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THE METROLINERS 1970—BAD TRIP?

As one who has written optimistically about the success of the Penn Central's MetroLiner service, it is with great regret that I report recent developments. The MetroLiner, in short, is in trouble. What is worse, there appears to be no immediate solutions in the offing.

Contrary to popular opinion, the government demonstration phase of the MetroLiner service has never begun. Last summer, as passengers flocked to the smooth operating trains run voluntarily by the railroad, PC bravely talked about the demonstration beginning at the time of the late October schedule changes. When that time neared, officials said the new trains would probably go the demonstration route around the beginning of the year. By Christmas, DOT was talking about April and now nobody is talking at all because the sad fact is that the MetroLiners are in such bad shape that it is absolutely impossible to talk about providing any additional service at all.

Indeed, it is now next to impossible for the Penn Central to keep up its existing schedule of six Monday-thru-Friday Washington-New York round trips (fewer trains operate on weekends).

As an example, a friend of mine, J. Fritz Rench, the president of the Rench Manufacturing Company of Racine, Wisconsin, was coming to Washington to have dinner with us after concluding some business in New York. Rench, although a dynamic young man, travels mostly by train, and so it was that he found himself aboard a southbound MetroLiner to Washington. My secretary at the office informed me that Fritz was on the phone calling long distance, and I naturally suspected that he had been tied up in New York and couldn't visit us that evening.

However, when I answered the phone, Fritz informed me that he was aboard the MetroLiner, and fortunately for him on the first car of a 6 car train. I say fortunately because Fritz informed me that the last four cars of the train had uncoupled while the MetroLiner was zinging along at about 120 mph. As he was talking to me, the first two cars of the train were busy backing up to retrieve the other four. Needless to say, the whole train was delayed for hours, and while some of the passengers saw a bit of humor in the incident others did not, and the PC probably lost a few regular customers that day. What is more, since this is not the first time the cars have uncoupled enroute, safety experts in Washington were quick to point out that had a passenger been walking between the cars at the time of uncoupling he would certainly not be with us today.

Uncoupling at high speeds is only one of the problems plaguing the

Penn Central and its fleet of MetroLiners. So many problems have developed, in fact, that about 26 of the line's 50 cars are out of service every week. DOT officials indicate that figure does not include the cars which begin a run and end up being pulled as trailers to complete a trip.

Regular Penn Central passengers have learned to tolerate such things over the years, but a good many of the MetroLiner passengers are people who have not ridden trains for years. Many have chosen the fast train over the Eastern Air Lines shuttle or their automobile. It is these patrons who will not return if the service is bad.

The Penn Central blames the Budd Company, and Budd is blaming the suppliers. DOT says it does not have any idea who is at fault; indicating that PC is not maintaining the equipment as it should. The railroad says it is doing the best it can, and what is more the MetroLiners require a fantastic amount of maintenance, something PC says it had never anticipated.

DOT is concerned. There is even talk in some quarters of scrapping the demonstration plan altogether. Others in DOT are thinking of trying to obtain, perhaps by leasing, some good passenger cars (perhaps ex-Santa Fe) to maintain the present Washington-New York schedules with GG-1s. Then the MetroLiners would be taken out of service. One of them would be torn down and rebuilt; if the problems could be worked out, alterations would then be made on the other cars.

At this point, no firm decisions have been made. However, almost anybody connected with the project agrees that things cannot go on the way that they are. The trains appear to be holding their own, but sooner or later patronage will drop if schedules continue to be late.

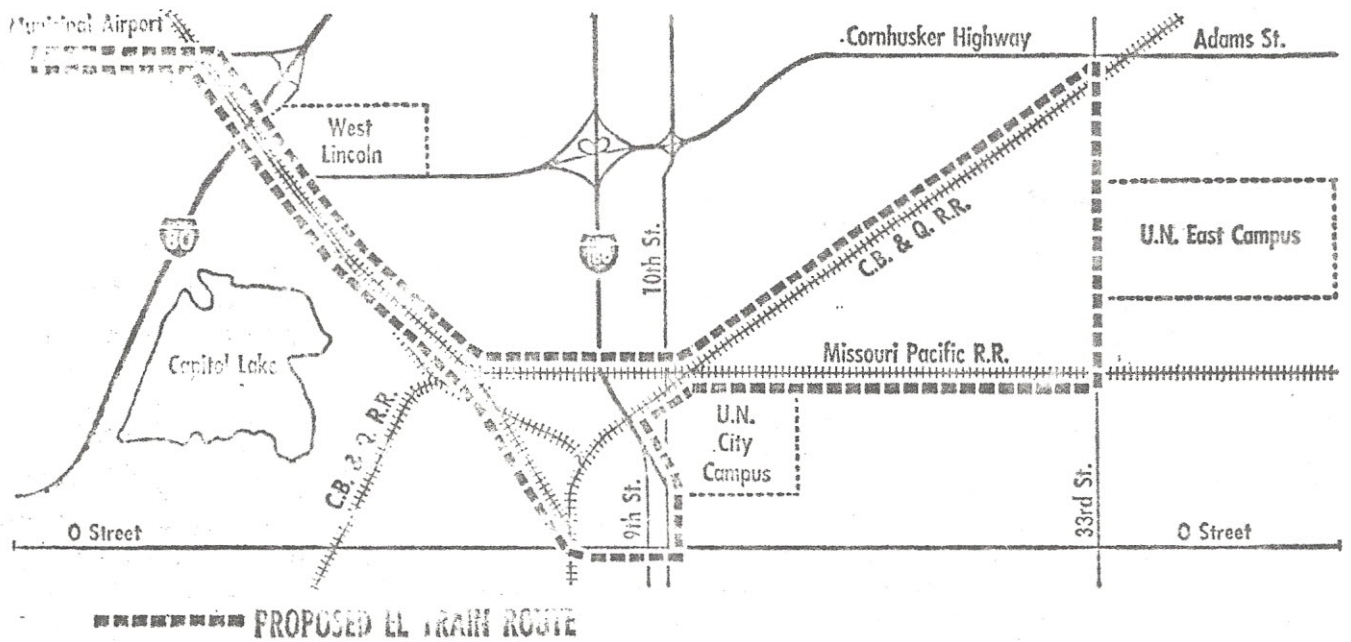
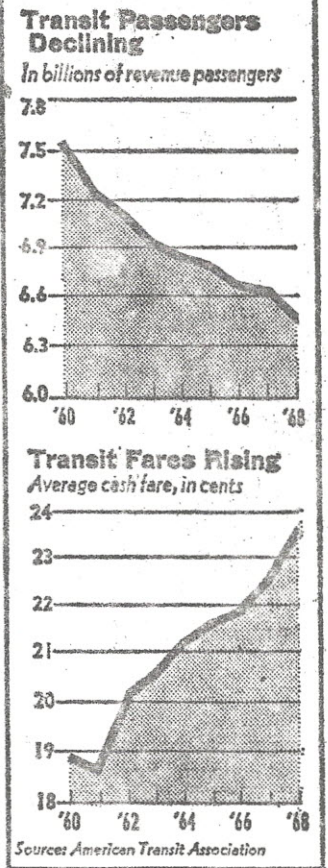
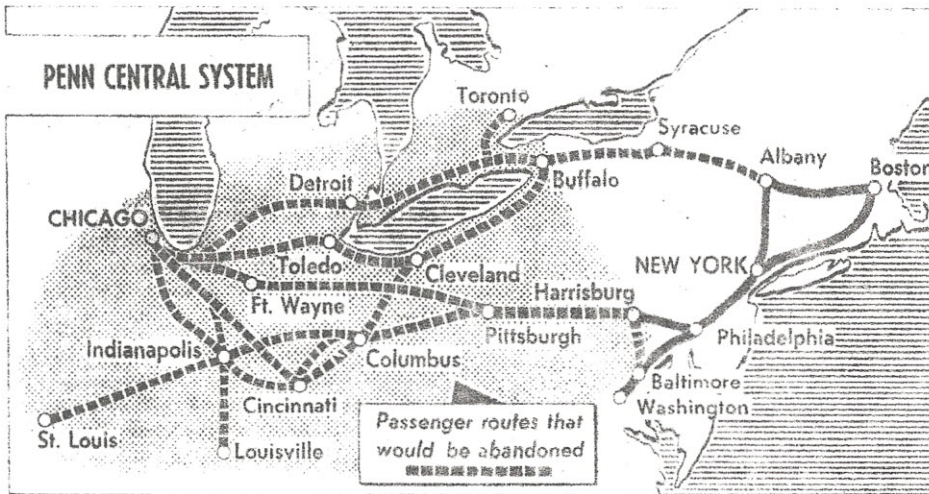
One of the problems deeply intertwined with the MetroLiner affair is the financial condition of the Penn Central. It is, insiders tell us, not very good. Accordingly, while the railroad might like to clear up the MetroLiner problem with some dispatch, it cannot afford to do so.

The government, for its part, has just about enough money to pay for the operation of the two demonstration trains for two years at 1967 prices. Any significant alteration of DOT's demonstration plans would mean a trip to the Congress for more money.

The MetroLiner service—what little we have had of it—has already demonstrated that passengers can be attracted to clean, fast and well-scheduled trains. But if the MetroLiner service fails for any reason, chances of keeping other trains on the rails in America won't be good. A great deal more than Washington-New York commuter service is at stake in the future of the MetroLiners.

The question now is whether the railroad and the government can get together to work things out; any official of DOT who has ever had anything to do with the MetroLiners will tell you that dealing with PC is not easy under the best of circumstances. Under present circumstances, the situation is even more difficult. I have a feeling, however, that the MetroLiner is important enough that forces will be rallied to solve the many problems seemingly insoluble at this time. Anyone for a good old-fashioned rally?

--PAUL M. WEYRICH



BLACK ROAD

As Louis Joliet looked on disapprovingly (see cover), transit service in his namesake town faded into oblivion, Saturday, February 28. As the town clock tolled in the month of March, Joliet City Lines' 43 drivers walked off their jobs, leaving an area of almost 80,000 without any local bus service. It had all begun late in 1969, when owner National City Lines notified drivers and city that it would be unable to meet drivers' demands for a pay hike. Faced with a strike, the city itself formed a mass transit district, and arranged for a temporary subsidy to the company pending a referendum to authorize the purchase of the company by the District. Of no little significance was the fact that the district as constituted comprised only that area within the corporate limits of Joliet, although JCL served a much larger region, including both suburbs and unincorporated area. This fact was to play a key role in the events that followed.

On Saturday, February 21, Joliet voters went to the polls to decide whether or not to authorize the purchase. With little time to present their case, proponents of the measure faced an uphill battle, and the proposition's detractors wasted no time in pointing out that Joliet taxpayers would be alone in paying for a system that also served the suburbs. Thus, it is understandable that the measure failed to pass, although by a relatively small margin.

Since the expiration of their contract late in 1969, JCL drivers had been kept on the job by the subsidy funds provided by the city, and any strike action was withheld until the fate of the District's proposal was decided upon. After the measure was defeated, the city could no longer provide any funds to continue transit operations, and the drivers were also subjected to the additional indignity of having to take a pay cut as well, back to the salary that had prevailed under the old contract. Faced with this alternative, the local had no choice but to walk out, which it did as Saturday's runs returned to the Osgood Street garage just after midnight.

Forty buses are now idled, school children and commuters alike must hoof it or find other ways to reach their destinations (JCL hauled the bulk of are school children, mostly on regular runs, and had little competition for this lucrative trade). NCL's Denver headquarters has indicated that a petition requesting permission to abandon all operations is in order soon before the Illinois Commerce Commission, and the city seems doomed to do without public transportation for some time to come. In that manner unique to governmental bodies, however, the Mass Transit District can continue in operation (as no provision was made for its dissolution), and it has plans for a new referendum later in 1970, after area residents presumable realize that bus service is one thing they cannot do without.

Public transportation in Joliet began with horsecars in 1885, and soon expanded to include electric interurban and bus service to Chicago, as well as an extensive network of local car lines. Rail service ended in 1934, as National City Lines began its bus empire by taking over the local company. With NCL's disappearance from the Joliet scene, only one company property still remains in Illinois, Rock Island-Moline City Lines; scarcely more than a dozen wholly-owned carriers remain in the U. S.

METRO REPORT

DOT has been asked for assistance in arranging a possible takeover of Tampa Transit Lines (NCL) by the city of Tampa....Progress is being made toward the creation of a transit district to purchase new equipment for lease to the Milwaukee Road. At present, reports On The (Bi) Level, the road's answer to similar rider publications, the district would embrace only the Chicago-Elgin West Line; no plans have been advanced for a similar agency along the Chicago-Fox Lake North Line....The North Western's Ben Heineman is definitely interested in becoming the Chicago area's transit "czar", should a multi-modal agency be created (TC 23 FEB 70)....Miami (Metro Dade Transit) goes to Exact Fare 15 April, if fare boxes arrive in time....National transit riding for October 1969 was down 1.87% over the previous year...AC Transit now offers a 10¢ senior citizen off-peak and weekend fare; no zone charges are assessed....

The annual convention of the Motor Bus Society for 1970 will be held in Providence, R.I., on 21-22 March, in cooperation with the Vintage Commercial Vehicle Club of Boston. Details are available from the Society, 767 Valley Road, Upper Montclair NJ 07043....Correcting any erroneous impressions that may have appeared in print, Thunder Bay Transit (an amalgamation of the two properties in Port Arthur and Fort William, Ontario) has no present plans to discontinue its trolley coach services, now through-routed between the two cities....The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority has been awarded a grant of \$524,000 for a study of a proposed high-speed, private-right-of-way transit facility in the Buffalo-Amherst corridor, and to facilitate a study of ways to improve and co-ordinate bus service and management in Erie and Niagara counties. Former Republican VP candidate (1964) William E. Miller has been named to head NFTA.

A short-term subsidy has been approved by the New Jersey Transportation Department for resumption of service in Morris County discontinued 4 February by West Morris Transit; 12 municipalities were affected by the shutdown, caused by the cancellation of liability insurance coverage....Some 33,000 workers in the Wall Street financial area of New York City are to be affected by a staggering of work hours necessitated 1 April by the extreme rush-hour subway congestion in the district. Ultimately, 100,000 workers will be affected by the move away from the traditional 9 to 5 working hours....The New York State Public Service Commission has prevailed upon two Manhattan-Jones Beach carriers, New York Bus Tours and Ferdinand Arrigoni, Inc. not to raise their one-way fares from \$1.25 to \$1.50. Both carriers were ordered to either justify the hikes at a formal hearing or withdraw the petition; both chose to withdraw....TC's last issue reported on the successful efforts of Cheetah Charter Tours (a black-owned carrier) to become the first minority-controlled carrier to be granted interstate rights (from Harlem) in the New York area. We have learned that Cheetah (whose address is 40 W. 135 St., NYC 10037) has on order 5 new General Motors PD-4905 coaches. Livery will be olive green and yellow with a striking logo that includes a cheetah on the sides....The Lincoln (Neb.) Airport Authority has approved the expenditure of \$800 for a preliminary study of the economic feasibility of a proposed high-speed aerial train system loop in Lincoln. The proposal is part of an overall plan for linking Omaha and Lincoln. The Lincoln loop would connect the two University of Nebraska campuses, the fairgrounds and downtown Lincoln with the airport.

PERILS OF PAULINE

In what is proving to be a modern-day sequel to the classic silent movie serial, America's railroads reached another brink of disaster in their continuing battle with the International Association of Machinists.

Since our last episode, Judge Corcoran, who issued the 10-day restraining orders against selective strike/nationwide lockout threats, has ruled that the union's selective "whipsaw" strike threat was contrary to NLRB collective bargaining regulations and, therefore, the railroads' lockout counter-threat was moot as a legal issue.

Thus, so says the IAM, it was left with no choice but to call a nationwide strike, emergency or not. President Nixon and an overwhelming majority of Congressmen apparently take Wally Schirra's commercial message seriously, as both Houses, in record time, passed and sent to the President for his equally-quick signature legislation barring any walkout for another 37 days, to April 11.

Neither side is expected to compromise on the "minor" work rule issue (the elimination of certain Sheet Metal Workers' jobs via revised schedules of responsibility); the carriers offered to drop the rule proposal if the Association would accept a 17 cent per hour cut in the wage package. This gambit was turned down, and thus a small (2300+ member) craft union is forcing what nobody wants—the serious consideration by the Congress of compulsory arbitration following the Easter break if the issue is not settled.

As if the carriers are not having enough trouble with their employees, managements were unable to agree unanimously to a 6% across-the-board increase in freight rates (a similar boost was allowed 18 November 69). Regardless, carriers in the East, West and Southwest have asked permission to increase rates by 6% effective 11 March. The Southeastern carriers feel this is not the time for such a hike, while the Eastern roads (plus RI, CNW and UP) are pushing very hard (with "sympathetic" approval by rich lines such as ATSF, SL-SF, SP, UP and BN) for increases now because the poor carriers (led by PC) are sinking very fast into complete deficit quicksand.

SCOOPING THE SCOOPERS

The Chicago Sun-Times 4 March "exclusive" on Penn Central's sweeping petition of all its long-haul passenger trains west of Buffalo and Harrisburg verifies our report (TC 23 Feb 70). The road says it will file petitions on 34 trains with an off-date of 15 April—the Broadway Limited included. The only Midwest passenger service to be untouched will be the James Whitcomb Riley (under ICC jurisdiction) and probably the Chicago-Valparaiso commuter runs.

CHICAGO, SOUTH SHORE & SOUTH BENDIX?

Word around Chicago is that the South Shore will withdraw from the streets of South Bend around 1 June. There has been little opposition to the proposal to shift the terminal to Bendix (west of town) as the city was its principal proponent, and plans for parking and a direct transfer to city

(now municipally controlled) buses was offered as a replacement for the congested downtown location.

The ICC has ordered South Shore to continue running the 31 trains it had petitioned to discontinue in whole or part 26 October 69. The Commission ruled that if the petition were allowed many trains presently earning an out-of-pocket profit would be lost forever to an area with a growing commuter population merely to provide 4 extra coaches for rush hour and standby use. Division 3 suggested that the road explore other ways to cut costs and economize on car utilization.

THAT'S NOT ALL...

Western Pacific will discontinue its portion of the California Zephyr following departure of the 21 March trips from Oakland and Salt Lake City. Rio Grande has advised Burlington Northern that it will reschedule its Denver Salt Lake City tri-weekly schedule in order to connect with SP at Ogden; BN in turn has requested permission to consolidate its trains 17-18 and 11-12 between Chicago and Omaha, and to reschedule and reduce to tri-weekly 17-18's runs between Omaha and Denver effective 1 April. 11-12's present schedule will easily accommodate the Rio Grande's schedule adjustments which require later arrival and earlier departure from Denver than at present to connect with the SP.

BN has also asked for permission to terminate 19-20, the American Royal, at North Kansas City instead of Kansas City Union Station, effective 1 April. ...SP has petitioned to reduce to tri-weekly its Cascade, 11-12, Oakland-Portland....PC was ordered to run 574-575, Buffalo-Harrisburg, for another 9 months (to 26 November) in order to see if improved, state-subsidized Harrisburg-Philadelphia service, soon to begin, will improve patronage....C&O has reapplied for discontinuance of 47-48, Ashland-Detroit....The ICC "post-discontinuance" hearings on N&W's Powhatan Arrow failed to change the original decision; the Commission noted that the train handled but 79,000 passengers in its final 21 months of service, and there was sufficient alternate transportation available as well as improved service on 3-4 to more than accommodate the affected patrons....PC has filed a Section 13a(2) petition to discontinue 15-18, Cleveland-Columbus.

ODDS AND ENDS

William J. Quinn, the odd-man-out at BI, will resign his position as Vice-Chairman of the recently-merged system effective 16 March, to return to his former slot as president of the Milwaukee Road. One of his first tasks on coming back will be to consider C&NW's offer to sell its assets to the Milwaukee, now that the two roads have withdrawn their merger proposal....The ICC has reopened the Rock Island merger hearings to consider North Western's appeal that UP has created 3 new highly-profitable non transportation subsidiaries that could provide additional financial power capable of further "injury" to CNW should UP win the Rock....Indiana Senator Hartke is pushing hard for approval of a bill to assume the \$155,000,000 debt of the U.S. portion of the St. Lawrence Seaway; one of his reasons for so doing was that the railroads charged discriminatory rates to the Seaway.

