Express Transit Operation—Indianapolis

W. W. Harris
Vice-President and General Manager
Indianapolis Railways

It will be my privilege to cite an example which we know in Indianapolis is helping to relieve traffic congestion on the streets of our capital city. However, before I delve into the details of our plan of express transit service, I would like to take a few minutes to cite to you the importance of mass transportation in its relationship to the overall picture of traffic.

Today, I believe you will agree, there is a greater awareness of the value of public transit as an important adjunct to the well-being of a city, and all groups, including downtown real estate boards, merchant groups, police and traffic engineers, bear this out, as evidenced in the changes made to relieve traffic in some of our great American cities.

It is generally recognized that the thing that is important is the movement of people and goods and not just the movement of vehicles. Strong minority groups in many segments of our cities scream and cry whenever curb parking is banned or a parking meter is removed to alleviate the flow of traffic. This emphasizes that still much education is needed. There is little agreement as to the amount of additional downtown parking areas or the extent of the amount of off-street parking that should be allowed. More parking, whether on- or off-street, will intensify congestion in our rush hours.

In Seattle, the store employees have urged shopping in the morning to relieve traffic congestion in the afternoon. In Boston, they have abandoned parking six days a week in the downtown area. Governor Kohler of Wisconsin has set up a state-wide committee to look into the problem of public transportation in its relationship to the business and social life of the community. Philadelphia, Richmond, Providence and many other cities are much more aware now of the importance of mass transit than a few years back.

In Indianapolis, the one-way street pattern has materially aided the movement of traffic, and with the great increase in the number of vehi-
cles in Marion County and the State of Indiana the whole central area would have been completely jammed had the improvements not been made.

We carry 40,000 people in the morning rush hour, 70,000 in the middle of the day, and 44,000 in the evening rush hour. If all came in automobiles, the cars driven would occupy the area of the mile square and, of course, this would kill the central area.

My opinion, and the opinion of most traffic engineers and those who have studied the movement of people, is that public transit must be given every consideration so more people will be attracted to this form of transportation and not fewer.

In the direction of traffic in the rush hours, "No Parking" has been established on many of the major transit streets in Indianapolis. However, it is my considered opinion that a much closer cooperative effort between the State Highway Department, City Traffic Department and ourselves could do much to improve the movement of transit in the city of Indianapolis. One would think it was a major operation to cut a corner off so that where a large bus makes a right-hand turn it will not be impeded by traffic coming in the opposite direction, and I find this situation true in almost all cities I have worked in.

Certain changes have been suggested in traffic lights, so that traffic will move freer on the streets. Some of these changes have been made and some have not. They are done in one location and not in another.

EXPRESS TROLLEY COACH SERVICE

Recently, we inaugurated express service in Indianapolis, which has created nation-wide attention. This express service has been inaugurated on four bus lines and two trolley coach lines at the present time and will soon be inaugurated on two more trolley coach lines and another bus line.

When our cities were small and congestion not so terrific, it did not take long to operate from a distance of three or four miles to the center of the city. That segment of the city is still the most important segment in a mass transportation system, but in the last 20 years the cities have grown tremendously and the public transportation systems generally have extended their lines to serve the new area with little or no turn-back service from the old terminal.

Briefly, we have literally cut our lines in two to inaugurate our express service. In the rush hours in the morning we operate vehicles from the outer ends of the long lines to a point where the fringe of the city was 20 to 25 years ago, and from that point on the vehicles run
express into town, with local service operating in the area which was once that part of the old city.

Persons who originate in the new section desiring to alight in the old section are given a continuation transfer at the beginning of the express area. These number less than 40 on a line a day.

Generally, the city has eliminated parking in the direction of traffic on the right side of the street, so that transit can move fast in local service along the curb, with the express buses or coaches keeping up and staying with the other traffic on the street and passing local transit vehicles.

The innovation of express trolley coach service, I mentioned a few minutes ago, was inaugurated in Indianapolis. This system enables express service to be operated with trolley coaches. This novel experiment has proven very successful and is now being studied by several other large transit properties in this country.

It consists simply of stringing a third set of wires over the center of the street, with the express trolley coaches operating inbound in the morning using this pair of wires in the express area, and in the afternoon rush hour using the same pair of wires in express service outbound.

In Indianapolis the express vehicle is identified by a white flashing light which is on the curb side of the vehicle above the destination sign. Anyone intending to board a trolley coach can readily tell at a glance whether the vehicle is an express or not.

This mode of express trolley coach operation was first tried on the East Washington trolley coach route, with the express area between Southeastern Avenue and Linwood, a distance of approximately 2.8 miles. The passenger transit traffic on this line has increased over 25%, thus helping to reduce traffic congestion since certainly some of these people formerly drove their cars.

The College bus route, which was formerly a street-car line, has shown an increase of 17% in riding since the express service started. The East Tenth Street trolley coach line, which operates express for only a mile and a half, has shown an increase of a very gratifying 7%. The express lines as a whole have shown an increase of 9% over the remaining lines of the system.

Express operation affords us an opportunity to force an even distribution of the load between short- and long-haul riders, thus making it easier to operate on more nearly even scheduled intervals, which means it gives us an opportunity to afford improved regularity of service to our patrons.
As some of you may be aware, we operate on a two-zone fare system in Indianapolis, with the inner zone being two miles from the Circle and the outer zone beyond that. Express service has simplified the operation of collecting zone fares outbound in the evening rush hours, as all persons boarding express vehicles alight in the second zone, therefore eliminating the necessity of zone checks in the evening rush hours for the express riders. This, too, has helped speed up our service.

I again wish to thank you for the opportunity afforded me to meet with you gentlemen, and I want to tell you that we are always ready and willing to meet with any of you for the furtherance of improving traffic conditions in Indianapolis, and I hope, whatever city you work in, you will look upon your transit system as an agency that can aid traffic movement.

I hope that you will realize that the movement of some 200,000 people a day is an important part of the life of our great capital city, and that we need and plead for your understanding of this situation.

Remember, if you please, that only the transit company represents this great segment of people and must, therefore, be their mouthpiece. We are no longer a monopoly; therefore, in the interest of the many thousands of good citizens who ride with us daily, we plead your consideration and understanding of our problems, which in the last analysis is your problem, too—moving people.