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Did Over-Regulation of The Connecticut Company Quicken the Demise of Hartford's Trolley System?

Preface

Hartford's electric trolley system formed the center of New England's most extensive rail network on the early 20th century¹. While this system² only lasted from 1888 until 1941, it was enormously influential in daily lives of nearly all of Hartford's citizens and the economic system of the early 20th century. The demise of these electric street railways is the subject of much scholarship focusing on either the nostalgia aspects of the bygone trolleys or the alleged involving General Motors, Standard Oil and Firestone Tire and Rubber. This cartel supposedly bought up and shut down numerous trolley systems in order to eliminate the trolleys from competing with the motor vehicles (buses) and then to later entice consumers into the purchase of automobiles. Since the 1990s, efforts have been made to revive fixed route transportation in the form of light rail and busway projects. Such projects have become the subject of intense public debate over their necessity as part of economic growth of the region and sources of taxation required for these endeavors.

The irony of this debate is that Hartford once enjoyed a trolley system far more extensive than any transit project proposed today. While the debate today generally focuses on the funding of mass transit projects, it is important to note that the transit

¹ Hinton and Due, 319

² For the purposes of this paper, the term "Hartford system" is used generically to refer to the complex and interlocking relationships of the street traction companies. The Hartford Street Railway, founded in 1896 was united with dozens of other traction companies through a complex series of buyouts, leases and mergers. This eventually culminated in The Connecticut Company, the predecessor to the modern CTTransit.

systems of yesteryear were funded largely with private bond issues and at little cost to the taxpayer.

Since most Connecticut trolleys ran on public streets, trolley companies were forced to negotiate franchise agreements with the cities in exchange for the right to of easement. Municipal control of the trolley systems varied in severity from state to state. Typically, trolley companies signed an agreement gaining the right to operate on streets for a period of twenty-five years. The trolley companies were required to lay and maintain its tracks and fares were fixed at a rate of five cents for the duration of the franchise period. The level of municipal control over the Hartford system was supreme. The city retained the ability to dictate routes, regulate fares and set requirements for times and frequency of service. In some instances, The Connecticut Company was forbidden to discontinue routes even when these routes proved to be unprofitable with low ridership.

Traction companies were able to accept the weight of regulations as a cost of doing business until the federal government increased the level of transit regulation in the 1910s. During WWI, the National War Labor Board deemed electric trolleys critical to the war effort. Aspects of trolley operation such as operator wages were brought under regulation and fixed to national prevailing levels. While wage outlays doubled from 1915 to 1920, traction companies were prohibited from increasing fares accordingly³. Trolley systems also degenerated under federal controls in that they were prevented from making the necessary equipment upgrades required to remain operational.

After the 1920s, the government returned Hartford's trolleys from national to local control, however public utility regulations fomented a new threat to the trolley operators. Hartford's trolley system, like many others, had ties to the local power utilities. The level

of integration of the Hartford trolley system with the utility was absolute as the two entities were organized under the Connecticut Railway and Light Company⁴. Although initially immune from public utility and interstate commerce regulations, the trolley systems were eventually forced to disassociate themselves from the power generation companies due to holding-company regulations in the 1930s⁵. This resulted in the loss of a number of operational efficiencies in the maintenance of the distribution systems, placing additional financial burdens on the already struggling trolley system.

Since The Connecticut Company in many ways served as a model for other systems and operated for roughly the same period, it is fairly representative of the national trends in trolley regulation. The author does not dispute the conclusion of other scholars that the final blow to trolleys was struck in the 1940s when the remaining street railways were replaced with buses. This study however finds previous scholarship lacking in failing to stress that federal and municipal government regulation had so mortally wounded the trolley systems by the 1920s that their demise was inevitable. While previous scholarship has focused on the effects of the buses and automobile on trolley operations, this study shall present evidence suggesting that government interference had an equal role in the demise of the trolley systems.

Unlike the demise of trolleys in other cities caused due to buyouts (possible by the GM cartel) and subsequent replacement with buses, the Hartford system was not bought out and the author found no evidence of GM's involvement. The transformation from trolleys to buses in The Connecticut Company took place under auspices of the

³ Pattacini, 9

⁴ Stanford, 4

⁵ Hinton and Due, 230

company's management in a piecemeal fashion starting in the 1920s as various routes became more economical to operate with buses.

Specifically, this study shall present evidence to suggest that the franchise agreements under which the trolley companies operated were grossly unfair and put traction companies at a significant disadvantage compared to bus and jitney providers. This disadvantage was mainly in the form of unequal taxation, technical and work practice regulations.

The Beginnings of Hartford Municipal Trolley Regulation

Hartford's initial horse trolley lines faced little resistance in their initial establishment of routes from Hartford to Wethersfield. Trolleys were seen as a sign of progress and prestige for the growing Victorian city. Eventually more lines were added and in 1888, the first Hartford line was electrified. Many were skeptical about the use of electrification and some residents vociferously lobbied the city to not allow the current carrying overhead trolley wires to be installed above the city streets. For the privilege of operating trolleys on city streets, the city council exacted a fee of two percent of the trolley revenues⁶. Trolley operators were required to sign franchise agreements with the city government requiring that fares would remain fixed for a period of typically twenty-five years. Fares on most lines were five cents or less.

City regulations required that the trolley company coordinate with the city government and city engineering department on every aspect of trolley operations. In the 1890s when most of the city's lines were electrified, the city initially attempted to force the trolley operators to install underground slotted power system instead of the overhead

lines. Given that most streets of the day were dirt or macadam this alternative would have been cost prohibitive and technically unfeasible. Finally, after delays the city relented and allowed the overhead wires. In 1909 when the Main St. and Central Row tracks were changed from single to double tracks to increase capacity, the city's engineer Jack Ross, prescribed the design details and coordinated all track-laying efforts through the city's approved contractor, Balf Company⁷.

Another particularly troublesome regulation that caused grave financial hardship to the trolley systems was the city's regulation requiring traction companies to pave the streets between the rails and for a set distance outside the rails. Before the turn of the century, when streets were macadam or dirt, this regulation was reasonable since the repeated wear of the horse hooves damaged the streets. By the early 1920s, however this regulation was obsolete because many of the major thoroughfares were paved with asphalt and the electrified trolley lines provided no further hoof-damage to the streets.

The organized efforts at snow removal from the main streets were a municipal requirement directed at the traction companies. Traction companies were forced to plow the streets where its lines ran. This service benefited not only the trolley lines, but the operators of automobiles as well. Due to the weather and frequency clauses in franchise agreements, trolley operations were required in inclement weather even in times of low ridership. Jitney and bus companies faced no such restrictions.

Hartford did not limit the scope of public regulation to technical issues alone. Moral issues were pervasive in the legislation of trolley politics. Initially, traction companies were unable to run on the Sabbath. This resulted in the losses of unspecified amounts of

⁶ Hartford Scrap Book Vol. 17, P. 45, The Hartford Collection

⁷ Hartford Scrap Book Vol 18, P. 9, The Hartford Collection

revenues for the companies. This Victorian-age restriction was apparently taken very seriously and once resulted in the arrest of a Hartford lineman Orrin W. Chaffer, performing wire repairs in East Hartford on a Sunday⁸. The case was appealed to the Connecticut Supreme Court where it was later dropped.

Finally, moral and religious arguments were employed to allow the trolleys to gain limited rights to Sunday operations. Mrs. Crilly, the wife of a traction company employee petitioned the city council for the right to have special event service to transport the faithful to religious revival meetings held by Reverend Moody in the Meadows area. Other church groups followed suite petitioned the city council for Sunday trolley service and the council relented. This did not mark the end of paternalistic legislation. When ladies' fashions came to favor the sheath-skirt, the traction company was order to lower the running boards so women did not have to breach their modesty when boarding the trolley. This design change came at a price of \$75,000⁹.

Other technical regulations of the Hartford trolleys involved the city's use of police influence to compel The Connecticut Company to install additional seating in the trolleys¹⁰. Hartford trolleys, like most others, utilized hanging straps for the passengers to hold into as they rode standing up. This allowed more passengers to fit into a trolley during rush hour times. The riding public reacted to this and demanded additional seats be installed, thus decreasing the number of passengers the trolley could carry. Lucius S. Storrs, then-president of The Connecticut Company was also nationally known in his role as a spokesman for the electric street railway industry. The Wilcox Report prepared for the Federal Electric Railways Commission provides details of Storrs' testimony before

⁸ Hartford Scrap Book Vol. 18, P. 9, The Hartford Collection

⁹ Hartford Scrap Book Vol. 18. p 16, The Hartford Collection

the commission¹¹. Storrs describes the use of political influence and pressure to induce the Connecticut Company into extending trolley lines to the small community of Westport. The community has too small a population to support ridership for the line extension; however, the town selectmen had interests in land and were thus able to induce the trolley to extend a line. According to Storrs' testimony, the trolley took in only \$2000, but cost \$8000 to operate¹².

The relationship between the management and Hartford's business elite was highly integrated. While this paper does not attempt to exhaustively investigate the political ties of all the principals, it is very interesting to note that the principals of the Hartford Street Railway Company included the president of The Travelers Insurance Company, the president of Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance Company, and a state senator¹³.

Additionally the vice president had familial ties to the founder of the Hartford Electric Company. Such an arrangement almost exactly parallels the fictional arrangement of the street railway system described by Theodore Dreiser in his work, The Financier¹⁴. The book, written in 1912, attempted to expose the rampant corruption in the municipal governments during the period. Specifically targeted in the book is the illegitimate manipulation of bond issues in attempt to form street railway combinations.

Federal Regulation of Hartford's Trolleys

Probably single most devastating government regulation faced by the traction companies was the nationalization of transit regulation in WWI. The federal government, deeming the trolleys integral to the war effort brought the trolley systems under its reign

¹⁰ Wilcox, 88

¹¹ Wilcox, 90

¹² Wilcox, 90

¹³ Pattacini, 8

in 1915. Wages paid to the motormen increased because of the federal mandate. Traction companies, already overcapitalized, compensated by deferring upgrades and reducing maintenance. One way the Hartford system finessed a way around the regulations was through the development of the zone fare system. It was technically not possible to raise the fare past five cents, however the city did allow the increasing fares for passengers traveling through more than a single zone area. Interestingly, The Connecticut Company was the first system to implement a zone fare system.

The WWI difficulties were increasingly compounded by difficulties in obtaining metal, particularly the copper that was integral to electrical wiring systems. During the war the federal government rationed critical materials for the war effort. Many of the trolley lines still operated with equipment installed at the initial electrification of 1896. The inability to perform equipment upgrades put the trolley lines on an unequal footing with the newer jitney and bus competition. The unequal treatment of trolleys and bus lines extended to the federal tax realm. Nearly all traction companies, including Hartford's were organized as corporations. At the beginning of the 20th century, the federal government obtained its revenues from tariffs and corporate taxes. The war effort put additional revenue strains on corporations in the form of federal taxation. The physical plant and rolling stock of the traction companies were considered assets and federal tax law dictated the rules used for depreciation. Jitney companies were often sole proprietors or small time operators. Personal motor vehicles were not taxed at the federal level, nor did these small time operators have to pay corporate taxes on their operational profits.

¹⁴ Dreiser, 1-450 (This book was a fictionalization of the life of transport magnate Charles T. Jerkes)

Mr. Loring, a contemporary of Lucius Storrs, testified on behalf of the Lynn, Massachusetts traction company, describing the tax avoidance of the jitney bus competitors.

“For instance, we showed the City of Lynn the other day that we paid in taxes \$30,000 and we ran about 40 regular cars; that is \$750 per car, figured in that way. The jitney bus seats 20 or 30 and it pays an average of \$25.”¹⁵

In later years, the federal and state governments directly subsidized the automobile industry via road construction, providing a further impetus for the use of automobiles. Traction companies had to cover the cost of laying tracks and maintaining their systems, while buses and jitneys used the public thoroughfares for free. In the early years, there were little in the way of technical regulations relating to buses, allowing them to operate cheaply. Trolley companies were also forced to pay maintenance fees on various other roads and bridges¹⁶, all items from which the buses and jitneys derived benefit.

Traction companies were initially immune from the Interstate Commerce Commission, due to the fact that they did not engage in interstate trade. This changed when a trolley lines was constructed between the District of Columbia and Maryland. Through a series of court decisions, the practices of the traction companies came under increasing regulation. Hartford’s system operated a line between Hartford and Springfield, Massachusetts, thus crossing state boundaries. Other lines transcended state lines of Rhode Island and New York. While the most damaging regulations had primarily to do

¹⁵ Wilcox, 104

¹⁶ “To Begin Hearings on Trolley Bills”, The Hartford Courant , p. 3, 4/8/1919

with labor practices, the regulations of freight interchange also caused the electric railroads considerable difficulty. Franchise agreements specifically restricted the transportation of freight on street railways. Most street railways were not initially constructed for the purpose of freight traffic, yet in many parts of the country, traction companies found it more profitable to haul freight than passengers. Some passenger operations were even subsidized by the freight operations. These regulations existed because municipal governments were afraid that street railway tracks would eventually allow steam locomotives onto the city streets. Electric traction companies rarely, if ever, shared the same tracks as steam rail systems, yet freight interchange was one avenue of possible profit for the trolley and interurban rail systems. Freight operations had been strictly regulated at the federal level since the 1887¹⁷ and those wishing to engage in rail freight operations were required to join into joint pricing agreements and obtain federal approval for their routes. Interchange of freight would have allowed freight to be shipped via rail to many of the smaller localities not served by steam railroads. Additionally, freight interchange would have created a more integrated transportation network, with speed of transit being increased. Such speed increases were not only more convenient for passengers, but absolutely essential for those shipping perishable agricultural products in an age with limited refrigeration. Steam railroads, which enjoyed a more powerful lobby than the electric traction companies feared that traction companies would take away their business by delivering a similar service at a lower cost. While there are some instances of overlap between the two services, it was generally uneconomical for either an electric

¹⁷ Hinton and Due, 152. As Hinton and Due point out, the ICC was given authority over railroads, but the Intrastate Commerce Act did not adequately define what a "railroad" was. This later led to the imposition of rules on electric railroads that were probably intended for the larger steam roads.

traction company or a steam road to build a duplicate route. Trolley freight operated on a limited basis in Hartford as late as 1920¹⁸ servicing Pratt and Whitney.

The Hartford trolley system eventually did become integrated with the New York and New Haven and Hartford Rail Road. This was due to a period of consolidations bolstered by the fact that some of the New Haven heavy freight lines were already electrified. Eventually, however, all trolley operations in the state became part of Connecticut Railway and Light Company (predecessor of CL&P) and later the Connecticut Company when power utility operations were divorced from street railways. It is of particular importance to note that the disassociation of the power companies presented a number of technical problems to the street railways. Trolley powerhouses produced a large amount of power, yet maximum current draw occurred when numerous electrical motors in the trolleys were starting at the same time. This meant that the trolley powerhouses produced an excess of electricity that could potentially be sold as a utility commodity if converted to AC. From a service and maintenance standpoint it made sense for the electrical company to use a single service department to maintain both systems.

As has been pointed out, technical regulations imposed on the trolley systems presented a hurdle to the Hartford system as the electric traction industry was in the early days of standardization and consolidation. As the years progressed, the technical issues did not pose as great a hurdle as the bond finance regulations imposed at the federal level. One of the most common practices in trolley finance was the watering down of bond issues used to fund the construction of new lines. This practice is equivalent to running the printing presses to mint new money. Throughout history this has only lead to the

¹⁸ "Trolley Freight may be stopped in Hartford". The Hartford Courant, p. 2, 6/9/1920

devaluation of monetary instruments and has made investors leery of devoting further capital to the losing proposition.

Labor issues in Hartford Trolley History

Hartford's street railways were a hotbed of union activity. Newspaper headlines from the 1910s to the 1920s¹⁹ indicate agitation on the part of the unions for increased wages and standardized working conditions. Union activity started primarily after the street railways were electrified and followed national trends in the unionization of rail systems. Trolley employees threatened strikes in 1913, 1918, and 1919²⁰. Fortunately most of these disputes were solved at the bargaining table. Traction operations remained a blue-collar profession, though it was one of the most respected²¹ of the AFL trades. The effectivity of the trolley system depended on the reach of its lines. By the 1920s the trolley companies had extended service to smaller towns such as Willimantic and Bristol in order to increase ridership. To fund these expansions, bond issues were made, typically on the Philadelphia exchange²². Watering of bond issues placed the traction company in a precarious position, especially considering the increasing wage demands of the workers. The archives of The Hartford Courant indicate numerous protests by the public ridership demanding reductions in fares or opposing fare increases²³. As new lines were installed, city governments held fast their demands of the fixed fare. As late as 1917, the fare on the Manchester line was only six cents, not much more than

¹⁹ Hartford Courant Archives, index note cards for The Connecticut Company

²⁰ Hartford Courant Archives, index note cards for The Connecticut Company

²¹ Middleton, 362

²² The Philadelphia exchange was used because the New York investors were heavily vested in the steam road stocks. Steam Railroad companies saw electric railways as a threat and thus made offerings on the New York exchange a conflict of interest for many brokerage firms there.

²³ Hartford Courant Archives, index note cards for The Connecticut Company

fares were in the 1890s²⁴. In Hartford proper, the fare did not increase to six cents until 1918²⁵. Fare increases were not without protest. The Hartford city hall fought the fare increases in court although the fare increases were eventually sustained. Similar fare battles took place in Waterbury and Manchester.

Events of the early teens served as an admonition for the future of The Connecticut Company. The fare protests by the public and the wage hikes caused by the federal government during the Great War brought the Connecticut Company to the brink of bankruptcy in February of 1919. Throughout out early 1919 the debate roared on between The Connecticut Company and the municipal governments over trolley fares and the need to maintain service. Even with the advent of the automobile, the vast majority of the families continued to use the trolleys to some degree into the 1920s. No mayor could afford to appear too sympathetic to the desires of The Connecticut Company to raise fares, while at the same time many merchants called on the city governments to maintain constant trolley service so as not to interrupt the flow of customers.

The trolley companies did not have success in obtaining changes in the status quo until a government committee was established to investigate the trolley problems. Senator John R. Dillon of Shelton chaired the committee and speakers included Lucius Storrs of The Connecticut Company and Harrison B. Freeman of the Hartford and Springfield [electric] Railway. The committee favored a resolution to provide tax relief to the trolley companies and relieve them from their street paving obligations. Mr. Freedman testified²⁶ that it took the discontinuance of 127 miles of track in nearby Massachusetts to

²⁴ “Manchester Merchants Protest 6 Cent Fare”. The Hartford Courant, p. 3, 10/6/1917

²⁵ “Hartford Appeals Trolley Decision”, The Hartford Courant, p. 4/13/1918-this date is believed by the author to be correct, but uncertainty remains due to illegible copy.

²⁶ “Jitney Benefits Cause Criticism”, The Hartford Courant, p. 10, 4/16/1919.

get the public to “wake up” to the problems the trolleys faced and the unfairness of the untaxed and unregulated competition posed by the jitneys.

By May 1919, a plan was formulated allowing The Connecticut Company relief from some of its obligations relating to the maintenance of city streets. Additionally, some of the taxes derived from trolley operations were reduced. The plan did not appease the angry public as fare increases were continually contested. During the latter months of 1919, The Connecticut Company switched all of its operations over to the new system of zone fares, essentially allowing a fare increase for riders traveling out of the core areas. The loudest protests came from outlying communities such as Stafford, where fares were hiked to 12 cents, nearly double what a rider had to pay for a cross-town fare. Zone fares continued to cause protests into 1920 and were the result in a hearing at the Capitol in March of 1920. The zone fare system was upheld, but it many say this as officially marking the beginning of the decline of electric trolleys.

The most contentious issue for the trolley men apart from wages was the adoption of one-man cars by the Hartford system in 1920. Prior to 1920, two trolley men rode in each car; the motorman drove the car the conductor collected fares and issues transfers. A new style of car designed at a conference of traction company presidents replaced most of the older wood cars with a larger all-metal construction car. This new car employed an entrance door and automatic fare collection box near the driver's seat. A rear door was used to exit. The trolley lines were still growing in 1920, however, this new car eliminated one of the well paid and respected positions from each car previously staffed by bargaining unit members. Fighting over the right of The Connecticut Company to use the one-man cars dragged on until 1921. The unions were mostly concerned with the

potential staffing reductions, but couched their arguments against the cars in terms on public safety. Some felt that a reduction in safety would result if the role of the conductor were to be eliminated. The fact that there had been a number of trolley mishaps involving fatalities did not favor the Connecticut Company. The company eventually prevailed in the debate over the cars when the Public Utility Commission (PUC) ruled they were safe²⁷, but quickly became mired in another labor dispute in 1921. This dispute went to arbitration and a settlement was reached forcing The Connecticut Company to pay back wages to trolley men.

Hartford traction companies convert to buses

The 1920s proved to be a major turning point in the future of common carrier transit in Hartford. Lucius Storrs blamed decreasing ridership on automobile usage and it was evident that the future of street running railways was limited. Storrs was able to obtain tax relief for the trolleys, yet he was unsuccessful in his efforts to stymie the growth of jitney competition²⁸. The Connecticut Company met this impasse by obtaining authorization to convert a number of its lines to bus operations. Government regulations continued to imperil The Connecticut Company as it converted to buses. Each route required approval from the PUC with respect to the streets used, number of stops and frequency. The PUC initially rejected The Connecticut Company's application for bus service from Hartford to Manchester via Burnside Avenue²⁹. This was due to concerns relating to at-grade rail crossings by the proposed route. This route was eventually established and ran along a similar path to the Z route of today, going from State House

²⁷ "One-man trolleys safer than others, Utility Commission rules", p. 1, The Hartford Courant, 4/28/1922

²⁸ "Storrs asks Governor to lay Trolley Crisis before Extra Session", p. 1, The Hartford Courant 9/1/1920

Square to the Buckland Hills Mall. It is the author's experience that this route is fairly heavily traveled to this day. By 1941 all trolley routes were converted to bus operations, relieving The Connecticut Company of its maintenance obligations. The labor unrest however did not cease and the transit unions continued to agitate for strikes when their demands were not met. In spite of the labor issues, the union did not protest the conversion to buses since there was not any loss in jobs to the bargaining unit. Although no longer hindered by the burdensome franchise agreements, the federal laws relating to management and labor were strengthened in the 1930s forcing management to recognize the bargaining units of the labor unions. The establishment of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) further limited market-based wage and labor practices and replacing them with socialistic government influenced practices. Progress in the setup of the new bus facilities off Vernon St., won The Connecticut Company national industry recognition for excellence in operational efficiency³⁰, but with labor making increasing demands these efficiencies did not translate into profits. Primarily because of the war effort, the remaining unused trolley tracks were removed so the scrap metal could support the defense industries. The New Haven operations of The Connecticut Company were the last to employ trolley service for the Yale bowl in 1948. Soon after the complete removal of the New Haven trolley service, the municipal government of New Haven obtained court rulings allowing it to tax the assets of the bus service in the same manner as the previous trolley system had been taxed³¹. Ramifications of this new tax meant that the Vernon St. garage facilities in Hartford were now taxable at the local level.

²⁹ "Conn. Co. Loses Route Application for Manchester", The Hartford Courant 12/31/1939

³⁰ "Transit Workers Receive Coveted Efficiency Award", The Hartford Courant, 1946 (exact date unclear due to partially missing header on clipping)

³¹ "Bus Company to Be Taxed in New Haven", 9/13/49, The Hartford Courant

Additional tax revenues boosted municipal intake but reverted bus operations to a regulatory status much like that under the old trolley system.

More Recent Trolley-like developments in Hartford

Labor and financial crises continued for The Connecticut Company. It again fell upon hard times and was sold to a Hartford businessman in 1964, paving the way for an eventual takeover by the Connecticut Department of Transportation. The Connecticut Company however was not the only organization to attempt to operate a fixed rail system. In 1973 a four-month strike by bus drivers at Bradley airport crippled the transportation system surrounding the airport. Using grant money from the state and federal governments, the airport solicited proposals for a fixed guideway tram system to move passengers to and from the car parking lot on a 0.7 mile guideway³². Unlike the buses, this tramway was automated and did not rely on a driver, thus eliminating the threat of strikes from shutting the system down. The project was completed in 1974 and operated until 1975, but was deemed an expensive failure by the then-new governor, Ella Grasso. Operations ceased and the guideway was torn out in a subsequent airport renovation. It is the author's opinion that this system was overly ambitious for the early 1970s and was probably too capital-intensive for the small line it served. The author has observed a similar system in continuous operation at the Philadelphia International Airport, however automation and electrical technologies making this possible are more mature than they were in the 1970s. Additionally, the Philadelphia airport is larger than Bradley and carries significantly more traffic.

³² Static display at the Connecticut Trolley Museum

Another failed government effort to revive a regional attempt at rail transport was the proposed Hartford Griffin Line of the early 1990s. This proposal involved building a modern light rail line along an existing rail line to the Griffin Office Park north of Hartford. Technically, this type of rail line could employ standard light rail equipment on an existing right of way. This proposal however, would have depended on a \$1.2M³³ yearly subsidy from the City of Hartford. Without the support of the City Council and the Governor's Office the proposal fell by the wayside. Previous scholars have derided the Department of Transportation for its opposition the Griffin Line proposal due the their, "Cheapness and lack of forward thinking."³⁴ Melissa Pattacini, the Trinity student who prepared this report, failed to consider the enormous impact to the taxpayer and did not identify any sources of funding for the project other than subsidies. Pattacini did however correctly point out the predisposition of the Department of Transportation to projects favoring roads over other forms of transit³⁵. The issue of what form future transit will take is critical to the future of the region, since it is unlikely that Hartford can continue to widen roads and highways to fit in more cars and relieve congestion.

Another attempt to revive a fixed route system is the proposed Hartford-New Britain Busway project. This project aims to use an abandoned rail right of way as a dedicated bus road between Hartford and New Britain, stopping at various points in between. Proponents of the project touted plans that included making the proposed stops resembling Victorian style buildings having space for coffee shops, dry cleaning services,

³³ Pattacini, 16

³⁴ Pattacini, 23

³⁵ Pattacini, 15

newsstands, and other conveniences to the rider³⁶. This proposal contained most of the benefits of a light rail system in that the transit vehicles traveled in an fixed route, separated by grade from other motor vehicle traffic giving it a speed advantage over street bus or freeway automobile use. The use of buses instead of light rail makes costs far more manageable from the installation standpoint. At the time of this writing, the busway has been selected as one of ten demonstration projects to receive funds from the Federal Transit Administration³⁷. A large hurdle in the planning and design of this project is the legal requirement to provide environmental impact studies. Project planners must provide designs, which meet the federal guidelines and satisfy environmental concerns identified by the study. The requirement of an environmental impact study amounts to another government hurdle since the proposed route is simply an alternative use of an existing right of way. The impacts are, self evidently, of little change from the present usage. The design will proceed through 2004 and actual implementation is scheduled for 2007.

Although unable to operate without massive subsidies, the busway projects will be a litmus test for future mass transit projects in the Hartford area. Most consumers are unlikely to abandon their automobiles unless a mass transit system can shave time off the trip and eliminate the difficulties and cost associated with parking the city. A busway by virtue of its separation from other forms of traffic enjoys this benefit, yet will still not be able to give the door-to-door service that automobile provides.

It is important to note that even without the governmental interference to private mass transit, bus and trolley systems would not have survived as they had been previously run.

³⁶ Notes by the author from, Hartford-Manchester/Vernon Bus Rapid Transit Study Public Information Meeting, attended by the Author 9/25/2001, Manchester City Hall, Manchester CT

In order to compete with the automobile it is necessary to have a dedicated right of way, avoiding the traffic jams of the freeway system and resulting in a benefit to the mass transit rider. Mass transit will always have a ridership consisting of the poor and elderly, but the middle classes are unlikely to abandon their cars in Hartford until there is a substantial tangible benefit to using mass transit.

Conclusions

Hartford once had a vibrant and far-reaching, trolley-based mass transit system that connected almost every neighborhood to the city center. The hub of the system at the Old State House served to link Hartford with Springfield, and cities as far away as Boston, New York and Providence. While this system was built largely with private funds, city bureaucrats regulated every aspect of the system. Federal and state laws later put the trolley system at a disadvantage with respect to other transit modes due to the fact that the federal government subsidized road construction for the auto and additionally forced electric traction companies to comply with labor standards that no reasonable business would accept. The cumulative effect of municipal, state and federal regulations was a factor in The Connecticut Company's bankruptcy. Without an equal playing field, the trolley systems were doomed. Conversion to buses and the advent of the automobile made mass transit less favorable and relegated it to the domain of the urban poor.

The strict regulatory environment is likely to deter investors from establishing future systems and any systems that are implemented will be established only through government largesse. Unfortunately, projects conceived solely through government agencies without market support are likely to be expensive failures.

³⁷ <http://www.ctrapidtransit.com/>

The most pragmatic approach to revitalizing mass transit in Connecticut lies in the conversion of CTTransit to a more market oriented structure. The urban poor will always represent a market for the transit agency, but to significantly increase the ridership, the company must deliver significant benefits to the more affluent customers in order to lure them away from automobiles. Transit management must lobby to ensure that if public funds are to be expended on transit, that CTTransit, or similar private bodies, receive a share of funding in proportion to their ridership.

Future transportation policy must not favor any one form of transit. For any given mode of transit, policy must allow for the user to be assessed the true total cost of the services they receive whether this is in the form of roads or other transit modes. This will eliminate the traditional subsidization of the road systems, which naturally leads to a preference of automobiles and buses. Government wage and route controls have not permitted transit systems to operate on a market-based model. Unless transportation is returned to a market based system, the historical patchwork of legislation will continue to burden transit operators and prevent the entry of private investors from offering mass transit services.

Bibliography and Research Notes:

The primary source documents for this brief summer seminar paper come primarily from the archives of the Hartford Courant. This archive provides a complete selection of nearly all articles written about this subject in the early 1900s by The Courant. Additionally, the Hartford collection contains a scrapbook with a subset of these articles. Although the Hartford collection is smaller, it does also contain some articles from the now defunct Hartford Times.

Delos Wilcox's text containing both analysis and experts from government committee hearings were especially useful. This text was a primary source from many of the raw figures that support the arguments presented in this paper. While Wilcox tends to recommend socialization of transit, his views are reflective of movements in the 1920s. Wilcox is pragmatic and admits to the difficulties the traction companies have with the maintenance regulations and the sometimes outlandish disconnect between operating costs and government-fixed wages.

Hinton and Due is another excellent text dealing with the interurban electric railways. This text gives a synopsis of the major interurban electric railway systems. As Hinton and Due note, The Connecticut system is a technically a trolley with many "rural" trolley routes, and not an "interurban", however, Connecticut's system had enough interurban characteristics to be noted in their study.

The Stanford history of the Connecticut Company is the best source detailing the complex series of mergers, which resulted in the formation of the Connecticut Company. This book is limited, however, in that it is primarily a chronological history with little information on the social or regulatory aspects of the trolley system.

The conclusions presented in this paper are merely a starting point for what will hopefully be a larger research project at a future time. A more thorough investigation of Public Utility Commission records would bring additional insights to this field. Unfortunately such an investigation requires more time and resources than a compressed summer class will allow. The focus of this research is also limited to the time period in which trolleys covered Hartford's streets, however further research is necessary relating to the later demise of the Connecticut Company and the formation of CTTransit. CTTransit is the present day Connecticut mass transit operator that is a private company wholly owned by the Connecticut Department of Transportation. The author believes that the study of the regulation of this field is of great importance because it led the way to the regulation of many other areas of private industry, which have shaped the 20th century and continue to have ramifications today.

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Available at Hartford Studies Office 70 Vernon ST.

This dissertation highlights the social relationship between the trolleys and the Hartford community. Especially important is an interview with an interview with the son of Hartford's longest-time trolley operator who operated both horse and electric trolleys.

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