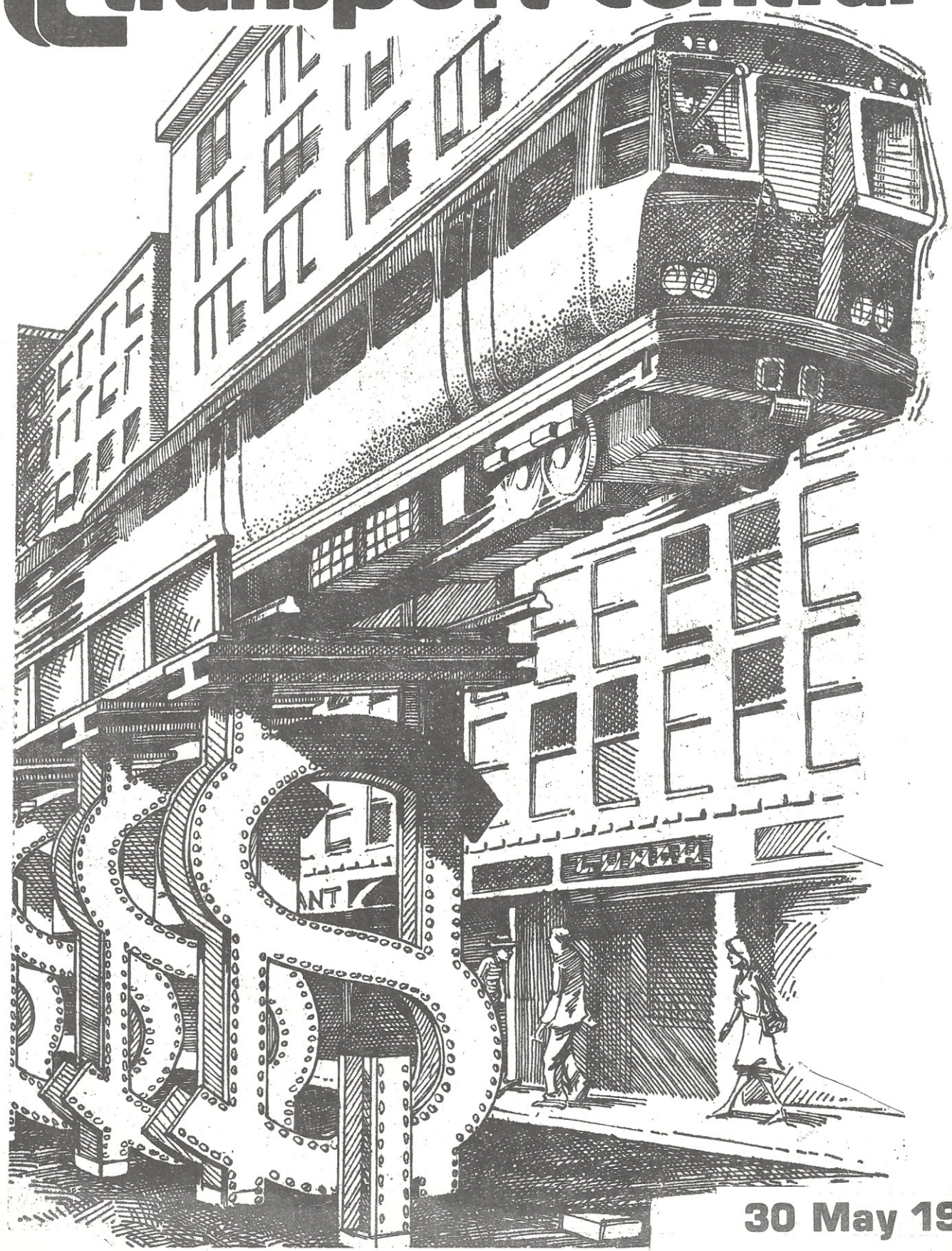


# **TC** transport central



**30 May 1981**

## interface

### CHICAGO COUNTDOWN

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Some thoughts on the continuing transit crisis in Chicago:

First, it need not have happened. That is patently obvious, but what might not be so evident is that the root causes of this breakdown go back far beyond the seven years that the Regional Transportation Authority has been in business. As one Chicago newspaper writer long on history put it just last weekend, many of today's transit troubles in the Windy City can be laid at the feet of one Charles Tyson Yerkes, a transit "robber baron" in the classic sense from the turbulent days around the turn of the century. His inclinations ran toward greed and the establishment of "alliances" with local politicians that resulted in the fragmentation of area transit and its total lack of freedom from political control—both of which are perhaps the principal reasons why today's system is failing.

Secondly, those in public office who have pointed fingers at others as responsible for the crisis are right—all of them, for there is almost no one without blame. Beginning with the governor (who has thus far failed to come up with a rescue plan that has even been acceptable to the members of his own party), down through the legislature (provincial as always—and often ludicrous to boot, as it is often wont to be) to the mayor (who, by and large, has also failed to come up with a proposal acceptable to the other side of the aisle—and who has threatened the very sound concept of regional transit by plumping for an autonomous Chicago Transit Authority), there are many villains in government.

Nor can we stop there. We can also point the finger at the RTA itself (whose stated goal of unifying mass transit in the six-county area has not been met in seven years—and whose reckless spending in the face of economic adversity has been typical of governmental agencies with seemingly unlimited access to the public trough); and, first among the wards of its Marina City parent, to the Chicago Transit Authority (whose operating methods are mired in the halcyon days of the postwar era when costs were low and money was cheap). Last, but certainly not least, a share of the blame goes to the long-suffering transit riders (who stood by uncomplainingly when their already imperfect system was made increasingly worse by unenlightened management). Honorable mention can also be awarded the transit unions for their singular lack of anything but self-interest in their dealings with management—and ultimately the public). At the doorstep of all can be laid the blame for the troubles of 1981 that began almost with Franklin Parmelee's first omnibus run down State Street in April 1859.

Thirdly, while this writer belongs to what is apparently a growing army of those who disagree with Reaganomics, it is only fair to point out an identification with one of its principles—that a belt-tightening is necessary if we are to maintain our basic strengths. We have, as a nation, indeed become slothful, and accustomed to have others do for us what we are perfectly capable of doing for ourselves. That reluctance to expend a little effort in our own interest has made itself felt in the structure of the unwieldy monster that is Chicago's transit network. There is no reason, for example, why that system should be required to react to its environment rather than shaping it. As has been said in these columns before, much of the network's dead weight could be eliminated if rush-hour service were cut, operations in its fringes expanded and a punitive peak fare instituted to "stimulate" business toward rational staggering of working hours. An ongoing, computerized analysis of riding habit coupled with necessary changes in outmoded work rules that would permit far more flexible scheduling and routing would make

the system a great deal more responsive to actual rather than perceived needs. The contracting out of certain functions to other public agencies that currently perform similar tasks is yet another way of reducing the labor burden. More important, however, is the disabusal of the notion that the network must be so comprehensive as to provide virtual door-to-door service throughout its breadth. We can no longer afford that kind of luxury.

Finally, a solution to this perpetual crisis can only come if the governor assumes the leadership role his job calls for (and his press agents assure us he is more than capable of), addressing the problem on the statewide level it demands; if the legislature fulfills its responsibility of serving the needs of *all* the people of Illinois, regardless of geographic location; if the mayor perceives that transportation needs can only be met on a regional basis, whatever the political consequences; if the RTA addresses its mandate on a sound economic basis (again without partisan political considerations); if the Chicago Transit Authority assumes its proper role of just one unit in a coordinated whole (with attendant economies in substance and style); if the ridership becomes a cohesive force and demands a continuing voice in managing the system it supports; and if labor becomes a partner with, rather than antagonist of, management.

Do you, dear readers, believe all of this will really happen?

—RICHARD R. KUNZ

## urban

### THE CITY THAT WALKS

► As this edition is being prepared in the first week of June, the lights are going out one by one in carriers' offices around the six-county area. At this writing, four suburban bus companies have ceased operations (Joliet, Aurora, West Towns and South Suburban SafeWay Lines), several others have curtailed service, and at least two commuter rail lines have indicated plans to suspend all operations June 6-7. At the same time, the area's biggest single carrier, the Chicago Transit Authority, is preparing plans to cut its service and begin worker layoffs.

The reason, of course, is money. Since the Regional Transportation Authority was formed seven years ago, ostensibly to coordinate and improve transit services in the six-county metropolitan area but actually to shift the burden of the CTA's ever-increasing deficits from the city to the state, costs have spiralled, and the ability to fund them has lagged further and further behind.

In those seven years, many proposals have been advanced to fund regional transit for the Chicago area—each touted as a "permanent" solution—and none have been successful. Various packages of taxes, loans and grants have only succeeded in delaying the day of reckoning when the need for money would outstrip the ability of the public agencies involved to provide it.

That day has now arrived, and the RTA is broke—and, more importantly, considerably behind in its obligations to its wards.

Virtually all of the carriers the agency subsidizes depend heavily on those funds for their very survival, for the fare box generates less than half the revenue necessary to sustain the CTA and most suburban bus carriers, and about 60% of the expenses of the commuter rail lines.

Faced with the loss of these much-needed RTA revenues, generally used to meet payrolls and fuel bills, the carriers have had to trim or cease operations.

In the case of the Milwaukee Road, which will probably be the first of the commuter roads to stop suburban service (tentatively set for the wee hours of Saturday, June 6), the railroad itself is in bankruptcy, and its cash position allows for no indirect "subsidies" to the RTA. Its fall will begin a series of "domino" closings, led off by the North Western, which is in relatively secure financial straits, but which cannot take the added strain of displaced Milwaukee commuters (whose lines it parallels) for safety reasons. Should the C&NW stop running (now set for June 7), the Burlington, which parallels the West Line of C&NW, has put RTA and public officials on notice that it, too, will have to close down to avoid a similar inundation. The final domino in that series is the Norfolk & Western, whose four daily trains are serviced by BN in its yards south of Union Station. N&W will of necessity be governed by what BN does.

Amidst much name-calling and finger-pointing, the mayor, governor and legislature are working toward a "permanent" solution to the crisis, but at this writing no plans have been advanced that stand a clear chance of passage. Indications are that more carriers will shut down before any type of solution is found.

### BIRMINGHAM'S BACK

► Birmingham buses, idled for three months because of a lack of cash—and a fare (80¢) that matched Chicago's—began rolling again June 1 on a reduced basis. The Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority had shut down February 28, faced with rising costs, declining ridership and an \$800,000 deficit, leaving the metropolitan area of some 800,000 without bus service.

The new service is operating on money the system has had available all year; no

additional funding was obtained during the closure. The revised reduced-service plan, cutting to 63 percent the bus service previously offered, is very similar to a plan the transit board refused to implement in March. Fares will remain at 80¢, and the service can operate through the end of the fiscal year September 30 with funds on hand.

### PAT'S PROBLEM

► Pittsburgh's Port Authority Transit has been ordered by an Allegheny County judge to reduce its fare from 75¢ to 60¢ effective June 15. The judge concluded that "PAT has and is engaged in the dissipation and squandering of scarce resources," and that it "relies on the fare box too readily rather than affecting obvious and attainable economies were it to concentrate its energies on fulfilling the stated reasons for its existence."

### FAREWELL TO 504

► Late in May, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington struck down a 1979 DOT ruling that said urban transit systems must modify buses and trains to make them accessible to the handicapped. The court said the wide-ranging regulations are not supported by federal laws banning discrimination against the handicapped. But the ruling did not simply strike down the regulations, but ordered DOT to find support for them in other federal laws. The ruling also noted that a transit system could be considered "discriminatory if it refused to take "modest steps" to make its network available to the handicapped.

### SAN DIEGO SOIREE

► The new "San Diego Trolley" LRT line from the Santa Fe station in that city to the Mexican border is now set to begin revenue operations on Sunday, July 26. The opening will be preceded by a week of VIP and public demonstration rides.



5701 marina city  
chicago il 60610

# FIRST CLASS MAIL

## rail

### SAFETY EXPRESS SUMMER

► This is the remaining schedule for Chessie's "Safety Express" through October of this year:

- 12. 06/07-Grand Rapids-St. Joseph (R/T)
- 13. 06/13-Grand Rapids-Plymouth (R/T)
- 14. 06/14-Grand Rapids-Chicago (O/W)
- 15. 06/20-Chicago-Garrett (R/T)
- 16. 06/21-Chicago-Hartford (R/T)
- 17. 06/27-Akron-Pittsburgh (R/T)
- 18. 06/28-Akron-Pittsburgh (O/W)
- 19. 07/11-Pittsburgh-Meyersdale (R/T)
- 20. 07/12-Pittsburgh-Somerset (R/T)
- (No operations July 13-September 11)
- 21. 09/12-Cumberland-Terra Alta (R/T)\*
- 22. 09/13-Cumberland-Somerset (R/T)
- 23. 09/19-Cumberland-Brunswick (O/W)
- 24. 09/20-Silver Spring-Philadelphia (R/T)
- 25. 09/26-Baltimore-Harpers Ferry-Martinsburg (via Old Main) (R/T)
- 26. 09/27-Baltimore-Harpers Ferry-Martinsburg (via Silv. Spg.) (R/T)
- 27. 10/03-Baltimore-Harpers Ferry-Martinsburg (via Old Main Line return via Silver Spring) (R/T)
- 28. 10/04-Baltimore-Richmond (O/W)
- 29. 10/10-Richmond-Balcony Falls (R/T)
- 30. 10/11-Richmond-Balcony Falls (R/T)
- 31. 10/16-Newport News-Richmond Railroad Centennial and Yorktown Bicentennial Celebrations (R/T)
- 32. 10/24-Huntington-Hinton (R/T)
- 33. 10/25-Huntington-Hinton (R/T)
- 34. 10/31-Huntington-Hinton (R/T)
- 35. 11/01-Huntington-Hinton (R/T)

For tour information, write:

Tours 12/13/14  
West Michigan Railroad Historical Society  
P.O. Box 2811  
Grand Rapids MI 49501

Tours 15/16  
Twentieth Century Railroad Club  
Post Office Box A3258  
Chicago IL 60690

Tours 17/18  
Whistle Stop  
2146 Front Street  
Cuyahoga Falls OH 44221



Tours 19/20  
Pittsburgh Chapter NRHS  
P.O. Box 822  
Pittsburgh PA 15230

Tours 21/22/23  
Western Maryland Chapter NRHS  
P.O. Box 1331  
Cumberland MD 21502

Tours 24/25/26/27/28  
Baltimore Chapter NRHS  
P.O. Box 600  
Lutherville MD 21093

Tours 29/30/31  
Old Dominion Chapter NRHS  
P.O. Box 8583  
Richmond VA 23226

Tours 32/33/34/35  
C. P. Huntington Chapter NRHS  
P.O. Box 271  
Huntington WV 25707

ACCOMMODATIONS	Round Trip	Ferry Move
COACH (A/C or open window)	\$33	\$20
ADULT		
CHILD (Under 12)	\$25	\$15
DOME CAR	\$60	\$40
Complimentary Buffet & Beverages		
PARLOR CAR	\$60	\$40
Complimentary Buffet & Beverages		
OBSERVATION LOUNGE	\$60	\$40
Complimentary Buffet & Beverages		

\*Fare between all points  
\*\*Reduced fares between intermediate points.  
Group rates available on all trips.  
Children under 5 years who do not occupy a seat ride free.

The Safety Express is the most visible and dramatic effort to combat the growing problem of rail-highway grade crossing accidents. Chessie System railroads have gone all out to provide a steam-powered, 19-car excursion train to get and direct the attention of passengers and the public

in general to one simple message: Whenever people in cars, trucks or other motor vehicles collide with a train at a grade crossing, they almost always come out a poor second. The Safety Express is being run to educate citizens about the hazards of grade crossing accidents, fatalities and injuries.

Accommodations include "old-time" open-window coaches, air-conditioned coaches, an open-air car, a dome lounge car, parlor car, observation lounge car and mid-train concession car.

### ALONG THE RIGHT-OF-WAY

► Although the Chicago & North Western Station in Chicago will soon fall to the wrecker's ball, the city Landmarks Commission has agreed to consider city landmark protection for Union Station. The eight-floor structure, extensively renovated after a fire last July, was praised in a report by the commission's staff as a "historic and architectural treasure".

The remaining structure, or "head house", was once linked to an imposing concourse building across Canal Street, which was torn down in 1969 to make way for an office structure. The Union Station complex was constructed between 1913 and 1925 in the style of Beaux Arts Classicism by Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. The head house is noted for its three-story-high classic waiting room, which was remodeled at a cost of \$2,000,000 after last year's fire. In the course of that rehabilitation, a "temporary" tar paper covering over the skylight added as air-raid protection during the war was removed, bathing the interior in muted sunlight.

## at deadline

### RAILROAD REPRIEVE

► Agreement was reached June 4 in the chambers of the federal judge overseeing the bankruptcy of the Milwaukee Road for a plan to keep the embattled commuter service of the road running for at least another week, until a similar meeting June 11. The railroad will finance fuel for its suburban trains from its general revenues, since the Regional Transportation Authority's coffers are depleted.