



# Rider's Reader



Vol. 4, No. 5

83

January, 1952

## It Was Quite a Struggle



*Illegally parked trucks and automobiles, combined with December's record blizzards, caused agonizing delays to thousands of transit riders despite CTA's round-the-clock snow-fighting efforts, as this view near North and California Avenues graphically illustrates.*

---

**YES, IT WAS QUITE A STRUGGLE**, this great "battle of the blizzards" waged on Chicago's streets during November and December, 1951.

Snow began to weave a white blanket over the Windy City in November . . . Then a series of major snow storms struck, starting Friday, December 14, and extending into Christmas morning.

By that time a total of 47.7 inches of snow had fallen, breaking all previous records for November and December. December's total—33.3 inches, as compared with 6.6 inches for a normal December—was in itself an all-time record for Chicago.



To snow already piled high on the city's streets, the Christmas Eve storm added another 8.6 inches. *Only the valiant work of CTA personnel and snow-fighting equipment, cooperating with the forces of the City and other public agencies, averted civic paralysis.*

Nearly 1,000 CTA employees, manning 225 snow-sweepers and plows, and 50 sand and salt spreading trucks, fought this "battle of the blizzards" from the start to the finish.

**OPERATING ON ROUND-THE-CLOCK SCHEDULES** for long, tortuous hours, these men, as well as motormen, conductors and bus operators worked to the point of complete physical exhaustion, giving up even Christmas day with their families to keep CTA service operating.

Thanks to their efforts, CTA's 1,500 miles of bus and streetcar routes were kept from the storm's grasp. Not one surface route, or even a section of a single route, was lost to the elements.

Secondary streets, however, were virtually impassable, being piled high with snow, and jammed with abandoned, snow-covered automobiles.

Consequently, CTA surface routes, kept usable by a constant day and night struggle at the car and bus riders' expense, became the city's principal "lifelines." Thousands of automobiles, trucks and service vehicles which normally fan out and thin out on the city's widespread network of secondary streets, were funneled onto CTA's routes, blocking transit vehicles and snarling traffic.

**THESE VITAL "LIFELINES"** then quickly became open-air garages, used by motorists for temporary parking during the day-time, and all-night parking after the evening rush hours, in violation of the city's snow removal ordinance.

This was the nerve-wracking, exasperating phase of the "battle of the blizzards." These illegally parked automobiles prevented CTA sweepers and plows from cleaning the streets from curb to curb.

Nevertheless, the snow-fighting equipment was kept on the streets. Hundreds of abandoned automobiles were buried in mounds of snow, establishing "new" curb lines, and reducing the serviceable width of the streets to a single lane, and even less, in each direction.

At this stage, the illegal parking became a tremendous handicap to local transit service, and to all traffic.

Literally thousands of thoughtless, or selfish motorists and truckers parked their vehicles in these narrowed lanes, blocking both streetcars and buses. Delays of 15 to 40 minutes to our riders were commonplace from each instance of thoughtless or selfish parking.

Thousands of flagrant examples of utter selfishness were committed by inconsiderate motorists and truckers. . . . Their thoughtlessness was directly responsible for the agonizing delays to hundreds of thousands of CTA riders, despite the

**THE INCONSIDERATE-HUMAN-OF-THE-YEAR-AWARD**, if one existed, would go to the motorist who, in snarling traffic on N. Clark St., during the storm period, typifies the parked automobile problem which the CTA and its 2,300,000 daily riders had to contend with in December.

Here are the almost unbelievable details. A southbound Clark St. car was blocked by an automobile parked squarely in the tracks . . . the crew began a search for the motorist in nearby stores. Finally, the motorman entered the Rogers Park post office and called out the license number of the automobile . . . a man, standing in a long line at the parcel post window, admitted ownership of the parked automobile . . . "you had better move your automobile before the passengers on my car mob you," the motorman advised him . . . The motorist's reply? "Why, if I have to move my automobile, I'll lose my place in line!"

best efforts of the CTA's snow-fighting crews, its emergency truck crews who patrolled the routes 24-hours a day to move illegally parked and stalled autos and trucks, the motormen and conductors who themselves in countless instances shoved and pushed vehicles out of the way of CTA cars and buses, and track department employees who were on the job the clock around, keeping automatic switches operable.

The snail's pace to which surface transit was slowed during and following the snowstorms, principally by automobiles and trucks, can be clearly judged from a single schedule comparison—Broadway-State streetcars ordinarily make the trip from Devon-Clark to 119th-Morgan and then back to the north terminal in three hours and forty minutes. On Sunday, December 23, the same trip required nine hours for some streetcars.

**MAYOR KENNELLY**, alert to the seriousness of the situation, held three emergency conferences of city traffic, police, fire and transit officials. Appealing for the cooperation of Chicago's citizens, following these conferences, the Mayor said: "Transportation authorities, the police and fire departments, and all others concerned, agreed it is absolutely imperative that the main streets of the city be kept open. . . . These main streets must be kept clear of parked autos so that snow-clearing and snow-removal equipment can operate. If your



car is parked on one of these streets you are in violation of the snow ordinance. . . . Under the law, your car can be towed away. . . . I appeal to you, if your car has been left on one of these streets, to remove it immediately so that we can keep these streets open."

Despite the severe handicaps imposed by the frequent snowstorms, the illegal parking, and stalled autos and trucks, the CTA did not abandon service on a single line. Although there were long delays, and vehicles were jammed with regular riders, and with motorists who wisely chose to use CTA services instead of driving, every CTA surface route continued to operate . . . sections of some lines east of State St., between 16th and 61st Streets, were all but cut-off because of large numbers of automobiles deserted in the middle of the streets. . . . Service on the Ravenswood "L" was interrupted for a few hours early Christmas morning by interlocking switch plant trouble. . . . However, the CTA's network of Rapid Transit lines carried in excess of 500,000 passengers on weekdays—a record total for the CTA—and maintained close to operating schedules.

**THE L-SUBWAY PERFORMANCE** in this emergency can be credited directly to the CTA's modernization of its rapid transit service by the introduction of A and B express trains, and the elimination of lightly used stations.

Other cities' experiences in the face of less severe wintry blasts indicate that CTA's December performance was commendable. In Baltimore, where the mid-December storm was less severe than in Chicago, local transit service was slowed almost to a standstill . . . as much as eight hours were required to complete trips normally taking only 40 minutes. In Philadelphia, many lines were completely out of service for as long as twelve hours when traffic became snarled as a result of a five-inch snow.

**SNOW-FIGHTING IS A COSTLY BUSINESS** . . . CTA, during November and December, spent more than \$750,000 on snow-clearing operations—this figure includes the wages of crews assigned to plows and sweepers, operating expenses of such equipment, and the cost of sand and salt spread on the streets—other substantial amounts for overtime pay of streetcar, bus and rapid transit operating personnel, equipment damage, etc., all directly chargeable to the snowstorms, will further swell the CTA's cost of fighting Chicago's 1951 "battle of the blizzards."

**YES, IT WAS QUITE A STRUGGLE** to maintain local transit service, but it can truly be said that December's bitter experiences were no more than a severe and dramatic intensification of illegal and double parking conditions that the CTA is compelled to combat daily, even when weather conditions are ideal.

These utterly selfish and inconsiderate violations of traffic ordinances, now at an all-time peak, daily subject thousands of local transit riders to inexcusable delays and inconvenience.