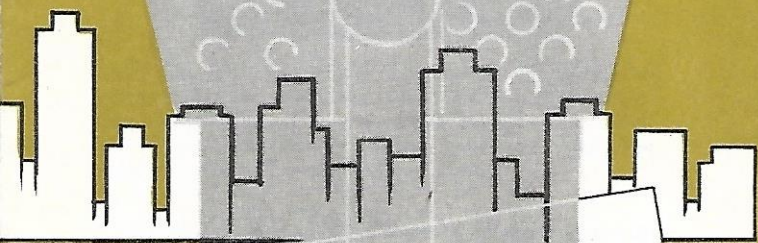


CHICAGO TRANSIT AUTHORITY



"In
Our Town"



A BROADCAST
FROM **WMAQ, CHICAGO**

by Cloyd Head

JANUARY 8, 1949

"IN OUR TOWN" is a weekly radio feature broadcast by Cloyd Head over Station WMAQ, Chicago. The address printed herein was prepared and given by Mr. Head on the program of January 8, 1949.

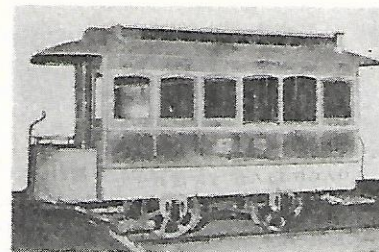
OUR TOWN is constantly in motion. Every day almost all the people in it need to go from where they are to somewhere else.

The home is the center; but, come morning, men and great numbers of women are off to work, children are off to school, housewives and others are likely to have reasons to move about.

All day long this activity continues, until the rush hours take people home again, and the evening traffic begins.

Sidewalks, of course, serve for short distances; but the rest of it is any city's greatest problem—the problem of transportation.

Few cities, none perhaps, have yet solved it completely. For one thing, modern transportation is relatively new. Nothing we use now, except steam railways, dates back beyond sixty years, and much of that has since become obsolete. For another, most cities, including our own, grew like Topsy and with as little thought for the future.

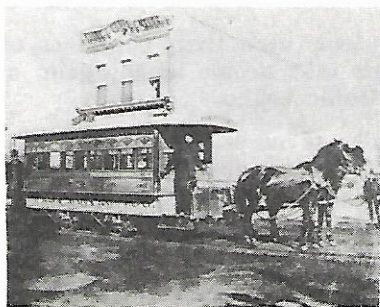


1859 Chicago's first one-horse, four-wheeled street car known as the "bobtail" because it had no rear platform. There were no heating appliances. In winter the floor was covered with straw to keep the feet warm. Speed was about three miles per hour. Oil lamps supplied light.

At the center a hard core of narrow canyon-like streets provided a business district into which were funneled more and more people as the town radiated outward. Public and private transportation jamming the streets made a situation bad enough at best. But during a major part of this period of growth, Chicago's transportation was in a tangle, wasteful, inefficient and outmoded by modern standards and so it remained until fifteen months ago.

On October 1, 1947, the people—and I mean that literally—took over most, though not all the system, to operate it not for private profit (of which incidentally there had been none for many a long year) but for public benefit and at cost.

The agency for doing this is called the Chicago Transit Authority. It had been created two years before, after all attempts to modernize and unify the transit facilities under private ownership and operation had failed. Public ownership became, therefore, the only alternative.



1870 The single truck, double end, two-horse car was the first important improvement in service. With the coming of this car also appeared another innovation—a conductor.

In 1945 carefully worked out reorganization plans were proposed jointly by the former Mayor of Chicago, the former Governor of Illinois and the Federal Court. The General Assembly enacted them into law. Not only was a Chicago Transit Authority created, but it was given *complete* authority: to acquire local transportation properties, to operate and modernize them without interference and according to its own rules and regulations, and to fix rates of fare. It is authorized to operate in Chicago and eighty-five other municipalities in Cook County, and its Chicago franchise extends for fifty years.

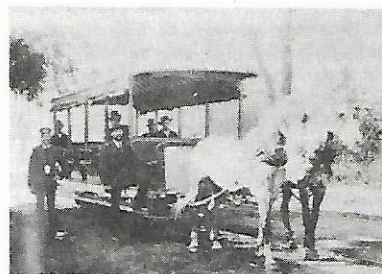
Chicago Transit Authority is strictly on its own. It can levy no taxes; no public funds are available to support it. It must pay its way from revenue, and nothing else. If it issues bonds — which of course are necessary, for example, in acquiring properties — they are revenue bonds, to be retired out of earnings.

But the point of the matter is that at long last, eighty-eight years after the first horse-car bumbled along State Street from Randolph to what is now Roosevelt Road, the people of our town have taken over their public means of getting about—or most of it—and are turning it with astonishing speed into a modern efficient system.

It could, and should of course, have been done earlier. Private ownership struggled with the problem too long, and politics played with it too often. But the early growth could hardly have been other than it was, marked by daring and much ingenuity, but developing haphazardly in the earliest years, then under control of such men as Charles T. Yerkes toward the turn of the century, and always getting itself into and out of snarls.

It is unthinkable today that people should at one time have been afraid of rapid transportation; first, lest it mar the beauty of the mud-strewn streets; and later, when came the cable cars, that horses would be frightened by them.

In the late fifties, to overcome opposition, we imported two secondhand horse cars from Troy, New York, and ran them back and forth on a two-block stretch from Randolph to Madison until people saw they did no harm.

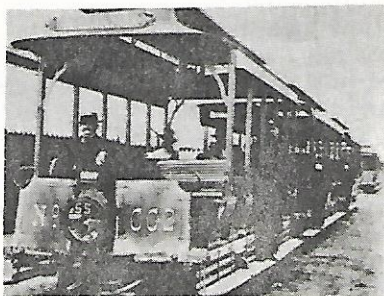


1870 First type of open horse-drawn cars operated by the North Chicago City Railway Company in the north division of the city.

The first unit was constructed south, followed by competing companies to the north, then west. These bobtail cars mounted on a single truck, with straw on the floor for warmth in winter, persisted even into the present century, the last survivor being one ancient owl car that clumped along Wells Street.

Meanwhile we tried steam—a small dummy engine built in what looked like a box with windows, but complete with cowcatcher, and hauling one or two trailers behind it.

Then, in the eighties, came cable cars. These were the admiration of the age, gripping a continuous underground moving cable which could pull them at fourteen miles per hour. At center of the open car in front the stalwart gripman worked his levers, while the passengers sat sideways, often more comfortable than in the jerking, closed trailer car behind. Even though the overhead trolley began presently to replace them, cable cars lasted until, I believe, 1906.



1882 Cable cars with trailers were used on the Wabash & Cottage Grove Avenue line from Lake Street to 39th Street. In 1887 the line was extended to 55th Street, and later to 71st Street. Last of the cable cars on this line disappeared in 1906.

A most important development was the elevated, riding high above traffic. The first was put into operation just before the opening of the World's Fair in 1893, extending from Congress Street ultimately to the Exposition grounds in Jackson Park and powered by those same small, steam dummies.

A second elevated on Lake Street used steam, too. But a couple of years later a third line, the Metropolitan, became the first commercial elevated in the world to be electrically operated. Immediately the others followed suit. These three, and later the Northwestern, were all separately owned; and though they tied themselves together in a Union loop, each charged separate fares, as did also the four companies which then operated the surface lines.

So, while we had transportation both on the ground and overhead, Chicago started the twentieth century in a mess that did not finally get straightened out for better than forty years.

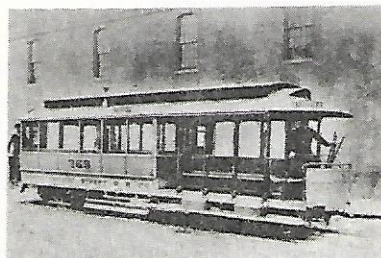
By 1913, however, the worst snarls had been corrected. The elevated lines were under joint operation with through routing and universal transfer privileges; and the surface lines, though still owned by several companies, were also operated as a unit.

Seventeen years later, in 1930, an attempt was made to consolidate the surface and elevated systems into a single company. But by that time the surface lines had no franchise and were in bankruptcy (the longest bankruptcy on record) and the Rapid Transit was toppling. It, too, soon fell into receivership. Altogether, five attempts were made to do something about it; but capital was frightened, competition of private cars was discouraging, and the situation dragged on much as it was, equipment getting older and older, for another fifteen long years.

But no sooner had the Transit Authority been created than the picture changed. Even while negotiations were going forward for purchase of elevated and surface lines, including traction-owned buses, the modernization program began.

The surface lines had held onto a reserve of some \$25,000,000. It was arranged that about half of this should be spent at once for new equipment, this equipment to be taken over in lieu of cash when the CTA acquired the property.

The need for modern equipment was urgent. The average age of streetcars was thirty-two years, of rapid transit cars forty-two years, and of trolley buses fifteen years.

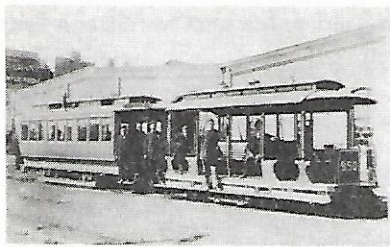


1886 A type of double-truck "combination" grip car operated with cable power. The last cable cars disappeared from Clark Street, Lincoln Avenue and Clybourn Avenue on October 21, 1906.

Meanwhile, negotiations resulted in the purchase of both systems for \$87,162,500, revenue bonds for \$105,000,000 being issued to cover the purchase price and get under way. This seems a bargain when you consider, that in addition to cash taken over, it included 1,092 miles of streetcar track, 171 single miles of elevated, 60 miles of trolley bus lines, and well over 5,000 cars and buses of all kinds in such condition as they were.

Negotiations have since been opened for purchase of various other transit facilities, such as Chicago Motor Coach Company; but if they have made progress one does not know of it—though transfers are interchangeable.

As everyone can see, the new equipment has been coming fast—over 1700 units already: new CTA buses and sleek, streamlined surface cars that make twelve to fourteen miles per hour, including stops.



1888 Grip car operated by cable power used on Milwaukee Avenue, Madison Street, Blue Island Avenue, and Halsted Street lines of the West Chicago Street Railroad Company and the Chicago Passenger Railway Company.

Nearly half the weekday rides now originate on this new equipment. Before the year ends there will be many more units, including some of the 130 new L-and-Subway all-metal cars of modern design, the first to be purchased for Chicago in over twenty years.

Beginning in 1945 and through 1948 a total of \$37,500,000 has been invested in such equipment and other facilities; '49 will bring it to over \$60,000,000; and the first ten years will reach a total of \$150,000,000. That should buy a great deal.

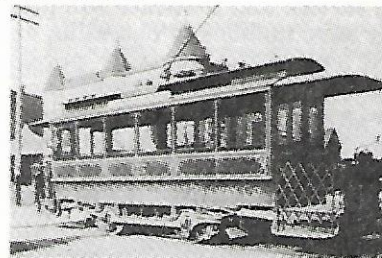
Yet modernization is not only a matter of equipment, but of operation. So long as the systems were competitive, the services often duplicated each other.

As the Authority's Public Information Department pointed out, this was especially true between elevated and surface lines. The former should specialize on longer hauls. So they are trying to create an all-express service, which has already been started on the Lake Street branch, ten stations being eliminated and the rest serviced by A and B trains which stop at alternate stations enroute. Average saving is ten minutes a trip, plus more frequent trains, making this the fastest way to get downtown from the far west side; and this includes private car.

Similar plans are under way for north-south branches of the "L" also.

As regards surface transportation, each type of equipment will be used for the purposes to which it is best adapted. The heaviest surface traffic should be handled by streetcars; but for less heavily used routes trolley and motor buses are often more satisfactory. Ultimately streetcars will be retained on not more than eleven surface lines, eliminating hundreds of miles of track.

With transfers universal, the whole set-up can be streamlined—not only each type of service feeding the others swiftly and directly, but with such conveniences as transfer stations under cover at strategic points, from bus to elevated, for instance. Moreover, since less than 20 percent of surface riders enter the loop, transportation will be adapted to neighborhood needs also. In brief, the CTA is committed to giving Chicago modern equipment, modern service, and a local transportation adapted exactly to our needs.



1890 On October 2, 1890 the Calumet Electric Street Railway installed the first overhead trolley system in the city. The first electric cars were largely remodeled horse and cable cars. Stoves were used for heating and electricity for illumination.

It will take time, but apparently no time is being lost. This is due both to far-sighted policy and aggressive management. Policy is directed by a Transit Board of seven members headed by Philip Harrington, engineer and former Commissioner of Subways and Superhighways, who had much to do with working out the plan. Of the seven members, four are appointed by the Mayor, three by the Governor, the appointments of each being approved by the other.

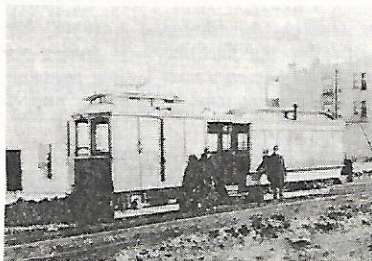
To direct operations the Board appointed a man nationally famous for his progressive policies and with many firsts to his credit: Walter J. McCarter, former General Manager of the Cleveland Transit System. He surrounded himself with an able staff and took over with already remarkable results.

So we have now what we have wanted, public controlled transportation—at least the surface, elevated and subway lines. The fares we pay are not based on profit to anyone, but on actual service at cost.



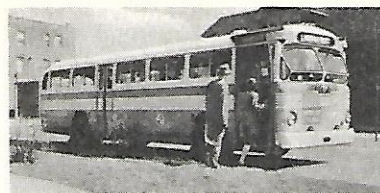
1892 Steam locomotives were used when the "L" was put into operation. The first line ran from Congress Street to 39th Street, and was extended the next year to Jackson Park, site of the World's Fair.

Unified service and first-rate equipment will ultimately save millions in operating expenses. Meanwhile comes the need for developing a system of which we can be proud and which will have comfort and convenience for the more than a billion revenue passengers each year. It must pay its way, and the one source is revenue—estimated for this year at above \$121,000,000.

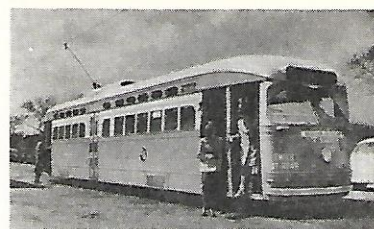


1893 Electric locomotive with trailer, getting power from an overhead trolley wire, was one of the early installations of the West Chicago Street Railroad Company.

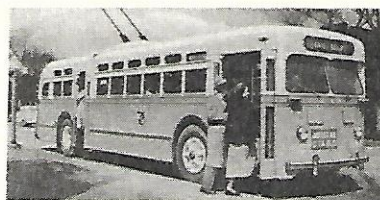
Clearly we are getting value received; for the Chicago Transit Authority in its first fifteen months of operation has demonstrated that it understands the problem and has the skills to solve it.



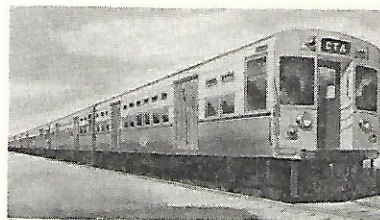
The old type street car is giving way fast to the modern, flexible motor bus. Present plans call for retirement of all old-type equipment throughout the CTA system within less than ten years.



Modern PCC streetcar, noise-proofed and streamlined, now in use on five major routes. It is contemplated that eventually the use of streetcars will continue on not more than 11 routes.



The trolley bus, now replacing streetcars on many routes with heavier flow of traffic, is a silently operating, flexible vehicle. It reduces materially the noise level on streets where it operates.



Plans call for modernization of all rapid transit elevated lines. 130 streamlined, all-metal cars are now being built and deliveries will be completed in 1950. Purchase of a total of one thousand such cars is contemplated.

