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Cover Page Footnote

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BOOK REVIEWS

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Urban transportation modes have been limited to private automobiles and mass transit.¹ Problems of vehicular congestion, noise and air pollution, financial limitations constraining new highway construction, and maintenance, fuel crises, and inflationary trends in the cost of operating automobiles have caused private automobiles to become a nemesis in urban transportation systems.

Mass transit is also plagued with ills. Limited financial resources have wrought a steady deterioration of service; operating costs have soared; service cuts have been made to minimize deficits while fares have been increased to raise revenue. Arguably, the net result has been substantial decrease in use, resulting in lower gross revenue.

In *Para-Transit*,² Kirby, Bhatt, Kemp, McGillivray, and Wohl have proposed a solution to the urban transit malady. It includes sundry para-transit programs composed of conventional taxicab service, dial-a-ride service, jitneys, daily and short term rental cars, subscription bus service, and van or car pools. The distinguishing features of para-transit programs, in contrast with conventional modes, are their service characteristics.

The book is divided initially according to these service characteristics, which include "hail and phone services," "hire and drive services," and "prearranged ride-sharing." A review of the para-transit operating experience follows these chapters, covering "taxi-service," "dial-a-ride," "jitney service," "daily and short-term rental cars," and "subscription buses and car pools."

The authors' failure to differentiate adequately between the "characteristic" and the "experience" chapters, in tandem with a disjointed, uneven textual style has rendered the format cumbersome. Moreover, the goals and intent of the various authors are not always in harmony. At points the book professes to solve the ills of urban transportation, while other sections dispassionately delineate historical statistics without considering plans for the future or ana-

1. Mass transit is traditional, fixed route, public transportation by bus or rail.

2. Para-transit is a term of art encompassing less utilized types of urban transportation modes.

lyzing past mistakes. The net result of the authors' efforts is a reference which aggregates all known statistics on present modes of transportation, incorporates the prior studies on the subject matter, and hints at some solutions. Invariably, however, the data accumulation and positive and negative aspects are so thoroughly examined that solutions, innovations, and recommendations are clearly intimated.

The recommendations gleaned from the data suggest a multipurpose, multi-priced, flexible mode which should be tailored to particular service needs. The only industry that can approach these standards—and is financially profitable—is the taxicab industry. Thus one might conceptualize the form of a successful para-transit operation structured along the organizational patterns of the taxicab industry with certain regulatory modifications. These modifications should include: (1) free entry into the industry; (2) multi-passenger pickups with corresponding rate structures;³ (3) destination placarding; (4) subsidies or other financial incentives for owner-operators as opposed to commissioned driver employees; (5) rates based upon both time and distance on a zone grid; and (6) increased vehicle capacity.

Free entry would reduce the capital expenditure necessary to enter the industry and increase the supply of vehicles and thereby reduce fares and eliminate illegal operations. Free entry should not be confused with deregulation. Proof of financial responsibility, fare regulation, and licensing requirements should be retained but modified.

The concept of multi-passenger pickups, usually associated with bus and jitney services, and specifically forbidden in most taxicab regulations, would temper the trend toward congestion created by free entry. The advantages of fuel economy, reduced pollution, and lower labor costs for drivers are self-evident.

Destination placarding⁴ would greatly facilitate multi-passenger pickups as would subscription sales. Subscriptions could be sold to commuters on a fixed schedule for the round trip from home to work. Hailing could be permitted with the addition of fixed stops

3. The structure must discount the cost of shared rides while encouraging drivers to pick up additional passengers.

4. Destination and/or routes of vehicles are usually posted on buses, jitneys and railways. Taxicabs in Caracas, Venezuela, for example, post destination placards since multi-passenger pickups are permitted and encouraged by regulation and rates.

and semi-fixed routes in appropriate situations, at certain times of the day, as is presently done by jitneys. The key would be to avoid the inflexibility of present mass transit.

The major cost for many systems is labor. The taxicab industry has avoided the public transit problem of labor costs by tying labor costs directly to productivity through commissions. Labor costs which are not linked directly with productivity insure financial failure. The strongest link is by owner-operators since these drivers have a financial interest in their vehicles and therefore profit from the efficient and safe operation of them.

Rate structures would be based on distance and time since they directly affect variable costs. However, zone rating reduces circuitous routing for profit, thereby increasing productivity while reducing fares.

Finally these recommended modes require vehicles with greater capacity than present private automobiles or taxicabs. However, vehicles should not be selected which would forfeit the advantages of comfort, luxury, and some measure of privacy. It would appear that the most desirable capacity is that of the limousine, minibus, or van.

All of these innovations are directed toward improving and expanding the use of para-transit modes. The alternatives to this system would still be the private automobile and mass transit; however, both of these modes would benefit from an expanding, viable para-transit system. Commutations are predominantly made by drivers without passengers, the most inefficient and expensive method of automobile operation. If para-transit modes replace automobiles for any significant portion of these trips, the automobile will become a leisure vehicle which is less expensive to run.

At the same time, mass transit would benefit because of its inherent nature. Mass transit has a fixed flow and is primarily designed for peak hour functioning. A viable para-transit system could remove the necessity for off-peak hour operations, which are primarily responsible for mass transit's annual deficits.

Ultimately para-transit can be whatever the service requirements of a given situation dictate it to be, as long as past and present mistakes are avoided, and services are truly tailored to the urban populous' demand.

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