

Auto Buses and the B. C. Electric Railway

Causes of Popularity of the "Jitney," Its Tendency, Need of Regulation—Antagonism Toward Tramway—Changes Necessary to Get Public Confidence:

The private automobile turned into the auto-bus, popularly called the "Jitney," is a very interesting phase, and, from the standpoint of the trolley car, a very disconcerting phase of the transportation problem in large cities. The bright mind that conceived this form of service would probably stand aghast at its present popularity and dimensions throughout the Coast cities.

The public of Vancouver has seized on this form of transportation with greater avidity than most other cities. It has truly assumed such proportions that it has made inroads on the tram service of the British Columbia Electric Railway conservatively estimated to exceed \$1,200 per day. In Vancouver, due to the general depression, a large number of automobiles were lying idle in garages at expense to the owners, and fast depreciating, due to lack of use. The institution of this jitney service has released these automobiles to use. The means therefore were in ample abundance. The new service has also proved more speedy than the electric car service, but the popularity of the service can be ascribed in no small measure to the antagonism which the people of Vancouver hold toward the B. C. E. R. Give the public the opportunity to use some other transportation service, and it does not take long to use the other if only to spite the established trolley system. The causes of speed and spite, combined with the large number of automobiles available without increased cost of carrying, has undoubtedly brought about the great vogue which the jitneys are enjoying at the present.

The jitney is something like a disease. It must run its course, and, like disease, it will not leave the patient the same. This is the really serious aspect so far as the B. C. E. R. is concerned. When repair, renewal, breakdown and accident expenses begin to make inroads on the earnings of the individual jitney owner or operator, his ardor and enthusiasm will quickly abate. When the present group of otherwise idle automobiles, but now in service, are finally thrown on the scrap heap, the real test of this service to compete with the slower tram service will occur. It seems from present indication that some form of auto-bus will be a permanent result. At any rate finance is watching developments of this problem with intense interest, and with no little concern and apprehension.

The B. C. E. R. has invested many millions of dollars in this Province and has contributed in no small way toward the building up of our principal cities. In addition, it spends at least eighty per cent. of its gross receipts within the Province. Against the jitney, it is compelled to an outlay of huge expenditures for rights of way, trackage, power-houses, cost of power, operation, etc. The tram car itself represents but a small part of the investment to give the

public the tram service. Against this the auto-bus has the cost only of the car, its upkeep, and its chauffeur. It would seem fair to hold the jitney up at least to the same conditions of operations that is exacted of the tramway. The jitney service should immediately be regulated. It should be required to maintain more or less rigid schedules. It should be held up to the same liability against accident that we exact of the tramway. Every driver should be insured against accident, and each passenger to the capacity of the jitney. Lastly, the jitney should be taxed for its service at least to the extent of the lost revenue to the city from its share of the gross earnings of the B. C. E. R. Under these conditions, and in fairness to the tramway they should be enacted into law, it remains to be seen just to what extent the jitney or the institution of any motor-bus service can survive and compete with the established railed trolley. This is the protection that is due the B. C. E. R. if the cities of Vancouver and Victoria are going to keep faith with the shareholders and investors of this or any other trolley company which is doing or wishes to do business in this Province.

This jitney phase has certainly shown the B. C. E. R. where it stands in public sentiment. The item of goodwill, so far as the public are concerned, can be represented on the asset side of its ledger by a string of noughts. No one can come to this city or Victoria without sensing the hostility and antagonism of the public toward its tram system. It is idle to go into the causes of it. But that it should be replaced by mutual goodwill at the earliest possible moment is to the best interests of the management and shareholders. The public are generally unreasonable and mulish, but after a reasonable length of time they respond to courtesy, fairness, and even display at times faint signs of intelligence. The B. C. E. R. is not altogether blameless. The public of Vancouver and Victoria want a responsible management in the Province and not one six thousand miles away. They also want a responsive management. When the public or an individual either within the company or without has a complaint, they or he wants that complaint listened to, considered, and, if fair, acted on; and if not fair, told the reason therefor. It is this apparent public-be-damned policy that is vitiating an otherwise very satisfactory service. The public deserve to be placated. They deserve to be uniformly courteously treated in all circumstances. They want to deal with human beings, not with a bureaucratic machine.

With a change of attitude approximating to some extent a public-be-pleased policy, affecting the entire morale and personnel of the system, it would be astonishing to see how soon the public would respond. The B. C. E. R. has too good a case to allow it to go by default. Its service, including light, power, gas and tramway, is uniformly excellent; the charges are uniformly reasonable. Its position in the community as large spenders of capital for development, as large employers of labor, as large consumers of material, all of which the Province and the public get the benefit, makes out a strong case for public support; yet that support is not only lacking but is replaced by actual antagonism, and for reasons that are almost trivial.