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The Street Railway Transportation Problem

Conclusion of Dr. Shortt's report—jitney competition must be removed—street railway a monopoly subject to supervision by public utilities commission.

The street railway transportation problem has been a very live topic in the cities of Vancouver, Victoria and New Westminster, since the advent of the "jitney" in December, 1914. The question became so pressing that the provincial government appointed a commission to investigate the situation and report its findings. Dr. Adam Shortt, then Civil Service Commissioner for the Dominion Government, was called upon to undertake this work, and the reputation and standing of the man is such as to disarm suspicion of any bias in judgment, or the drawing of unwarranted conclusions. The Commission sat all during the summer and it must be confessed that the evidence submitted was particular and comprehensive.

Dr. Shortt has recently laid before the Premier his findings contained in a document of 110 pages, which upon examination will be regarded as a classic and an outstanding authority on the entire question of urban transportation and will be more and more consulted as a textbook by students of municipal affairs, civic officials and transportation operators.

Dr. Shortt marshals such a wealth of fact for his premises and pursues his treatment with such clear, close and cogent reasoning that his conclusions are not only obvious but inescapable. In a word, his conclusion of the whole subject is that an electric street railway and a "jitney" service cannot co-exist and the former remain solvent. The electric railway performs services that the "jitney" will not or cannot, and is necessary to public need. Therefore the "jitney" competition must be removed and the electric railway given a monopoly subject to a competent and thorough supervision by the creation of a permanent public utilities commission to protect the interests of both.

We regret that space will admit of only a few excerpts from Dr. Shortt's report and these excerpts will bear on the "jitney" competition, which is the most prominent issue. We hope to present some comment on transportation rates and the electric light rates in future issues.

Dr. Shortt recounts the capital expenditure of the British Columbia Electric Railway, the desirability of consolidating the surrounding municipalities into one with consequent uniformity of franchise, the expansion during the boom and its reaction and their effects on the street railway and then continues.

The jitney he points out, came at the moment when the economic reaction was beginning to press heavily upon the company, making its sudden appearance, "on the central, shorter, well-paved and most lucrative routes.

"A peculiarity of the jitney" he remarks, "is that it calls for the expenditure of no new capital, but simply the use of second-hand automobiles, vehicles of transit already existing and for which neither sale nor employment could be had in any other lines, while their owners were for the time being without other means of employment. The owners of these automobiles were simply following the example furnished in several of the American cities of the Pacific States, where certain possessors of automobiles sought to supplement their diminishing, or replace their vanquished incomes by carrying passengers for short distances in their cars at five cent fares, this being the condition on which they were able to attract patrons.

"The name 'jitney' applied to this new type of public vehicle was imported with the service itself. It appears to have originated in Los Angeles, where 'jitney,' the name of a small Spanish-American coin, was a slang term for five cents

employed by the 'barkers' or barrelhead vocalists who vociferated in front of the lower types of side shows on midways, at fairs or suburban amusement grounds. The name, once applied to this type of automobile service by many of its patrons, adhered and in time was accepted by the operators themselves and employed to designate their more or less loose associations for mutual benefit."

At the outset, Dr. Shortt says the jitney was regarded as merely a passing phase of the hard times. It was expected to disappear when the cars fell into disrepair or the owners found more lucrative employment, but the continued supply of second-hand automobiles and the substitution of other types of drivers led both in Vancouver, Victoria and

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