up 81 percent from $1.03 per hour to $1.87.\(^{140}\) So in mid-1954, Metro Coach Lines bought Asbury for $150,000 in a move Asbury hoped would help combat the “pressure of automobile competition, taxes and other costs” that made it “difficult to maintain an independent operation.” Vice president A. J. Eyraud said Asbury would position itself as a division of MCL and continue as a separate company with its own management structure. The immediate benefit to the companies was the elimination of duplicate services routes while patrons received increased access to a now-larger transit network.\(^{141}\) Asbury buses were repainted to Metro Coach Lines green but kept their own name to avoid passenger confusion.

The Metropolitan Coach Lines purchase of Asbury Rapid Transit was not made only to assume control of a competitor’s business. MCL was having financial troubles of its own and hoped a greater coverage area and less competition would enable the company to increase its influence over the state commission’s intractable position on fare increases. The Public Utilities Commission was unwilling to let Metro grow fares to


cover the rising costs of equipment maintenance, fuel, and employee compensation, resulting in a deficit of nearly $200,000 for 1955.\textsuperscript{142} MCL president Jesse Haugh pleaded before the PUC, testifying, “We are not making money. We have to have help. Operating costs are rising and our present fare structure is not enough.”\textsuperscript{143} MCL had moved to a zone fare scheme, maintaining the 5-cent cash rate on local rides demanded by the PUC, with 15-cent rates for interzonal transport. In March, 1955 the PUC allowed Metro Coach to increase rates by 1 cent on local trips and 2 cents on longer routes. But MCL was back before the Commission only four months later, this time asking for a 20 percent fare increase across the board to deal with cost inflations. Rather than let MCL cut service, the PUC allowed the fare increase, raising fares to 8 cents locally and 20 cents for zone-crossing routes.\textsuperscript{144} On top of rising costs, public transportation companies throughout California were losing riders, mostly to private automobiles, a PUC report claimed. The combination of the lack of increased revenue from refused fare hikes and a reduction in riders due to the private automobile was “slowly undermining mass transportation efficiency in the state” the Commission said. “Privately owned passenger transportation companies in California, in many instances, are fighting for their survival. As costs and fares have increased, patronage has decreased and in consequence some decrease in service has been necessitated.”\textsuperscript{145} Service cuts did not go unnoticed by riders, who appeared at PUC hearings to demand the Commission refuse Metro’s requests for fare increases, arguing that the equipment was being neglected, that the routes were slow, and

\textsuperscript{144} Bail, \textit{From Railway to Freeway}, 177.
suggested that “privately owned transit is a dying operation.” Essentially, riders wondered why they should pay more for lower quality service on old, smelly, slow buses. With the streetcar gone as a comparison, the bus surely seemed slow compared to private automobiles cruising along on the new highway system—and slower indeed compared to modern transit panaceas, including the high-speed monorail proposal along the L.A. River from the San Fernando Valley to downtown, coming out of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (LAMTA), formed in 1951 to research the transit problem in L.A. County. The science-fiction transportation systems in popular literature seemed literally light years ahead of buses, too, such as the silent air-propelled trains in Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 (1953), the network of high-speed people movers in Isaac Asimov’s The Caves of Steel (1954), robot taxis in Solar Lottery by Philip K. Dick (1955), and the vacutube capsules in Robert Heinlein’s Double Star (1956). As unrealistic as those comparisons might have been, the growing inefficiency of LATL and MCL, as well as the looming threat of fare increases, meant the luster on the once-lauded motor bus as the cure for what ailed Los Angeles transportation was all but gone. The growing labor struggles of transit companies—manifested in a series of increasingly-common strikes beginning after WWII—added to the public disdain for public transit in Los Angeles. As an almost all-bus system, motor transport was the focus of this ire, however prejudicial when compared to the better coverage of service allowed by buses

147 Cloverdale & Colpitts, Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles.
rather than streetcars. Although Angelinos had inspired the initial movement into busing through use of the jitney, the economic considerations of maintaining a profitable transportation system dictated the bus would be the primary form of service…especially as the private automobile whittled down on transit ridership.

The association with poor air quality in the form of smog, wading through increased traffic due to the growing volume of private automobiles, and lower quality and aging bus equipment meant that by the mid-1950s the public’s affection for bus transportation was ending. From the early 1920s through the mid-1950s, transportation companies that offered streetcar service steadily replaced their lines with buses as a means of maintaining profitability and improving access to riders. Los Angeles Railway and Pacific Electric subsidized the expense of streetcars amid pressing competition from independent bus companies operating at the peripheries of the county, eventually replacing their fleets to “modernize” with buses and then selling out when profits seemed impossible to achieve. Immediately following the jitney period, traction companies were hesitant to include buses into their networks, even in ancillary capacities. But even the skeptics could not justify the expense of extending a streetcar network into growing suburban areas when buses could handle the load at a third the cost or less. The State Railroad Commission refused to allow transportation companies to increase fares, and between that and a reduction in riders due to the availability of automobile transportation private transit providers struggled to make money. The consolidation of small private transit outfits into larger, regional networks was an attempt to return to profitability, but, as the next chapter will demonstrate, the cost of labor increased so dramatically that the
public would have been shocked by the necessary fares to earn an income on passenger transportation…and eventually was. Meanwhile, union activity and strikes became so common following WWII that privately-owned public transportation management was eventually grateful for a chance to sell their businesses to a municipal agency in the LAMTA and exit the field entirely in 1957. But this inability to turn a profit correlated with a shift in the way Angelinos interpreted public transportation: as a right more so than a business opportunity, and the subject of the next chapter.

The fare crisis and effective union acquisition of pay increases meant mid-century Los Angeles public transportation was operating at a constant loss. Private busing companies had done what they could under the circumstances—such as reducing costlier rail service and refining service routes for efficiency—but the intractable position of the Public Utilities Commission on raising fares and the fair-minded demands of workers for better pay and facilities meant urban transportation as a profitable business was becoming less achievable. By the mid-1950s, L.A. transit providers were literally begging the Public Utilities Commission to increase fares, almost monthly, to return passenger service to profitability. Between 1914 and 1953, wages for Los Angeles transportation employees increased from 25 cents per hour to $1.81 per hour, a 624 percent increase, outpacing revenue by a factor of three.¹

The ironic element of this situation is the nature of its ultimate competitors. Unions were trying to improve the lives and working conditions of their members, as a union is created to do. By forging agreements with transit providers for closed shops and successfully bargaining for regular wage increases, unions such as the Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees of America and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (which combined represented nearly all passenger transportation employees in Los Angeles) gave transit providers no choice but to accede to union demands. In order to

remain profitable, providers had three choices: cut service and fire employees, seek fare increases, or both. In every case, the riding public—increasingly working class in nature, earning less than national averages and less able to afford alternative means of transportation—would assume the burden. In the end, one working class group was pitted against another, discouraging the affection of similar circumstances and ultimately resulting in a move toward public ownership of public transportation. Through the mid-1950s, a series of union-organized strikes and transit-organized attempts at fare increases soured the public on privately-owned public transit, creating an environment where public ownership seemed a better option based on the assumption that such an organization could arrest fare increases, better control union demands, and keep transit running for those working-class Angelenos who depended upon it.

By the late 1940s, buses were the dominant form of transit and had become something of a subject of derision within the community, however unfairly. The growing smog concern within Los Angeles was, of course, attributable to automobiles most especially. But buses with their visible exhaust and noise pollution were no longer interpreted as the wonderful devices of freedom and mobility they had been in the early 1920s. Buses were, by mid-century, a road-hogging, diesel-spewing, din-creating impediment within urban transportation…at least to those in the majority who were driving automobiles in increasing numbers. In 1921, Los Angeles had 6.37 residents per

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automobile for a total of 171,642 cars. By 1953 that ratio was decreased to 2.43 residents per automobile and a total of 1.9 million cars. So buses, although the salvation of transit solvency through 1950, were becoming what seemed like a nuisance in the wake of a massive infusion of cars into the Los Angeles urban environment.\textsuperscript{3}

In the early 1950s transit’s future was no longer envisioned as bus mobility by planners and municipal leaders. Futuristic and modern ideas foresaw a space-age Los Angeles with rapid, centralized, master-planned public transportation that zipped at lightning speed from hinterland to downtown: a monorail. But this rapid transit scheme seemed like something that was beyond the reach of privately-owned transportation companies. After all, transit providers were barely making their bottom lines, if they were, and were either unwilling or unable to invest time and money into planning a massive and costly rapid transit project. The need for some change in transit was clear and it was in this environment—where fares were stuck, where employee costs were rising, and where transit was verging on insolvency—that the state government stepped in and created a new government agency to work toward a solution: the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (LAMTA), initially tasked with researching and building a monorail system.\textsuperscript{4} The oddest part about this move is a very open and expensive growth of government at a time when public-sector growth was contrary to Cold War anti-socialist rhetoric, and in a place that was becoming one of the “most private cities in America” as discussed by Don Parson in reference to diminishing support for public

\textsuperscript{3} Ruscardon Engineers, \textit{Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles; Part II: Traffic, Population and Economic Data} (Los Angeles, January 15, 1954), 49, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 4.
housing.\textsuperscript{5} The creation of LAMTA opposes that history, but does not negate it. Until the mid-1950s Angelinos had been willing to negotiate their transportation through a series of private enterprises. Several failed attempts at publicly-owned transportation had failed on public ballots, so the state creation of LAMTA represents a challenge to the existing will of Los Angeles residents to keep transportation away from the control of public ownership.\textsuperscript{6}

LAMTA and support for the monorail program, and the later support for LAMTA’s purchase of busing in Los Angeles, indicate a shift in public attitudes regarding transportation toward one of social responsibility: public transportation as a vital and necessary role for government to provide, not a private business opportunity. While this seems to refute Parson’s argument for growing anti-government sentiment, the failure of rapid transit ballot measures to increase public transit’s role as a transportation provider (under the successor agency to LAMTA, Southern California Rapid Transit District [SCRTD]) provides a limit to the public responsibility to provide transit. The creation of LAMTA, if anything, represents a stall in the privatization of Los Angeles that Parsons discusses, not an outright refutation of corporate modernism. In fact, I would argue that the LAMTA buyout of private busing companies amounted to little more than welfare for influential businessmen whose industry was no longer profitable. Regardless of the motivation, the public did become owners of transportation, resulting in an

\textsuperscript{5} Don Parson, \textit{Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles} (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xii, 2, 10–11. Parson argues that Cold War sentiments encouraged the growth of private housing projects and protective homeowners associations in L.A. at the expense of funding public housing projects, creating a system that privileged private spending over public spending and even criticized the latter on ideological grounds.

ostensible increase in access to route planning and transit operations—ultimately increasing public agency. When it came to the transit riders themselves (those few who were unable to participate in car culture) the public eventually decided buses answered their needs adequately and that costly rapid transit projects were an unnecessary growth of government. A limit to government growth was found for at least the first 30 years of public transportation ownership: busing is acceptable, but expensive and flashy transit schemes are not. Although this decision was ideologically-motivated, the underlying practicality of buses was highlighted in the failure of ballot measures for rapid transit.

Despite this turn toward investment in transit as a public responsibility, transit riders of this era were ultimately granted less agency in terms of how the system functioned, even if their access to the county itself was increased by the simplicity garnered by the consolidation of transportation under a single authority. Unlike the jitney episode and the era of private bus company control, public ownership diluted the direct control riders had been able to wield through competition or market forces. Public ownership simplified the use of the system, but riders were victims of fare hikes and unable to dictate route preferences as they had been when private owners had to run a system that was profitable. The initial period of public ownership, ironically, represents the lowest point of control exerted by riders in terms of fares, in terms of routes and in terms of how the future of the system was determined. The bureaucracy of large-scale planning, the increased influence of a fully-unionized workforce, and the ability to raise fares carte blanche represents a nadir in rider agency that wouldn’t be reclaimed until the 1990s.
Finally, LAMTA’s desire for large-scale transportation systems and those of its successor, SCRTD, are clear indications of municipal egotism as at least part of the impulse for creating them. LAMTA’s unfunded and unbuilt plans for grandiose rapid transit in Los Angeles seen in the monorail over the L.A. River, as well as the Master Plan envisioned by SCRTD, are best interpreted, I believe, as a yearning to keep up with what transportation companies were doing throughout the world—even if bus operations were handling Los Angeles’ transit needs admirably.

**LAMTA**

In July of 1951, the state government created Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, which was tasked with creating a massive, ultra-modern monorail system. At the time, the freeway system was beginning to take shape in Los Angeles. A series of highways had been under construction throughout California thanks to the funding created under the Collier-Burns Act. The Act required that each county in the state establish a system of primary roads, consolidate its road administration, and report road expenses to the State Controller. For its part, California levied a 4.5-cent gasoline tax to fund improvements necessary for this mandate and would construct and maintain a series of highways throughout the state. In Los Angeles, the highways were argued as desperately called for, since the existing streets were “not designed to meet the needs of modern automotive traffic.” Between 1923 and 1950, automobile traffic volume into

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downtown had doubled. Beyond increased private automobile growth creating traffic, L.A. Mayor Fletcher Bowron, Board of Supervisors Chairman William Smith, and the Los Angeles County Section of the League of California Cities reported that the “increased use of buses” (along with industrial and commercial use of trucks) meant a highway system was necessary to relieve the congestion growing on Angelino streets. As described in the last chapter, private transit companies had purchased Los Angeles Railway and Pacific Electric transportation interests and created a quilted network of busing as the primary form of public transportation in the city as they retired streetcars for less expensive bus service.

Planners and city leaders were optimistic that buses could be supplemented with new technology and officials thought progress would best be served by creating a monorail system. Following German engineering and working in conjunction with increased bus service, the monorail was supposed to run sixteen feet above the Los Angeles River, transporting passengers from Van Nuys to Los Angeles to Long Beach in less than two hours. It was estimated the monorail would be built within three years at a cost of $60 to $80 million and transport as many as 30 million people each year. But by the beginning of 1953, little had been done for either public transportation or the freeway system. The monorail was still resigned to a few blueprints and freeway construction had produced only 17 miles of useable road. Traffic congestion was worsening. Collier-Burns

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9 Ruscardon Engineers, *Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles; Part II: Traffic, Population and Economic Data*, 54. This report details Ruscardon’s assessment that more highways—as well as a centralized mass transit system—were needed to alleviate growing traffic concerns in the Basin.


FIGURE 33: Monorail Route with Population Density. Ruscardon Engineers, *Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles; Part II: Traffic, Population and Economic Data* (Los Angeles, January 15, 1954), Fig. 6, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
highways were under construction, so promising for future traffic assistance, but Angelinos wanted immediate relief. In the face of stagnation, business leaders called on the state to increase the scope of LAMTA’s authority, “so it will have the right to study all kinds of mass transportation, not just monorail… It is foolish for the authority now to presume that monorail is the final answer to Los Angeles’ transit problem.”

Ernest Geddes from Claremont argued that increasing the jurisdiction of LAMTA to the entire county and expanding its purview to multiple transportation possibilities would “relieve it of all controls except from the Legislature” and “allow the authority to approve any type of mass transportation facilities, rather than just monorail.” Although business and civic leaders were in favor of increasing LAMTA’s authority—which was created to study and implement the monorail exclusively—the legislators in Sacramento thought differently and voted Geddes’s measure down. By 1955, the monorail was still at the drawing board and Los Angeles public transportation was stalling badly. Private enterprise was managing to fulfill the needs of the public transportation through busing, but planners and city leaders worried that a city of buses would not be enough to meet the growing demands of Los Angeles as it expanded into the future. Hayden Jones, the chairman of LAMTA, and his board decided the best way to begin managing transportation in the city was to assume ownership of the bus lines as a first step toward consolidating the county’s transportation in a unified vision. The County Board of Supervisors tended to agree with Jones, and authorized nearly $400,000 of public money to begin the planning of such a takeover. The initial plan of LAMTA was to purchase two

of the city’s largest bus operators: “If purchased, the properties of the Los Angeles Transit Lines and the Metropolitan Coach Lines will form the nucleus from which we plan to develop an effective mass transportation system through expansion, extension and improvement of these facilities.” Los Angeles Transit Lines was the transit provider that bought the LARY lines after Huntington’s inheritors had had enough of the transit industry. And Metropolitan Coach Lines owned what had once been the domain of P.E. Jones hoped that the acquisition of these two companies would allow his agency to begin serving the public by providing some measure of concerted transportation in the city.

Not all of Los Angeles was in favor of this plan. That LAMTA was intending to expand its granted powers rubbed some the wrong way, and the Los Angeles Times made that criticism clear to its readers that it thought a system built to accommodate the automobile was the clearest way into the future:

There is nothing in 30 years of history to feed the hope that public transportation can win back very much of what it lost to the private automobile. The average citizen seems to prefer to pay his gas tax and repose his hopes in the freeway program—and fight for a place to park. The truth of this could be discovered quickly enough by a plebiscite on the latest transit scheme.

The Times was referring to several previous attempts to create a publicly-owned transportation system in the County. In 1934 the Works Project Administration made some overtures toward funding underground and elevated rail lines on the condition surface lines were banned in the downtown district, but the cost was prohibitive. In 1935, along with a proposition to reinstate jitney service into the downtown area, voters were asked to begin a municipally-owned bus system to supplement P.E. and LARY rail

services in the city. The Municipal Bus League argued their services would be cheaper to operate and have the will of the public in mind, while detractors (loudest of all: Pacific Electric and the *Los Angeles Times*) denounced the plan as a socialist plot proposed by unions as revenge for their losses at the bargaining table with existing transit companies.¹⁷ Effectively associated with the Upton Sinclair’s EPIC campaign, which also lost at the polls, voters rejected the first real attempt at municipal ownership 3-to-2.¹⁸

The second and third attempts at public ownership of bus service in Los Angeles were close behind, in 1937 and 1939, and suffered similar losses at the ballot box. The 1937 plan was less coordinated than the Municipal Bus League in ’35 and had no real shot at passing; it failed 2-to-1, a higher margin of loss than the EPIC-associated bus plan two years before.¹⁹ And in 1939, a final attempt at municipal bus ownership was criticized as a corrupted plan that would keep a proposed transit board at arms-length from regular city government. Although Mayor Fletcher Bowron had no love for the existing streetcar system (calling it “antiquated, cumbersome and clattering”), he said the Proposition 1 plan was insufficiently organized and potentially dangerous to create a new

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¹⁸ “EPICs Routed and Bus Proposals Beaten,” 1. The End Poverty in California campaign was a large-scale social program that was heavily influential upon Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal social programs. It involved seizure of unused lands, redistribution, increased taxation, and pensions for elderly and disabled Californians. For more on EPIC, see: Charles E. Larsen, “The Epic Campaign of 1934,” *Pacific Historical Review* 27, no. 2 (May 1958): 127–47; and Upton Sinclair, *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1994).
wing of municipal authority that had no oversight. Bowron’s worries were mirrored by the voters, and the “office-seeking plunderers” of Proposition 1 were routed 4-to-1, the largest margin of defeat for a municipal bus plan to that point.

Despite the concerns of voters in recent memory, LAMTA continued in its quest to purchase buses and (what few) trolley lines were available in the city. The Authority announced it had confirmed sale prices of about $49 million for both bus outfits and Richard Richards, a state senator from Los Angeles, intended to present a bill to the Legislature asking for permission to issue a bond in that amount for their purchase.

LAMTA Board Member Emmett Doherty argued that in order to fulfill their obligation to improve transportation LAMTA needed the “power to take over present public transportation and to seek new systems that will work better.” In a matter of days, LAMTA and its board decided that it would better serve the people of Los Angeles by casting aside its original mandate to create and manage a monorail system and created its own, adjusted plan of attack concerning the future of public transportation in Los Angeles. Up to this point, LAMTA had spent the $400,000 given to it by the County Board of Supervisors to research the idea of taking over transit operations in the City and the original $250,000 it got from the State Legislature in 1951 to study the monorail concept. It had produced very little in terms of actual transportation alternatives.

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20 Bowron was not against the establishment of a municipal bus system per se. In fact, he believed buses could very well satisfy the need for rapid transit to replace the aged streetcars and that the city might do well to run such an operation—provided the organization was appropriate. See: “Bus System Plan Assailed,” Los Angeles Times, November 29, 1939, A1.


When quizzed on the methods the planning agency that was now in charge of operations would employ in running a transportation agency based on bus service, Chairman Jones and his officers responded that very little would change regarding the actual management of Metropolitan Coach Lines and Los Angeles Transit Lines—even though both companies had been running at a loss for more than five years. In fact, Jones claimed, “There really is no difference in principle, but in this instance the authority would be using the know-how of private management to operate the lines to insure efficient and profitable service.” No acknowledgement was made of the fact that private management had been unable, in the marketplace, to secure “profitable service.” It was supposed that the benefits of public ownership, such as a negligible tax burden and a large pot of public money to spend upgrading the bus fleet into larger coaches, would serve to fill the operating gap both lines were experiencing and bring the entire operation into a position of breaking even, at the very least. LAMTA General Manager Ralph Merritt argued that taking the private industry public made good financial sense: “We not only will not have to pay out large sums in taxes, but we will increase our income by increasing the volume of business at the same time—at least we hope to and are planning on it.” Finally, Jones claimed that the purchase of the bus lines (and acquisition of whatever smaller lines became available in the future) would be “probably the last drastic move to free Los Angeles from traffic strangulation.” It was at the same press conference that Jones said very clearly, “I am of the opinion that monorail is not the answer.” 23 The assumption of all transit planning was the end result of a discussion in the Authority’s

board meetings a year earlier, when Doherty suggested LAMTA adopt a policy to recommend “the Authority as an overall countywide planner” to “serve the present and future needs of the area” managing “all types of transit.”

LAMTA’s inability to get a monorail off the ground had set wheels in motion long before it bought out L.A. busing.

There was some opposition from Los Angeles City Council Members about the plan to purchase buses. Even some on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors were against the plan from the start. Supervisor Roger Jessup called the plan of public ownership “the antithesis of good government,” and Supervisor Herbert Legg said, “It seems clear that present owners of the lines can’t make enough on them to warrant their retention, so naturally they wish to ‘unload’ them on the public.” Public officials were not the only people against the purchase. The Citizens Traffic and Transportation Committee, originally created in 1954 by L.A. Mayor Norris Poulson to create a transportation survey from the perspective of the people who would need to use transit, was not expressly against the consolidation of transit into the hands of the public. But the Committee did come out against the LAMTA bus purchase, claiming “the Citizens Committee believes it is unwise to spend vast sums of the public’s money on a segment of the transportation system and at the same time in effect irretrievably abandon private enterprise in favor of government ownership and operation without first determining whether or not this activity fits into a general and accepted plan.”

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24 “Minute Record of Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority,” June 8, 1954, 3, LAMTA Box 1, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
Committee was critical of the plan for being half-cocked. Ridership statistics for those using public transportation in the city concur with those against the county’s purchase of transit in the city. A 1959 study by Cloverdale & Colpitts, a New York engineering consulting group, found ridership had peaked in 1947 with a total of 468 million passengers. Each subsequent year, ridership had fallen until it reached the lowest number of riders in a twenty-year period: 182 million in 1957, the year LAMTA proposed to take over the bus transportation in the county.\(^{28}\)

Despite the opposition, on May 24, 1957 the State Legislature approved the bill that allowed LAMTA to purchase Metropolitan Coach Lines and Los Angeles Transit Lines for a final purchase price of $33 million in State funds, augmented by the issuance of bonds for another $12 million, for a total of $45 million.\(^{29}\) LAMTA was granted power to issue bonds in their duties as the operators of public bus lines in Los Angeles County—and did so almost immediately in order to purchase six more private bus lines in the County that wished to be included in the “amalgamation.” Long Beach Transit Lines, Inglewood Transit Lines, Foster Transportation Co., Atkisson Transportation Co., San Bernardino Valley Transit System, and Pasadena City Lines were all soon purchased for a total of $40 million from a twenty-year bond through Bear, Stearns & Co.\(^{30}\) The use of public funds to gamble that a government agency could bring costs under control


indicates a willingness, if it didn’t pan out, to permanently subsidize public transportation—a dramatic shift in the thinking of government’s role in transit.

From spring 1957, LAMTA attempted to fulfill its new obligations to run bus service in the County with dedication. But labor troubles plagued the agency and criticisms ranged from inadequate service to a failure to plan for the future. After making the stride to assume command of the bus service, LAMTA seemed to stagnate. As one rider wrote in the opinion section of the *Times*, “I had pinned some hopes on the MTA for improved service, but instead service is worsening rapidly.”31 Other riders detailed similar grievances: “Metropolitan Transit Authority, which was organized to provide rapid transit for Los Angeles, seems to be hard at work trying to accomplish the exact opposite.”32 LAMTA even seemed to displease the politicians who had helped make its bus takeover a reality. In spring 1959, the County Board of Supervisors started to become disillusioned with the effectiveness of LAMTA, charging the agency with “failing to better mass transportation in the Los Angeles area” and demanded officials explain the failure.33 By winter of the same year, the supervisors were starting to tire of the Authority’s inability to meet the demands of the community and were “sharply critical of the lack of information they have been given regarding the MTA board’s actions.” Moreover, LAMTA was coming under fire for replacing streetcars with buses in areas like Watts; some complained the service was not as efficient, while others, like the women’s organization, Stamp Out Smog, were concerned for the health effects of the

33 “Supervisors Criticize MTA; Failure Charged: Demand That Transit Officials Appear and Explain Situation to County Board,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1959, 4.
greater amount of pollution caused by buses versus streetcars. The Authority was sensitive to the pollution caused by buses and worked with the Air Pollution Foundation, an independent community-based group organized by the *Los Angeles Times*, to install devices to monitor bus pollution and study ways to reduce pollutants.

Public ownership of the transit seemed to actually increase the public’s ability to have their concerns met when LAMTA would cut service or change service. Los Angeles public transportation was often the only option for those who were on fixed incomes or not yet old enough to drive—and when the only option for transit was detrimentally altered, the “owners” of public transportation were unafraid to kick up a fuss to get service reinstated. When a Glendale-to-Burbank line was cut because of a falling ridership, community members in the area signed a petition to reinstate the service, even though LAMTA was operating at a loss by retaining the line. Community members felt that public ownership of public transportation meant its primary obligation was to serve the citizens, regardless the fact that LAMTA might lose a little money. Where the public was concerned, LAMTA was between a rock and a hard place: it could not risk alienating the people it was meant to serve, nor could it afford to run bus lines without sufficient riders to justify them. Although the Authority had been hopeful that a lenient tax structure and unified management of county transit would result in improved service

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35 Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, “Minutes of Regular Meeting of the Members of the Authority,” December 2, 1958, 7, LAMTA Box 1, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.

and lowered costs, it was finding public influence as difficult to overcome as it had found labor differences and increased operating costs when under private ownership.

In 1960, LAMTA sought to control the bad publicity it was receiving for failing to provide adequate transportation to the county and to provide a cohesive plan for the future of public transportation in the region. C.M. Gilliss, the new executive director, pleaded with people to give up their allegiance to one form or transportation over another (bus vs. trolley) and their arguments over public or private ownership of public transportation, urging: “We must present a united front to achieve our common goal of mobility for the masses…we must make it clear how unlivable American cities would be without mass transportation.” He also argued pragmatically, saying that the automobile was here to stay and what Los Angeles needed to survive was a healthy mix of both forms of transportation.37 By this time, the population had grown to more than 6 million and public officials were coming to regard the issues of public transportation as paramount.38 But LAMTA was finding that—despite its best intentions—real change in transportation was not going to come cheap. A flurry of studies was commissioned by the agency, each supposing it knew best about what to do: monorail, elevated rail, subway, banning cars in the city center.39 In an attempt to begin the construction of some of the

39 Kelker, De Leuw & Co., Report and Recommendations on a Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan for the City and County of Los Angeles; East and Holley, Traffic Survey, Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, 1937; DeLeuw, Cather & Company, Lewis, and Ong, City of Los Angeles Recommended Program for Improvement of Transportation and Traffic Facilities in the Metropolitan Area; Ruscardon Engineers, Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles; Part II: Traffic, Population and Economic Data; Cloverdale & Colpitts, A Study of Public

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more feasible plans, LAMTA began to make some moves toward funding more serious work in the direction of reasonable planning ideas. The City Council, however, did not like that LAMTA was seeking more funding under the radar, and accused the agency of reaching for “dictatorial” powers after it proposed legislation that would allow it to “grab gasoline taxes, levy assessments against private property and obligate the area it serves with general obligation bonds.”

Moreover, 1960 was the year LAMTA was forced to deal with a massive mechanics strike over low wages. Beginning in late October, Superior Court Judge Lloyd Nix twice ordered the mechanics to continue working, restraining the union from striking for twenty days. Despite a further indefinite extension of his temporary order not to strike, on November 16, 1960, 900 LAMTA mechanics went on strike, supported by the unionized bus drivers. The Authority had dealt with threats of strikes and actual strikes before, but prior to 1960 the unions involved with the operators and mechanics were varied and unconsolidated; labor organization had never stopped buses or trolleys from rolling entirely. The organization of LAMTA mechanics under the banner of the Amalgamated Transportation Union served to strengthen their resolve to strike for higher wages—and the support of the bus drivers alongside them created a situation that saw LAMTA buses inoperative for the first time since taking over bus operations in the County in 1957. Within four days, LAMTA officials acceded to the union demands and


buses were operating again. Although the mechanics got what they wanted (higher wages and a restructuring of pension benefits), LAMTA was “forced” to raise fare rates. Amalgamated representative C.M. Snow argued that an increase in fares was not necessarily the means LAMTA would need to go about in order to pay “employees the prevailing wage.” Nevertheless, rates increased almost immediately from 20 cents to 23 cents (plus a 1-cent “zone charge,” creating a real rate of 24 cents).

In 1961 LAMTA attempted to continue in its quest to provide “rapid” transit to Los Angeles County and not just bus transportation. A “backbone” plan was introduced and approved through the State Legislature: LAMTA intended to build either a monorail system or a subway system or a hybrid—something running east to west from El Monte through Downtown, following Wilshire Boulevard to the ocean. Commissions were granted to study the idea to the tune of nearly $1 million. LAMTA Executive Director C.M. Gillis argued strongly for federal funding to help the project along, and claimed that the system, estimated to cost $192 million, would have to be begun prior to Congressional hearing dates in spring in order to grab at the available money. He said delay was costly and that every year of inaction “adds $10 million in capital cost to the system—just from normal inflation.” LAMTA was also toying with the idea of creating a rapid line from Downtown to Long Beach and intended to finance the project through

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the Federal Housing and Federal Transportation funding pots.\textsuperscript{46} The plans were overshadowed by still more labor threats of strike, this time by the bus drivers in early 1962. Although the strike never materialized, LAMTA again turned to fare hikes as a means of financing the demands of the union contracts; this time, LAMTA raised rates by 22 cents over a two year period.\textsuperscript{47} Between the fare increases to finance labor costs, costs of improving the bus fleet, project studies financed by the Authority, and regular inflation, LAMTA increased fares by more than 300 percent from 1957 to 1964.\textsuperscript{48} The public was finding public ownership detrimental at least at the farebox. The Public Utilities Commission was overtly friendlier to LAMTA vis-à-vis fare increases than it ever had been for privately-owned transit companies.

But labor concerns and higher prices were not the only worry of LAMTA in the summer of 1962. Congress turned out to be a dry well for LAMTA funding. A.J. Eyraud, new chairman of the LAMTA, said clearly: “Let’s face it—we’re dead in Washington. Our only hope now rests with the State Legislature.” The funding sources LAMTA had been counting on would only be available in the form of matching asset grants of up to $500 million. Congress meant for the bill to be matched by state funds, but the California Legislature had made it clear that LAMTA was to get its funding from Washington; failing that, the Legislature (or LAMTA) had conceived of no back-up plan.\textsuperscript{49} By this time, the proposed “backbone” system—now finalized into a hybrid of heavy rail above

\textsuperscript{47}“MTA Directors to Study Fare Increase Today,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, March 19, 1962, A1.
and below ground—was to cost $288 million, representing a 50 percent increase in estimated cost in just a single year.

Tired of asking for money hat-in-hand, and keen to do anything to get rapid transit into the County (the latest idea had been a monorail to Los Angeles International Airport\(^{50}\)), LAMTA attempted to fund itself by asking the State Legislature for the power to tax county property owners to help fund its future transit plans. The plan—which Gov. Pat Brown supported—would have allowed LAMTA to affix an addition to the state property tax, raising it by 41 cents per month in 1964 (on a property assessed at $4,000),

\(^{50}\) Ray Hebert, “MTA May Be Asked Soon to Act on Proposed Monorail to Airport,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 12, 1962, 2.
and declining steadily to a rate of 19 cents per month in 1980. The thought was that LAMTA would need a larger initial amount of capital to finance its project, which would become self-sustaining at the fare box after construction, thereby lowering the need for taxpayer support at such high levels.\(^5^1\) Massive public backlash at the proposed tax was directed at LAMTA and Gov. Brown from all segments of society, causing the governor to shrink and LAMTA’s Executive Director C.M. Gilliss to claim the tax idea was “only a suggestion,” but still arguing that the county needed a rapid transit system (now reckoned to cost $649 million—almost four times the original estimate in 1960, just three years earlier) no matter where the money came from, so long as LAMTA did receive some substantial funding.\(^5^2\)

Failure of the property tax idea at the state level did not tamp down the resolve of LAMTA, though, which in summer of 1963 asked the County Board of Supervisors to divert a one-half percent increase in the vehicle license fees to the Authority so it could implement its $649 million rapid transit plan.\(^5^3\) This attempt at more tax money did at least two things: the Board of Supervisors rejected the plan outright and public support of the Authority began to wane dramatically. The need for funds prompted a private agency, Alweg Rapid Transit Systems of California, to propose a public/private merger with LAMTA, which would ostensibly provide the Authority with much-needed capital to create the rapid transit it had in mind. But there was a trick—private ownership would


\(^{53}\) “MTA Believes It Has Rapid Transit Answer: But It Needs Blessing of Supervisors and This May Be Difficult to Acquire,” Los Angeles Times, June 30, 1963, G5.
make even State funding a thing of the past. Hopeful for his agency’s ability to turn the
trend against LAMTA around, A.J. Eyraud rejected the partnership with Alweg Rapid
Transit Systems of California and claimed, “We believe that it has been well established
that the high capital cost of building a metropolitan rapid transit system discounts any
possibility of private financing. Tax support is a necessity.” At this, the County Board
of Supervisors, already disillusioned with LAMTA, became openly hostile to the agency
and demanded the Authority discuss the money it had spent on studies and plans that
never came to fruition. Supervisor Frank Bonelli called the work at the agency a “fiasco,”
and said, “something more than blind adherence to the assumptions of the MTA board
chairman and others is needed. Their statements should not be readily accepted as
gospel.” Public outcry accompanied the supervisors’ hostility. One man from Canoga
Park wrote critically of all government in regards to LAMTA: “The ineptitude of the Los
Angeles government, city and county, is appalling. It is not sufficient to excuse
blundering and waste by pointing to other large American cities that are run even
worse…. I shudder to think if [taxation authority] is left in the hands of the Metropolitan
Transit Authority, as seems tragically imminent.”

By the end of 1963, State officials were publicly calling for the removal of
LAMTA as the transportation agency in Los Angeles County. The State Senator from
Los Angeles, Thomas Rees, told the Assembly Committee on Transportation and

54 “MTA Rejects Private Rapid Transit, Holds Tax Necessary: Officials of Agency Agree to Reorganization
55 Ray Hebert, “State Inquiry to Be Asked on Monorail: Bonelli to Demand Airing of ‘Fiasco’ Involving
56 Robert Shwery, “Reader Sees Transit Situation as Sign of Government Ineptitude,” Los Angeles Times,
Commerce that the he thought the State ought to wipe the “slate clean” by eliminating LAMTA, claiming that, “We have to start over. The MTA bought a pile of junk in 1957. It’s done nothing more.”\textsuperscript{57} In early 1964, Rees proposed legislation that would end the reign of the LAMTA and reorganize its property under the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD).\textsuperscript{58} The rhetoric between Rees and the LAMTA grew heated as what seemed to be the inevitable demise of the agency drew nearer. LAMTA began advertising in an attempt to swerve public opinion in its direction, but the public was dissatisfied with the bus service it had received and unimpressed by LAMTA’s inability to implement any kind of rapid transit since being created to do just that in 1951. Rees’s rhetoric proved more powerful and persuasive, as he called the LAMTA a “success story” if the tale is one of “misuse of public funds.”\textsuperscript{59}

In May, 1964, under the guidance of State Sen. Thomas Rees, the State Legislature and Gov. Brown agreed that LAMTA should be dissolved in favor of the new SCRTD. Cited as part of the major complaint, Rees notes that LAMTA had spent more than $2 million on studies and surveys—none of which had been implemented.\textsuperscript{60} LAMTA was resigned to “lame duck” status until the SCRTD would take over in August, 1964, which it did. Although its specific mandate was to plan and construct a high-speed monorail system to augment the private automobile and bus transportation in the city, LAMTA managed to usher in the end of private enterprise as the major owner of public

transportation in the county. From the time that LAMTA was created to its end in 1964, it served as the agency responsible for switching public transportation from private to public ownership. And although public ownership of public transportation had some advantages for patrons, the behavior of LAMTA had long-lasting consequences for the state of public transportation in the Los Angeles region—not the least of which was the dramatic increase of fares, a decidedly negative effect on riders. Although the Public Utilities Commission had kept fares artificially low for transit patrons during the period of private ownership, public ownership allowed the tripling of rates in less than 10 years. In the mid-1950s, LAMTA consolidated the privately-owned public transportation in Los Angeles to control regional transit under a single agency to help increase efficiency, lower costs, and improve service. Although LAMTA was originally tasked only with planning and creating a rapid transit system, a monorail or subway to serve the greater L.A. Basin, it was never able to measure up to that task. Instead, LAMTA became an agency that ran the bus system in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties—even though it was never meant to do that. Union concerns, rising costs, and the need to fund expensive rapid transit studies created a situation where the agency was in desperate need of money. Attempting to secure funds, agency leaders attempted to secure tax money in ways that rubbed voters and local Los Angeles politicians wrong. By 1964, Los Angeles was tired of LAMTA and its dysfunction.
SCRTD

The result of the Rees’s reorganization was the Southern California Rapid Transit District. Senate Bill 41 was passed through the legislature and signed into law on May 13, 1964 by Gov. Brown. The bill amended the Public Utilities Code, creating the law that made SCRTD the legal authority over public transportation in Los Angeles. The law itself is critical of LAMTA, citing, “In view of the limited powers of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority…it has become apparent that the authority is unable to solve the transit problems of the Southern California area and provide the needed mass rapid transit systems.”61 A crucial difference between LAMTA and SCRTD rested in the powers of funding available to the latter that the former, as a hodge-podge transit agency acting outside of its purview, was never afforded. SCRTD was able to incur debt, make investments, secure bonds, and—most importantly—submit to the legislature taxation plans that, with legislative or voter approval (depending on the kind of tax), would fund transportation projects.62 LAMTA had created transit plans it thought would serve the region but had been unable to secure funding through appropriate channels. Senate Bill 41 allowed SCRTD the ability to feed itself from more than one source. On September 30, 1964, the transition was considered official and the 3,893 employees, 1,539 buses, 13 divisions, and various buildings, as well as 200 million annual passengers and $145 million in yearly revenues, became the concern of SCRTD.63 The “Certificate of Merger”

61 “Senate Bill No. 41,” May 13, 1964, 2, SCRTD Collection, Box 4, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
62 Ibid., 27–39.
63 Employee and passenger numbers are from “Answers for Questionnaire for Mr. Hideharu Doi,” April 1965, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library; “Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority Fact Sheet,” June 30, 1964, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray
lists, as well as assets, “all the legally enforceable debts and liabilities of Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority.” Real assets and debts aside, SCRTD also took with it the social animosity and disappointment LAMTA had earned in 12 years of general failure.

Despite the massive funding difference, the day-to-day operation of the two agencies stayed similar and included most of the same faces. Positions within LAMTA were shifted, literally, in name only. Board “members” became “directors,” and the “chairman” became the “president”; while the titles had changed, most of the people in the positions remained. Even those who moved out of one job managed to stay involved somehow. A.J. Eyraud, for example, the chairman of LAMTA at its demise, moved into a board position. A new face, Harry Faull, was appointed president of SCRTD and from the beginning his rhetoric took seriously the creation of Los Angeles’ first legitimately-conceived publicly-owned transportation agency, which he said was “created to meet a community need; and fulfill a community demand—construction of an area-wide rapid transit system to complement freeways, highways and surface streets—a ‘Balanced Transportation’ system.” Aware of the love affair Los Angelinos were experiencing with their cars and their freeways, Faull was shrewd to emphasize how the rapid transit

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Transportation Library; “Average Fares (Includes Cash, Token, School Fares, and Tickets); Year 1963,” September 14, 1964, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.

64 “Certificate of Merger of Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority into Southern California Rapid Transit District,” November 5, 1964, SCRTD Collection, Box 4, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.

65 “Differences Between Rules and Regulations Prepared for Southern California Rapid Transit District and Those of Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority,” N.D., SCRTD Collection, Box 4, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.

66 “Minutes of the Formation Meeting, Board of Directors, Southern California Rapid Transit District,” September 30, 1964, SCRTD Collection, Box 4, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.

system he had in mind would be complementary to existing systems. The first of the studies commissioned by SCRTD, in fact, made it clear that SCRTD was in no way going to attempt to subvert or eliminate the freeway system, citing them as the “finest and most extensive in the world; without them, street traffic would come to a halt.” The persuasive argument was only friendly to a point, though: “It has been projected, however, that by 1980, when the freeway system is scheduled to be completed, and the current rate of population growth continues, the freeways will be overburdened far beyond their maximum capacity—if there is no rapid transit to relieve the congestion.” The new tactic of SCRTD was to portray itself as part of the traffic solution, rather than an alternative to independent mobility.

Public affairs and the treatment of the opinions of Los Angelinos were of paramount importance to the new president of SCRTD. He believed that rapid transit was necessary to the region, but also believed that the citizens deserved to be consulted and heard. Faull was aware of the negative view the city held toward LAMTA, with its endless planning and no action, and hoped to overcome this deficiency. As he said in an early interview, “It’s going to take a tremendous selling job, but it has to be done. It’s absolutely necessary that we get started immediately on a transit network to supplement our freeway and highway system.” The Los Angeles Times wrote an editorial at the beginning of 1965 that said much the same thing and tasked SCRTD with shifting public viewpoints on rapid transit, arguing, “Persuading voters may not be easy. But it can be

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68 “Rough Draft of Summary Report,” 1965, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library. This is an amalgam report based on reports by Cloverdale and Colpitts, and Daniel Mann Johnson and Mendenhall.
done if they are convinced that they will be financing a transit system that has been properly planned to meet the unique and changing needs of the metropolitan area.”

To help create support for SCRTD, the agency began right away to fulfill one of its new, legally-mandated requirements: to develop a plan of attack for creating new forms and manners of transportation, and to conceive of these ideas “without limitation.” In November, 1964, SCRTD used its new funding power to secure four $100,000 bonds as the first money taken by the agency in its quest to create the most efficient rapid transit system for the region. But engineers for the district did not want to “re-do” LAMTA planning models that they saw as perfectly usable designs “simply because that work was done prior to the ‘merger date’ under the provisions of the Transit Authority Act rather than after that date under the similar provisions of the District Act.” So new faces aside, SCRTD remained—in operation, planning, and attitude—much the same as LAMTA despite the change in name, management, and rhetoric.

**SCRTD AND FUNDING**

Funding planning expeditions with nearly half a million dollars in bond money was nothing compared to the amount of money that would be necessary to construct a truly useful rapid transit system. Initial reports had indicated to SCRTD that the price tag on completing something like the “backbone route” would be somewhere between $800

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71 “Southern California Rapid Transit District Law, Section 30636,” N.D., SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
72 “Walter J. Braunschweiger (Treasurer’s Bond); Audit No. 981,” November 5, 1964, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
73 “Letter from Musick, Peeler & Garrett, Attorneys at Law, Counsel for SCRTD,” January 7, 1965, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
million and $1 billion. By April, 1965, Thomas Rees, the political engine behind the creation of the district, proposed Senate bills 997 and 998 hoping to start SCRTD with a full wallet to begin construction as soon as possible. SB 997 proposed amending the Unruh-Collier Act to allow for raising the vehicle license fee by 0.5 to 1 percent to be diverted to SCRTD as collateral on a large bond. SB 998 created a need for a 60 percent voter approval on any legislation such as SB 997—but not on 997 itself, which would not have been under the jurisdiction of 998. After much deliberation, 998 passed through the legislature, but 997 failed, due in large part to State Senator Randolph Collier, known as the “father of the freeways.” His influence against SB 997 was known prior to the vote, so SCRTD organized a campaign to sway his opinion. Hundreds of form telegrams were sent from Los Angelinos such as Joseph Eli Kovner, who wrote to Collier, “I hope you will lend your support to the passage of Senate Bill 997. We need the means this legislature provides for effecting construction or rapid transit facilities and improving bus service.” Collier argued that 997 was not available for a general vote and thought citizens should get direct input, likely because he was convinced the voters would reject such a plan. The Los Angeles branch of the Young Republicans were not even interested in seeing the gas tax come to a vote, arguing that it was “fundamentally immoral” to tax

75 “Senate Bill No. 998. Amended in Assembly June 2, 1965; Amended in Senate May 10, 1965,” June 2, 1965, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
76 “Western Union Telegram to The Honorable Randolph Collier, California State Senator, from Joseph Eli Kovner,” June 1965, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
car owners to fund rail projects. SCRTD President Harry Faull did not believe Collier’s motives were so altruistic as enfranchising voters, and claimed he was uninterested in public transit: “[Collier] has done this to us before. He couldn’t care less for public transportation.” The *Los Angeles Times*, a proponent of publicly-owned public transportation by the mid-1960s, nevertheless wrote that Collier’s arguments for turning it down were sound; that the people of Los Angeles deserve a chance to vote for such a large change in state law.

In early 1966, SCRTD was handed two heavy blows regarding funding opportunities. Faull and the Board had tried to get a hold of a percentage of state gas tax funding, arguing that SCRTD was a public utility and entitled to some of that money. A disagreement with the legislature had sent the matter to court out of necessity (there were no bad feelings between the district and the legislature; it was simply a case that there was no precedent for this sort of action). Combined in the same decision, SCRTD had asked to be relieved of its obligation to pay the state diesel tax, thereby lowering its operating costs. The State Superior Court decided against SCRTD on both counts, ruling that the district was not a “public street or highway,” and that Article 26 of the state constitution limited gas tax relief expressly to those uses. A year later, SCRTD and Assemblyman Frank Lanterman of Pasadena tried to amend Article 26 to include the district as an agency eligible for gas tax money; the bill also proposed raising the gas tax by 1¼ cents. Those in favor of the bill argued that the “financing proposed in the

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Lanterman bill clearly poses no threat to freeway construction,” attempting to negate criticisms that SCRTD was trying to steal freeway money.\(^8^1\) The Lanterman bill made it through the Assembly, but was killed in the Senate, another victim of Randolph Collier.\(^8^2\)

Following the failure of SCRTD to get SB 997 passed or to secure gas funds, a pro-transportation group called PRIME (Promote Rapid Transit—Improve Metropolitan Environment) became openly hostile toward the district. PRIME’s chairman, science fiction/mystery writer Ray Bradbury, had originally been concerned in 1964 that SCRTD would “not accomplish a great deal more than did the Transit Authority and we will end up five or six years from now with still too little accomplished by which to get the transportation crisis off our backs. PRIME therefore wishes to insure that the MTA-type fiasco will not happen again.”\(^8^3\) By 1965, PRIME was truly unhappy with SCRTD’s “proposed measures and others, including possible combinations thereof, to be not only insufficient, but relatively unjust in the public interest.” The group, interested in public transportation above and beyond the interests of the automobile, saw SCRTD’s inability to secure funding a matter of political gamesmanship—that the district did not take seriously enough the dire need for transit: “It is insignificant as to whether we like it, or your committee likes it; or whether the highway officials and roadway lobbies like it; or whether the governor or the President likes it. The dilemma dictates the solution and the

\(^8^3\) “Group to Consider Rapid Transit Role,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1964, J1.
measures for obtaining it—not political expediency!” PRIME believed that a bus-based system was inadequate to future needs and argued for a county-wide rapid transit system. In the magazine Pacific Scene, R.H. Richmond attributed the problem personally to SCRTD Executive Director Max Gilliss, and called for “dismissal of the present general manager (executive director) of the Southern California Rapid Transit District, for lack of practical knowledge of transit and related subjects and for deficiency in administrative initiative and tact. (Editor’s Note: he resigned).” By its second birthday SCRTD’s inability to secure funds was costing it allies (even if some were fringe in their transit militancy). Other supporters, such as the Los Angeles Times, believed that the legislature—not SCRTD—was to blame for the issue. “Los Angeles County simply wants the opportunity to solve its complex and worsening transportation problem. The Legislature should not deny us. It is all too clear that an effective rapid transit system cannot be financed entirely out of the farebox. Some tax support is essential.” Whether SCRTD or the legislature was to blame, rapid transit was no nearer to completion than it had been in 1964 largely due to lack of money.

The summer of 1966 was the first time SCRTD had real success in getting some funds from the state government, although nowhere near the amount necessary for completing the rapid transit system the leadership had in mind. By this time, SCRTD had re-used the “backbone route” and honed it into a 64-mile “Master Plan” they hoped

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84 “Statement of the PRIME Foundation of Los Angeles, Submitted to the Assembly Committee on Transportation and Commerce,” November 8, 1965, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
86 “Breakthrough on Transit Funds,” Los Angeles Times, May 27, 1965, A4, SCRTD Collection, Box 5, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
would be everything citizens of Los Angeles County would need. A new bill before the legislature, SB 2, was written to divert $3.9 million in tideland oil revenues directly to SCRTD to begin the final engineering work needed to make the rapid transit in L.A. ready for voter approval. The legislature approved SB 2 and sent it to Gov. Brown, who signed it, securing the first substantial state funding for transit in Los Angeles. SCRTD Board Member Jack Gilstrap wrote to his fellow board members that, “All in all, the 1966 legislative session can be considered a successful one for the District. For the first time since MTA/SCRTD became into being, the Legislature enacted rapid transit financing legislation.”

The Herald Examiner, a more conservative newspaper than the Los Angeles Times, argued that Randolph Collier had not steered the state wrong with freeways and their belief was that his opinion was to be given increased credibility.

The Los Angeles-Orange County area will someday need a mass rapid transit system but we are in the fortunate position, thanks for our freeway network, of being able to wait a few years and study all possible alternatives before we commit ourselves to a system that will require an enormous initial outlay. We think it possible that as a result of the experience of San Francisco and other cities, a better answer may be found for this area than a subway rail system.

The editorial argued that Bay Area Rapid Transit in San Francisco, although funded by bridge toll money to augment state funds, was experiencing overspending. Moreover, the opinion piece is critical of the high price tag of more “plans.” The rhetoric was not far off. Since 1911, various government enterprises had commissioned 74 surveys of the Los

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87 “Letter from Jack Gilstrap to Members of the SCRTD Board of Directors,” July 11, 1966, SCRTD Collection, Box 9, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
Angeles region in the hopes of developing a network that would satisfy the spread-out population. Unless SCRTD created the system it wanted, it would just be funding the 75th.

This good news was not very long for the headlines. The end of the year report for 1965 showed SCRTD was working with an annual operating deficit of $4 million. Supporters of transit—including L.A. Mayor Sam Yorty—argued that the County Board of Supervisors should help SCRTD fill its gap, equaling a 83-cent raise in county property taxes for residents. At Yorty’s urging, the Supervisors did pay for one year’s worth of SCRTD’s operating gap on the promise that their winning funding ticket was just around the corner. But the frank discussion from within SCRTD makes it clear that there was some frustration with the difficulties associated with bringing mass transit to Los Angeles.

Where did the 1965 deficit come from? Well, for one thing we had a sharp drop in patronage during and immediately after the South Central Los Angeles Riots, accounting for a drop in revenue or about $400,000. Over the year, we carried fewer passengers—and yet the number of miles operated rose to 54,129,000 in 1965, compared with 53,755,000 in 1964. The cost of wages and employee welfare rose by half a million dollars in 1965, despite a 3 percent reduction in the number of District employees. And wages and employee benefits amount to nearly three-fourths of all expenses.

1966 showed a similar budget shortfall, this time blamed on rising employee costs. The threat of strikes, ever present, was usually ended when SCRTD raised wages. But this sword cut SCRTD both ways, which was forced to raise rates in 1967 by 30 cents in order to help eliminate the shortfall. Board Member A.J. Eyraud summed up the paradox of this situation

92 “Remarks of Cone T. Bass, General Manager, Southern California Rapid Transit District, before the Southern California Planning Congress,” July 14, 1966, SCRTD Collection, Box 8, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
following a fare increase: “With every increase in fares there is a reduction in patronage and every person who rejects public transportation adds one automobile to our already congested freeways and streets.” LAMTA had experienced the same issues and had tried to solve the problem through raising fares, which it did by 300 percent from 1957 to 1964. LAMTA’s ridership fell dramatically between 1947 and 1958 (from 468 million annual passengers to 182 million) and SCRTD was trying to solve problems in the same way its predecessor had—with equally unsuccessful tactics. The private automobile was the central nemesis fingered by Cloverdale & Colpitts as the reason transit was losing passengers.

Adding on to that unpleasant situation, SCRTD’s detractors became bolder. State freeway planner E.T. Telford argued, “The total effect of any other transportation mode on the freeway will not be noticeable,” continuing, “even if a mixed rail system is built and a great many people use it, the percentage it eliminates from the over-all transportation demand will have no measurable impact on freeway and street systems.”

Moreover, mixed signals erupted from local business sources, who spent $150,000 to promote the use of the freeway system, which, at this point, was the nation’s largest. In explaining their aims, the Chamber of Commerce said, “We’re for rapid transit, but we

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95 Electric Railway Historical Association of Southern California, “MTA Ticket Examples.”
do not feel that gasoline taxes should be used for anything other than highways—just as the constitution provides,” citing the court decision to back up their argument.98

A SHOT AT SUCCESS—MEASURE A

In 1968, Assemblyman Frank Lanterman proposed AB 101: raising the Los Angeles County sales tax rate by ½ of 1 percent to help pay for the “Master Plan.”99 Although there was heavy opposition from the usual proponents of the freeway system, such as Randolph Collier, Lanterman and SCRTD were optimistic about getting what they viewed as a small tax approved by legislators.100 Their optimism was unfounded and AB 101 died quietly in committee without even coming before the full body for a vote.101 The State Senate quickly reconsidered an amended AB 101 that required L.A. County voters to decide on the sales tax increase. The bill passed with a simple majority vote.102 The new Governor of California, Ronald Reagan, signed the financing bill and said, “This bill is particularly significant, because it offers a method of funding rail transit and encourages a broader state role in balanced transportation planning. By its enactment, state government has accepted the fact that we need many forms of transportation in order to best serve the needs of the public.”103 The bill required (thanks to the passage of SB 998 in 1965) a 60 percent majority vote by the voters in the county and was to be Measure A for the

November 1968 ballot. Measure A included the bond to pay for the project as well as the $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1 percent sales tax increase necessary to secure the loan.

SCRTD, overjoyed at the possibility, set to work on a publicity campaign to convince the public to pass the sales tax increase. The district used television to its advantage and created a half-hour infomercial to explain the financial ramifications of Measure A, the need for rapid transit, and how it would benefit the entire county. In “Transportation: Who Needs It?” the SCRTD cast Paul Lynde (of *Bewitched* and *Hollywood Squares* fame) as a “professional skeptic” who is leading a mob of transit naysayers against public transportation with the mantra, “Who Needs It!” L.A. newscaster Ralph Story is cast as the good, calm, prepared arbiter of transit truth, discussing the merits of transportation in the region by explaining: “Story’s Law: In a Metropolis, EVERYBODY Benefits from Public Transportation.” To answer Story’s claims that public transportation is a “community affair,” Lynde fires back: “In other communities, maybe. Not in L.A. Los Angeles is different. Just look around. Los Angeles grew up around the automobile. We have a beautiful freeway system. It answers all our needs. So I repeat, public transportation: Who Needs It!” In the end, of course, Story’s reason overcomes the anti-transit mob, arguing the social benefits of providing transportation (to the elderly, the disabled, those with no cars, and those without licenses), the benefits to those who could ride instead of drive, and the savings to the community as a whole.\textsuperscript{104} Although the pitch was oriented toward bus service, it spoke to the promise that mass rail

transit systems might have toward eliminating traffic congestion. Streetcar service was totally eliminated in 1963, meaning buses were the only option.\textsuperscript{105}

But the cultural stubbornness behind Lynde’s snarky responses is a perfect illustration of Amos Rapoport’s arguments that meanings of and protection over spaces within the built environment are developed and interpreted by the community. Rapoport argues that once a cultural space is defined, its community will interpret the definition as normative and act to defend reinterpretations or challenges to the developed space.\textsuperscript{106} So while the film is an interesting bit of persuasive propaganda created by SCRTD to help convince voters that Measure A was worth voting for, the representation of the built environment by the detractors of rapid transit illustrates the severity of the attachment to place that was at least one reason rapid public transportation had been difficult to institute in Los Angeles since the advent of the car and the creation of the freeway system. That SCRTD was directly fighting and demeaning this mentality is further proof of its cultural power; the district was aware that they would need to defeat this social construction in order to make real headway in public transportation.

To augment the film, SCRTD created a “Final Report,” detailing the projected costs of the finished “Master Plan,” which called for a series of light rail lines spanning the County. What began as $800 million in 1965 had ballooned (although not terribly) to $1.2 billion. Inflation had increased the price tag, but the 1968 plan included an


additional 22 stations along the five-corridor route. This amount of money was staggering and would have represented the largest bond ever taken in the history of California governance. But the materials for creating the system were even more staggering. Project Manager P.J. Iovin briefly listed “some of the quantities involved in the work” as: “Excavation, 6,000,000 cubic yards; Cement, 1,824,000 barrels; Lumber, 35,000,000 board feet; Reinforcing Steel, 140,000 tons; Structural Steel, 160,000 tons; Fabricated Steel Liner, 180,000 tons; Misc. Metals, 20,000 tons; Steel Rails, 60,000 tons.


107 “SCRTD Final Report.”
108 Southern California Rapid Transit District, Transportation: Who Needs It?
Total construction manhours in excess of 40,000,000.” The “Master Plan” represented the culmination of nearly 20 years of Los Angeles transportation planning between two agencies and dozens on studies.

Several community groups formed in support of Measure A, including one that spent $750,000 on a publicity campaign to help SCRTD convince Los Angelinos that transit was the way to go. Most of those on the side of transit looked to a Stanford Research Institute study that indicated the “Master Plan” system would bring a return on the investment by the County to the tune of an estimated $117 million in annual revenues at the farebox—even after repaying the bond at $136 million each year. The SRI study estimated that rapid transit would save L.A. County residents $40 million in travel time, $46 million in car costs, and $23 million in parking alone. Stanford researcher Dan Haney argued, “This will be the opportunity that rapid transit will present for the community to regain control of its urban environment and to shape the land use closer to its desires.” Even Gov. Reagan, who had defeated Pat Brown on a platform of sending “the welfare bums back to work,” supported funding SCRTD and threw his support behind Measure A. As he said: “A vote for transit is not a vote against freeways or automobiles, as anti-transit publicity campaigns continually claim. Freeways are essential, but a balanced transportation system must be developed if cities are ever to

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overcome the worsening problems of traffic congestion and air pollution.”

The “Final Report” echoed many of these sentiments, arguing that Angelinos had come to realize the urgent need for rail rapid transit, that property owners shouldn’t bear the burden alone, and that Measure A would allow the District to expand bus service into underserved areas and increase frequency. All in all, RTD was convinced Measure A would pass because of its holistic appeal to basically every county resident. But the cant was not all on the side of SCRTD; their detractors were varied and many.

Especially on the west side of town, where public transportation in the “Master Plan” was less present, cities were vocally against Measure A. In September, 1968, three months before the vote, the San Fernando Valley Chambers of Commerce unanimously voted their opposition to the bill and vowed to see its defeat on November 4.

The following day, the Santa Monica City Council voted to oppose the bill on the basis that it was “astronomically costly,” arguing, “In the present case, the entire county is being asked to finance into perpetuity a real estate and business promotion for the metropolitan core.”

The Automobile Club of Southern California was especially honest in its disdain for the “Master Plan.” The Club successfully lobbied hardest against a bill in the State Legislature that would have reduced the 60 percent majority necessary to pass Measure A to a simple majority vote; the bill wanted to lighten the voter restrictions to ease the passage of Measure A. However, the Club president at the time, Asa Call, thought he understood the dynamics of Southern California voters and felt that by simply explaining

the general cost to L.A. County voters, Measure A would be defeated. Call believed, and wrote in a *Los Angeles Times* editorial, that, “The proposed transit $2.5 billion bond issue would be the largest bond ever proposed in the State of California for any purpose. There should be a clear mandate from the people before any such indebtedness could be incurred.”¹¹⁷ Although the bond itself was in the amount of $1.2 billion, Measure A would have been a total of nearly $2.5 billion over the course of the loan, with interest. Predictably, those in favor of Measure A said it was $1.2 billion. Those against said it really cost $2.5 billion.

Just before the vote in November, two RAND corporation economists wrote a report that completely countermanded the arguments in the Stanford Research Institute study from earlier in the year. It argued that the “Master Plan” would not provide an economic boost to the region: “There will not only be many citizens (if not a majority) who will find the costs to exceed the benefits, but also that on balance the costs to the community as a whole will exceed the benefits.”¹¹⁸ A taxpayers group ostensibly watching after the interests of “those in lower economic brackets” argued that the SCRTD plan would only remove 2 percent of the daily total of cars from the streets and freeways and was, therefore, not a sound economic investment.¹¹⁹ Although the California State and Los Angeles City governments were both vocally in favor of

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Measure A, it seemed that citizens and local city groups against the measure were gaining more headway in the publicity push in the final days prior to the vote.

On November 4, 1968, Measure A was defeated. While the bill required a 60 percent majority to carry the day, the 1,068,679 votes for it fell far short of the 1,319,967 votes against it. Following the defeat, SCRTD resigned itself to running and improving bus transportation in its area of responsibility. The district was largely quiet for more than a decade. Measure A’s defeat and the failure to create rapid transit in 1968 inspired Los Angeles County to create the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, which took away all of the legal authority SCRTD had to create and institute rapid transit in Los Angeles. LACTC became the planning head and SCRTD became the operations head of the transportation bicephaly in Los Angeles. In 1980, another Measure A was on the ballot to fund a rapid transit project; this time, voters passed the bond, funding the light rail and subway systems that now exist in the city.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the assumption of busing by LAMTA and the creation of SCRTD indicate a clear shift in the interpretation by Angelinos of the social responsibility of a county or municipality to maintain a public transportation system, the financial impediments that halted the expansion of rapid transit indicate an unwillingness to relent to even limited government expansion. The diminishment of support for government housing in the Cold War era illustrated by Don Parsons is not exactly mirrored in the experience of transit in

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120 Eric Malnic, “Rapid Transit Bonds Lose by Wide Margin: Juvenile Hall, Convention Center Issues Also Fail; City Officials’ Pay Hike Beaten,” Los Angeles Times, November 7, 1968, 20.
L.A., but the notable and continuing concern over the role of government in transportation and the limitations seen in the failure of Measure A, especially, coincide with a remaining vein of an unremitting fear of socialism brought on by Cold War anxiety. People like Roy Houston, who wrote, “There is no such thing as a perfect government agency or bureau, and those who say there is will bear watching,” or Catherine Morgan, who believed “hinting as they do, or actually coming out in favor of public ownership, [some] seem to think government ownership is a cure-all for all transit troubles. Socialism of that kind just doesn’t appeal to me,” illustrate an important sentiment that influenced how people interpreted social responsibility in providing public transportation. Moreover, much of the stated “need” for rapid transit was diminished by the ever-present, competent, expanded bus service provided by publicly-owned public transit. By 1968, buses had been providing timely and dependable transportation throughout the county with few gaps for 20 years, undermining the arguments that Los Angeles was in dire straits when it came to transit. Indeed, city traffic engineers and operations managers triumphed the bus’ practicality, cost, flexibility, speed, and even its ability to diminish pollution (despite the earliest uninformed opinions on bus contribution to smog). Moreover, public ownership of transit increased public access to planning and operations management because their local elected officials could be emboldened or frightened off by organized support or opposition for transit within their constituency.

The argument for rider-directed transportation is seen in this period of L.A. transit history more in the choices being made by citizens for what they didn’t want, rather than what they did—at least in part propelled by a sense of municipal egotism and the dear that Los Angeles was going to suffer economically and socially if it continued to allow the face of its public transportation to be a bus. Although transit riders did not direct the movement into an entirely new technology (as the jitney did, illustrated in chapter 1), nor did they direct the initial foray into public ownership (as they did direct the use and expansion of busing through patronage, as demonstrated in chapter 2), riders did control the path of public ownership in conforming to a set of ideological principles dominant within American culture in the post-WWII era by limiting funding and voting against transit plans they believed extended beyond the realm of the appropriate role of government. In this way, riders continued to wield power over the type and direction of transportation in Los Angeles—most especially in their unstated approval of bus service throughout the County seen in the refusal to replace bus service with any number of rapid transit plans proposed by LAMTA and SCRTD from 1954 through 1968. Certainly a source of complaint and sometimes ridicule for its bulk or its diesel fumes, riders continued to maintain their allegiance to busing in Los Angeles through the understanding that it remained—despite it all—the transportation source that best suited the needs of Angelinos. But as far as ranking this era of public ownership against earlier eras of private public transportation, riders were granted the least amount of influence—especially regarding fare control and system impact in bus resources. The complete fixation on rapid transit at the expense of busing is, at least partially, born out of municipal egotism and disregard for riders themselves.
Epilogue: Shifting Interpretations of Social Responsibility in Transit

The history of Los Angeles public transit continues to be written. This epilogue was created to earmark two areas worthy of future research into L.A. urban studies to demonstrate the continuing areas of inquiry available and necessary within the subject: the return of light rail in the 1980s and the present-day challenge to public transportation seen in ridesharing companies, such as Uber and Lyft. Both of the topics examined here are researched and argued continuing the theme of rider agency provided throughout the dissertation—and illustrate that while the character and demographics of the Los Angeles public transit rider has changed in a century of urban development, the impulse of riders to determine and shape the sort of transportation they use has not. Although brief, I believe this early research demonstrates the argumentative refrains I have made regarding rider agency, regarding municipal egotism, and regarding the shifting element of social responsibility that public transportation represents in the ongoing debate about public versus private ownership in transit.

In 1980, an important shift occurred, cementing the interpretation of public transportation in Los Angeles as a social responsibility. The passage of Proposition A in 1980 (and its continuation with Proposition C in 1990), which placed rail throughout Los Angeles, were costly and ambitious projects that could only have been assumed by a citizenry that believed it was among their social duties to provide transportation options in the urban environment. A 1954 LAMTA-commissioned transit studies had estimated that the
population of L.A. County would near 8 million in 1980.\footnote{Ruscardon Engineers, \textit{Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles: Part II: Traffic, Population and Economic Data}, 19.} In 1968 SCRTD transit analysts believed the population of the Greater L.A. area would be 23 million by 2000.\footnote{“SCRTD Final Report,” 21. This number included L.A., Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties.} In truth, both of these estimates were close enough to accurate.\footnote{In 1980, L.A. County had a population of 7.5 million. And in 2000, the Southern California population was 16.25 million. See: U.S. Bureau of the Census, “California Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990,” March 27, 1995, \texttt{http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ca190090.txt}; “Population of Counties in California: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Maps, Statistics, Demographics - CensusViewer,” accessed June 17, 2014, \texttt{http://censusviewer.com/counties/CA/2000}.} The concern over such a dramatic population increase—and the accompanying growth of automobile use by the enlarged public—meant that what failed in 1968 passed in 1980. The Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) planned and successfully lobbied voters to pass Prop. A, a half-cent sales tax increase in L.A. County funding 160 miles of rail (both light and heavy, some at street grade and some subway). It was conceived as the network of interconnected rail along the routes previously suggested by Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority and Southern California Rapid Transit District—the so-called “backbone” route.\footnote{Jack Birkinshaw, “Transit Tax Rode Rail Route to Victory, Area-by-Area Study of Voting Reveals,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, November 16, 1980, V1.} But the 1980 plan was not enough money to build the full system planners envisioned, nor were routes specifically outlined for the public. In 1990, Prop. C was proposed and passed by voters; another half-cent sales tax, this proposal was accompanied by a map of routes.\footnote{Ronald B. Taylor, “2 Transit Plans Get $550-Million Tax Boost from Voters,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, November 8, 1990, VCB7.} The rail network was now nearly fully funded and built in segments through the 2000s, resulting in the system Los Angeles has now: Metro Rail, operated by Los Angeles Country Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro).
The excitement and construction of rail seemed to leave the bus system in Los Angeles as though an older sibling of a newborn. After all, transit planners from three agencies had been trying to reinstitute a rail system of some kind in L.A. since 1954, so successful funding and planning after a 25-year battle was greeted with great joy. Proposition A required 25 percent of the tax money be used on rail projects. The limitations on Proposition C said only 10 percent of the acquired funds could be used on rail projects. But in both propositions, 40 percent of the money was labeled as “discretionary funds” which could be dispersed as LACTC felt was best. In the case of L.A. transit funding in the 1980s and 1990s, “discretionary funds” were used exclusively on rail improvements while the bus

FIGURE 36: 1990 Proposition C Voter Materials, Los Angeles County Transportation Commission. LACTC Collection, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library.
system languished in disrepair, with aging equipment, overfull coaches, and service cuts.\textsuperscript{6} Meanwhile, as SCRTD and LACTC were combined into Metro in 1992 to smooth out the divisions between having separate planning and operations agencies, Metro pleaded poverty and raised fares by 23 percent in September of 1994.\textsuperscript{7} This inspired bus riders—who outnumbered rail riders 10 to 1—to organize a lawsuit against Metro on the grounds that the agency was engaged in “transit racism.” As most of the city’s 500,000 bus riders were people of color, the community-based Bus Riders Union (BRU) and the Labor/Community Strategy Center sued Metro under a civil rights class action claim on behalf of L.A.’s poor and minority transit users to halt the fare increase on the grounds that such behavior was discriminatory.\textsuperscript{8} The BRU was formed in 1989 by community organizers who had previously worked to keep automobile plants opened in the San Fernando Valley and focused their attention on “civil rights, environmental justice, public health, global warming, and the criminal justice system.”\textsuperscript{9} For the BRU, it seemed discriminatory on its face to allocate the dominant portion of funds toward rail projects with low ridership statistics while allowing poor and minority bus riders to deal with polluting, aging equipment and then worse to ask bus riders to pay more for service that was worsening while Metro chose to spend its discretionary funds on rail rather than bus. In his book, \textit{Seeking Spatial Justice}, Edward Soja discusses the needs of the “transit-dependent poor,” arguing that the type of work they engage in (multiple jobs, often, ...
requiring transportation to various locations) lends itself to “flexible, multimodal, and densely meshed bus networks” rather than the rail projects which work to shuttle white collar workers to and from the urban core. BRU believed Metro’s choice to embrace rail had come at the expense of bus service which was a better source of transit for existing riders than rail could possibly be, considering the geography of the Basin and the various routes riders needed to use to get from home to job to job and back.

The BRU and Metro settled in 1996, ending a two-year struggle with a victory for the bus riders. Concessions included a return to lower fare pricing, purchase of 1,000 new environmentally-friendly buses over a five-year period, expansion of busing into underserved areas of the County, and ridership limits on standing patrons to ensure against overcrowding. Beyond a win for community activism, the BRU success is another example of riders adjusting Los Angeles transit to meet its needs. As it had done with jitneys, the consent decree is the result of riders using the tools they had at their disposal to craft transit into a form that suited their preferences. The agreement also put forward an additional factor of growing import to Angelinos in the mid-1990s: environmentalism. The insistence on environmentally-responsible buses using less pollutant fuel—compressed natural gas—illustrates that riders wanted transit to be acceptable to them on both practical and ideological bases. Metro complied and now advertises its services as the “Nation’s Largest Clean Air Fleet” on the side of all of its buses. As with jitney patronage, the BRU organized an economic boycott of Metro

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10 Soja, Seeking Spatial Justice, xvi.
12 The environmental impact of transit on the city had been circulating since the mid-1960s, as my previous references to smog discussed in chapter 2.
service and voted with their fares to adjust service to their desires. The slogan “No Seat, No Fare” and chants of “Hey, hey, MTA. The bus is overcrowded, we won’t pay” were used at protest rallies staged when Metro struggled to comply with the consent decree and build its rail system in the late 1990s. In the end, Metro purchased 800 buses more than the agreement called for, a success for the BRU and for rider-directed transit.¹³

Another example of the shift toward the interpretation of transit as a social responsibility is the passage of Measure R in 2008, another funding device to grow rail services and freeway widening throughout the County. Measure R passed with 67 percent

http://www.thestrategycenter.org/project/bus-riders-union/old-bru-site

SP stands for “Sindicato de Pasajeros,” the Spanish name for the BRU.

of the vote, a greater margin of victory than either Proposition A or Proposition C. The November 2008 election was, coincidentally, the same ballot that included the winning statewide California High-Speed Rail (Proposition 1A).14 Although Measure R was largely designed as a funding source for new rail projects and expansions of existing rail lines (most specifically the Eastside Expansion of the Gold Line into Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles and the Expo Line from downtown to Culver City via USC), the Measure also called for 20 percent of the funding to be diverted to “countywide bus service operations, maintenance, and expansion.”15 The 30-year estimation of rail expenditure was nearly $14 billion, but nearly $8 billion in attention to bus service over the same period shows a lesson learned from the Bus Riders Union lawsuit in the mid-1990s: planning for the future with rail projects is a good idea, but not at the expense of bus service which remains the preferred transportation source of the vast majority of transit-riding Angelinos. As of May 2014, rail and bus ridership provided by Metro have remained consistent for the past three years: buses account for nearly four times the average daily boardings of rail service with 1.2 million compared to 340,000.16

The fight to reinstitute rail service in Los Angeles waged almost in spite of its citizens represents a continuing crisis of character Los Angeles has experienced since its inception as an Anglo-American settlement in the late nineteenth century. As Kevin Starr argues in Material Dreams, L.A. concocted a “deliberately fashioned identity” as the

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“latest and most promising English-speaking city on the planet.”

His examples range from the Los Angeles Aqueduct to the film industry, but could easily have included the Pacific Electric Railway which by 1920 was the world’s largest interurban system with more than 1,000 miles of track spanning into four Southern California counties. The esteem of this distinction is precisely the sort of honor Los Angeles strove for, and is present in the sentiment that a modern character should be the goal of L.A.’s urban environment seen in the *Major Traffic Street Plan* (1924), the *Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan* (1925), the *Report on a Rapid Transit System for Los Angeles* (1933), *Interregional, Regional, Metropolitan Parkways in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area* (1946), and the SCRTD *Final Report* (1968). Jeremiah Axelrod studies this impulse in his examination of how planners worked to craft the built environment in Los Angeles into something citizens would identify as distinct and significant. The *Report to the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority in a Monorail Rapid Transit Line for Los Angeles* (1954) is especially guilty of identity insecurity, listing L.A. as a third-place finisher behind New York and Chicago “transportationwise,” and discussing how that ignoble position might be remedied. The freeway system in Southern California helped to regain some measure of international renown in its scope and breadth, but also became

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the “symbol of a common urban malaise” seen in the resource use, space allocation, pollution, decentralization, white flight, ghettoization, and even social alienation of automobile culture and freeway design.\textsuperscript{22} The influence of the environmental movement cannot be exaggerated, as well, creating a sense of nostalgia for transportation devices that seemed to be environmentally-friendly compared to legions of gas-powered automobiles and diesel-burning buses.\textsuperscript{23} Air quality had been a growing problem since the early 1940s, and worsened into the 1970s.\textsuperscript{24} During the Proposition A campaign in 1980, eliminating “chocking smog” and endeavoring for “energy conservation” were chief arguments for creating a countywide rail system.\textsuperscript{25} All of this contributed to the rather unfair characterization of the bus as part of the problem—rather than an integral component to smog reduction and a device to combat car culture’s worst crimes.

The Measure J campaign in 2012 (an addition to Measure R for a longer time period) maintained all of these elements when L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa stumped for more rail throughout the County, saying: “It means making Los Angeles the capital of sustainability, not smog”; “It means remaking the face of L.A. and finally taking us beyond sprawl”; and “The most diverse city in the world [will be] drawn together by a world-class transit system.”\textsuperscript{26} Villaraigosa’s sentiments were unable to sway the public, but Measure J failed by less than 1 percent of the needed 65 percent needed to pass the
tax extension. The influence of environmentalism, community-building in the wake of automobile alienation, and an undying fear that Los Angeles isn’t a “world-class” city are all present in the rationale the mayor employed in arguing for an expanded use of rail.

An ever-present theme in the rail-versus-bus debate of the last 35 years in Los Angeles transportation planning is the implicit understanding that the bus is the refuge of poor people with no other options. The growth of private automobile ownership served to separate the users of public transit; while most Angelinos used public transportation in the early to mid-century, as more people opted to drive in cars the primary users of transit became those who were unable to afford their own automobiles (or the small number of so-called “choice riders” who opted for transit out of some ulterior motive, such as environmentalism). In *Imagining Transit*, Sikivu Hutchinson argues, “As one drives past the MTA bus stops on an early weekday morning ‘they’—the bus riders—are invisible to the street traffic, testimony to the otherworldly economy of L.A.’s sidewalks, to the now-clichéd observations that ‘nobody’ walks in L.A.,” capturing the sentiment that transit users are a group in the lower caste—a subaltern group deemed less worthy by dominant classes because of their inability to function within the dominant car culture of Southern California. The cultural interpretation of buses as the acceptable domain only for poor people is deeply rooted, if easily dismissed. Jacquelyn Carr, a recent college graduate, started work at a talent agency in Hollywood in 2006 but was soon unable to make the payments on her new car and resorted to public transit, saying she was initially worried

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she would be out of place: “I felt like I was too good for the bus. I think there’s a social understanding and a construction around that if you take the bus, you take it because you don’t have any money. There’s a social standard. Obviously I had bought into that.”

This social perception is so prevalent that transit professionals have to work to counteract the stigma when devising new busing service. When the Orange Line in the San Fernando Valley opened, the marketing angle taken by Metro was to equate the bus to a train because, as Metro Art Director Maya Emsden told the *New York Times*, “People tend to think a bus is a lower-class system.”

*San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Caille Millner assessed the situation even more bluntly: “They simply don’t like to be in the


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same space as poor people.”

In a 2010 complaint, the Bus Riders Union alleged that Metro had violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by persisting in “cutting service to predominantly low-income and minority bus riders. At the same time, Metro has not only maintained but actually increased the service it provides to rail riders, which are more than twice as likely to be White and far less likely to live in poverty.” Specifically, the 5 percent service cuts made by Metro in the 5 years after the 1996 consent decree had ended were in areas where riders were 91 percent minority and 70 percent low-income. Although the U.S. Department of Transportation did not agree with the BRU that Metro had acted discriminatorily (on the grounds that Metro had provided community outreach prior to service cuts), the federal government suggested Metro should take care to avoid future cuts that disproportionately affected low-income riders.

The years since 1980 have shown a dedication to transit as a public responsibility (rather than a private entrepreneurial opportunity), and municipal, state, and federal funds have been spent to secure comprehensive transportation options in Los Angeles in league with that line of thinking, although this energy was not always directed in ways that riders believed were in their best interests. As the BRU lawsuit, consent decree, and continued activity at Metro Board meetings challenging cuts and service changes

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32 Bus Riders Union; Labor/Community Strategy Center, Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance and Los Angeles Community Action Network v. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 1 (United States Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration 2010).
33 Ibid., 14.
34 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, “Title VI Compliance Review of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro)” (The DMP Group, LLP, December 2011).
demonstrates, riders have persisted in making their preferences and demands known, using whatever means possible to orchestrate a rider-oriented transit system in Los Angeles.

**UBER, LYFT, AND SIDECAR**

Rider-directed transit is currently enjoying a revolution in point-to-point transportation akin to the jitney craze of the 1910s—and equally inspired by technological advances of the age. The parallels are eerie, in fact, including similar battles between entrenched existing transportation and upstart would-be transit providers. Coinciding with the dramatic growth of smart phone technology, application-based ridesharing companies started using the interconnectivity and networking available within the ether of the Internet to create new transportation options beyond established transit companies. The most well publicized—and most contentious—is Uber, a venture-capital start-up that created an app to provide an alternative to traditional point-to-point taxi service as “part-time limo drivers.” Riders request a ride through the app, an Uber-associated driver gets the call, conducts the ride, and payment is made through the app; Uber takes its cut and the driver is paid later. Traditional taxi companies made the first noises, arguing that Uber was operating a taxi service in all but name only, and that the “limo service” cover was a thin attempt to avoid taxi regulations and safety laws that are the product of literally centuries of cab service. Uber argues it only puts people together—it doesn’t provide the vehicles, making it something different altogether. Taxi companies have tried to turn this difference with traditional cabs (which are largely uniform within a fleet, and owned and maintained by a central company) to their advantage by suggesting that Uber
automobiles are potentially dangerous. Cabbies also argue that there is no oversight for driver conduct, that surge pricing harms consumers, and that cabs have rules to follow that Uber doesn’t for operating what is essentially the same service. Uber claims that taxi service is experiencing a revolution thanks to technology, and that the traditional way of doing business is lashing out against a smarter, more efficient, more attractive business model. Travis Kalanick, Uber’s CEO, says cab companies are a protectionist scheme endorsed by city governments that artificially limit taxi medallions to ensure pricing is fixed, and that they “prefer not to compete at all and like things the way they are.”

In California, Uber and other ridesharing companies (such as Lyft and SideCar, which operate similarly to Uber) were regulated by the Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) in late 2013 to try to answer some of the complaints of taxi companies by creating a new category of common carrier called “Transportation Network Companies” which would require: state licensing of each driver, criminal background checks, training programs, liability insurance in the amount of $1 million per incident, company licensing with the State, and vehicle inspections. In Chicago—where taxi companies are a greater part of local transportation culture than in Los Angeles—the local government took the regulatory problem under advisement and drafted a proposal that was much the same as the CPUC, but taxi companies were displeased that regulators weren’t working to banish the likes of Uber and Lyft entirely. The CEO of Yellow Cab Co. said, “What we have

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here is an administration that is proposing an ordinance that would set up a segregated class of transportation that excludes the vast majority of the Chicago riding public, including the sick and underprivileged, disabled and people without credit cards.” Chicago cab companies were in the midst of lawsuits against Uber at the state level, and were even considering suing the City of Chicago for not protecting their city-approved monopoly in the face of “illegal taxi service.”

If this debate seems familiar, it should. The jitneys of the 1910s were castigated along the same lines a century earlier. Jitneys were attacked when their use of new technology achieved a threatening level to entrenched transportation companies that—like cab companies now threatened by Uber—ran to local government pleading for severe regulation under the auspices of public safety. At the apex of national jitney regulation, municipalities carved out rules requiring: licensing, vehicle inspections, insurance bonds, and fees to the city and state. Like Uber in the modern era, jitneys were interpreted by established transportation as dangerous, jitney drivers unprofessional, and even potentially hazardous to the weaker sex. In jitneys, women were subjected to cigarette smoke, lewd conversation, and forced even to sit upon men’s laps in dimly-lit automobile backseats…or so Pacific Electric wanted people to believe. In San Francisco, in early 2014, Trevor Johnson (a director of the San Francisco Cab Drivers Association and anti-Uber advocate) said, “Would you feel comfortable if you had a 21-year-old daughter living alone in the city, using a smartphone app to get in a vehicle for hire, and that

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vehicle ends up being a 2001 Chevy Astro van with 300,000 miles on it?38 The arguments remain the same, only this time it’s a rickety van that will kidnap away your daughter for rape or worse rather than the unwanted advances of smoking men.

In June 2014 the Department of Motor Vehicles for the Commonwealth of Virginia determined that Uber and Lyft lacked the proper authority to operate within the state on the grounds that their services—the peer-to-peer ridesharing outside the typical dispatch and medallion taxi system—are unacceptable to the law. Lyft produced a statement pleading the general shortsightedness of the decision: “Current regulations surrounding taxis and limos were created before anything like Lyft's peer-to-peer model was ever imagined,” and hoped they might come to some accord with state officials on how ridesharing can move forward. Virginia police were instructed to ticket drivers operating what the state has determined is an illegal taxi service.39 Uber responded to the decision by dropping prices in the District of Columbia by 25 percent and released a new advertising spot that included Tysons Corner, Virginia as a destination served by the company, clearly defying the decision by the Virginia State DMV—and hoping their drivers, who are non-contract freelancers, will continue to operate despite the threat of ticketing. Virginia was the first state to entirely ban ride-sharing, but Miami, Orlando, and Austin are municipalities that have barred the practice. As with Virginia, both Uber and

38 Stone, “Invasion of the Taxi Snatchers: Uber Leads and Industry’s Disruption.”
Lyft encouraged their drivers to violate municipal regulations by offering low prices and free rides to scare up new riders.⁴⁰

Even as this dissertation closes in on its filing date, the future of ridesharing companies is a hotly-debated topic. In early January 2015, the California Department of Motor Vehicles issued a memo that determined drivers for ridesharing companies such as Lyft, Sidecar, and Uber were in need of commercial registration because the vehicles were “used or maintained for the transportation of persons for hire” based on a 1935 statute. Lyft and Sidecar spokespeople issued statements arguing peer-to-peer

transportation was generally a side business for its drivers and that a commercial registration at an annual cost of $1,000 or more was a violation of the niche the CPUC had carved out to allow ridesharing companies the opportunity to operate. On January 23, 2015 the DMV issued a retraction of its statement that ridesharing vehicles required commercial license plates. California DMV Director Jean Shiomoto wrote that “there remains uncertainly about the interaction and effect of this [1935] law governing vehicle registration requirements with the more recent regulatory and statutory changes affecting ride share operators” and that the DMV had “jumped the gun” in setting a policy for ridesharing operators.

As with jitneys in the early twentieth century, riders are using Uber and Lyft. Although the trip itself is not altogether different from the alternative (a ride in a taxi is the same as a ride in Lyft or Uber), riders are attracted to the community aspect of the ridesharing experience, the use of technology to bring drivers directly to them, and are keen to support something new in an industry that’s been largely the same since WWII. Jitneys were a huge departure from the fixed-route alternative on the streetcar, but the attraction values are much the same: something new, an alternative, a technological advance. As with jitneys, ridesharing in the twenty-first century is triumphed for “speed of service,” and hailed for its gumption and excitement in the face of a stale taxi system that “didn’t seem to care” and was “characterized by high prices, low service, and no

accountability.”

Although a populist response to entrenched, establishment transit, Uber
and Lyft are highly competitive with each other, turning the populist narrative into a
capitalist feud of epic proportions. Jitney service has also been interpreted as a populist
movement against the establishment—but it is better viewed as an entrepreneurial
opportunity in a transit market that was stagnating despite technological advances that
might be advantageous. As I argued in the first chapter, the jitney’s legacy is one that
encouraged the movement into road-based public transportation at the behest of a riding
public that saw the benefits of using automobiles for transit. In the same light, ridesharing
is best regarded as a symbol of riders’ desire to be heard and serviced in ways that best
suit them—and not passively accept the means of transportation that embedded interests
want to give them.

Jitneys, buses, fare limitations, bus-versus-rail, ridesharing. In each of these examples
throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, riders have been the advocates
of change in Los Angeles public transportation, directing and limiting transportation to
suit their needs and desires. Along the way, the public’s perception about what its
responsibilities were to provide transit shifted to accommodate a central role in assuming
ownership of public transportation and in funding large-scale rail projects beginning in
the 1980s. Although these projects have not been given unlimited financial support,
indicating a clear demarcation of the acceptable role of municipal government in Los

43 Stone, “Invasion of the Taxi Snatchers: Uber Leads and Industry’s Disruption.”
44 Davis, “Competition’s Moment: The Jitney-Bus and Corporate Capitalism in the Canadian City, 1914-
29”; Chambliss, “A Question of Progress and Welfare: The Jitney Bus Phenomenon in Atlanta, 1915-
1925.”
Angeles public transportation, the general estimation of L.A. transit in the twentieth century has to be one that shows a rider-directed, rider-approved system. Car culture in Southern California continues to be the great influence on expectations of mobility in the region and inadvertently stigmatizes bus transportation along the way. But for those who actually use the system, the twentieth century has shown, largely through application of the bus beginning in the 1920s and increasing into the present day, a heightened sense of mobility and access to transit that they were able to mold, guide, plead, and demand into the sort of system that they—the riders—wanted.
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