

Bus proposals: Unrelated, but . . .

Electric-trolley fleet for Seattle?

(County voters in the September 19 primary election will have the opportunity to put Metro into the transportation business. A ballot measure would give Metro authority to establish a county-wide transit system. In Seattle, voters also will decide on a measure that would require the city to restore its electric trolley fleet to original size. The two issues are not related, but each could ultimately have an effect on the other, if they are approved. Bob Lane, staff reporter who has covered public transportation issues for The Times, has prepared questions and answers about both of these complicated ballot measures.)

Question: What — or who — is the Committee for Modernization of Electric Transportation (COMET)?

Answer: Essentially it is four men. They make up the board of officers of the committee. The group was organized years ago as a political body to campaign for electric trolleys. It is an outgrowth of a study by the Seattle chapter of the Washington Society of Professional Engineers which reported trolleys were more efficient than diesel buses.

Q. Who are the officers?
A. Charles Ittner, a retired electrical engineer, is president.

Kernan R. Dennis, president of Northwest Electric Co., is vice president. Raymond O. Petrich, vice president of Engineered Industrial Systems, Inc., is secretary. Peter A. Breyse, an assistant professor of environmental health at the University of Washington, is a director.

Q. How many members does COMET have?
A. None. It has sympathetic supporters, however.

Q. What does COMET want?

A. Its intent, as expressed in the initiative petition it qualified for the September 19 election, is to restore to operation within two years all of the electric trolley lines operating in Seattle June 3, 1963. (That was the city's full trolley system, before the former Seattle Transit Commission began to switch to diesels.)

The committee's initiative would require the city's transit vehicles to be predominantly electric, by which it means about 75 per cent would be trolleys. This would permit the use of motor coaches for charters, some school routes and route development.

The Transit System would become part of City Light, according to the COMET initiative.

Q. What would it cost to do what COMET wants?

A. COMET says \$30 million. The Seattle Transit System says the cost could be as much as \$40 million.

Q. What would that buy?

A. About 300 new electric trolleys and about 81 miles of new overhead wire. Seattle Transit now has 53 trolleys (some 32 years old) and about 27 miles of overhead wire.

Q. How would COMET pay for its trolley system?

A. Ittner says the federal government would pay two thirds of the cost of building the new system. The city would have to raise about \$5 million a year for two years to provide matching funds, although COMET believes state aid might pay half of that.

The city's share could be raised through a continuation of the household-business tax, imposition of a sales tax increase or a small increase in City Light rates, Ittner has said.

The initiative measure on the ballot says transit revenue bonds could be sold and guaranteed by City Light profits. Transit, however, has no revenue with which to pay of bonds and City Light, which has little surplus revenue of its own, probably would have to raise rates to be able to retire transit bonds.

Ittner has said COMET would leave the City Council the job of solving all of the financial problems inherent in passage of the trolley proposal. Passage would represent "a mandate" and would need to be supplemented "by willing public officials . . ."

For example: Seattle Transit last year spent \$407,756 for electricity, diesel fuel and gasoline. Wages totaled \$8.7 million.

COMET says, however, that 35 per cent of Transit's labor is an "excessive penalty" caused by maintenance of diesel engines.

Transit officials note the limiting factor common to both types of vehicles is the congested traffic on city streets. A faster vehicle would have no advantage because it cannot use that superior acceleration in slow-moving traffic.

Q. Is economics the only argument used by COMET?

ing operating losses of Seattle Transit but that if costs continue to increase sharply some subsidy might be needed.

Q. There are firm funding commitments to COMET from the state and federal governments?

A. No. COMET believes any form of aid available to Metro, if it goes into the transit business, would be available to a transit system operated by City Light.

Q. Why is COMET so insistent about the superiority of trolleys over diesels?

A. The group believes, basically, that trolleys are more efficient and will earn money for a transit system while a diesel bus operation will lose money.

Ittner says three electric trolley buses will do the work of four diesel coaches. Trolleys can start faster and stop sooner; thus they can do more work in the same period of time. COMET argues.

Q. Do transit experts support the COMET viewpoint?

A. Not at all. They might agree a trolley traction motor is more efficient in its use of energy, but there is no agreement on the effect of that efficiency.

The cost of labor—drivers and mechanics and office workers—represents about 87 per cent of the cost of running the transit system. Transit experts say slight savings in fuel and maintenance would not offset the high price of manpower.

For example: Seattle Transit last year spent \$407,756 for electricity, diesel fuel and gasoline. Wages totaled \$8.7 million.

COMET says, however, that 35 per cent of Transit's labor is an "excessive penalty" caused by maintenance of diesel engines.

Transit officials note the limiting factor common to both types of vehicles is the congested traffic on city streets. A faster vehicle would have no advantage because it cannot use that superior acceleration in slow-moving traffic.

Q. Is economics the only argument used by COMET?

A. No. COMET stresses the air pollution — particularly toxic oxides of nitrogen — created by diesel engines. The group also emphasizes that trolleys are quiet, while diesels are noisy.

COMET has estimated diesel buses have created about 8,000 tons of oxides of nitrogen since the decision was made in 1963 to switch to diesels.

Q. Transit planners, particularly those associated with the Metro plan, are saying the issue is not diesels versus trolleys. What do they mean?

A. Several things. First, the Metro Council, in a policy statement, has promised to refurbish the existing trolley fleet — starting with an early order for 20 new units — and to expand the fleet and the overhead wiring system if the Seattle City Council asks for it. In other words, Metro can provide trolleys if the public wants them.

More important, at least to transit planners, is the need to develop an integrated and coordinated regional transit system, one that would improve the movement of people between all major points of the county and within Seattle. Other cities and suburban communities.

Passage of the COMET proposal and defeat of the Metro plan would, in their opinion, destroy any opportunity to develop a sensible regional transportation system that would serve all of the people of King County.

Q. What does COMET say to that?

A. Its response is that Seattle's needs represent the major share of the region's commuting problems and that the central city should come first. Ittner has suggested that discarded diesel buses from Seattle could be turned over to King County, which could use them for mass transit in the county.

Ittner and COMET have

made no suggestions for integrating the two systems, nor for the provision of regional movement of people.

Q. What does City Light think about the COMET proposal that it take over public transportation responsibilities?

A. It doesn't like the idea. Gordon Vickery, lighting superintendent, has said approval of the COMET initiative could "be disastrous" financially to City Light. It could require an increase in light bills. (to pay for bonds needed to buy new trolleys, for example, damage the utility's reputation in the bond market and, possibly, violate the city's contract with the Bonneville Power Administration which makes Seattle a preferential power customer of the federal agency.)

COMET has not responded directly to City Light's comments about the impact passage might have on the utility or its dealings in the bond market and with other agencies.

Q. Transit patronage has declined in Seattle—and most other cities—because of the convenience of availability of the automobile and freeways. Seattle Transit generally is considered a good system, yet it has had to cut service because of patronage declines. How does COMET expect to reverse this trend?

A. COMET would hope to capture additional riders. (needed to help pay for any operation) simply by providing more frequent service on a convenient "block-by-block" basis.

Most transit experts consider this illusory. Improvements in service—such as having buses come every 10 minutes instead of every 30 minutes—would cost a fantastic amount of money. And without a major increase in patronage the need for public subsidy funds would be multiplied.

A county-wide bus system?

Question: What is the Metro proposition on the county primary ballot September 19 all about?

Answer: Metro is asking the public to approve its plan for county-wide public transportation, to put the agency into the transit business and to approve increasing the sales tax in the county from 5 to 5.3 per cent to help pay for it.

Q. What does the plan offer?

A. Its principal elements, as adopted by the Metro Council, are:

1. A multi-center concept of public transit in which express bus routes would link major activity centers (such as cities, community centers, shopping areas, Seattle-Tacoma Airport, colleges and hospitals) throughout the county. There would be about 25 express routes providing about 650 miles of two-way service.

2. Local service in communities and towns provided by about 100 routes covering 850 miles of two-way routes daily. The local service would feed the express system and provide transportation within neighborhoods.

(All of that service would not be provided immediately. It would be developed gradually with Metro buying buses and building facilities on a pay-as-you-go basis.)

3. Introduction of a new type of express service, known as the Metro Flyer. Buses would operate on freeways and major arterials and would pick up passengers from feeder buses at major interchanges. The freeways would be modified with the addition of new lanes and ramps and stairways so the Metro Flyers would not need to leave the freeway to meet passengers.

4. Construction of approximately 25 park-and-ride lots for continuation and expansion of Blue Streak-type express service. The lots would provide free parking for about 14,000 cars and would provide simple sheltered waiting areas, passenger pick-up and drop-off points, special access lanes and landscaping.

5. The replacement of 300 existing transit buses and trolleys and the purchase of an additional 250 vehicles by 1980.

6. A shelter and signing program to provide about 1,200 sheltered waiting areas along bus routes, an estimated 6,000 new bus stop signs providing schedule and route information.

Q. What kind of buses will Metro use?

A. It will start out using equipment it acquires from Seattle Transit and Metropolitan Transit. Except for a few gasoline buses and a few electric trolleys, those systems use diesel buses.

Metro has said it will rebuild the existing fleet of 53 trolleys and that if the Seattle City Council wishes the trolley fleet will be expanded. Metro also has said it will buy no more new diesel buses, that it will seek the elast-polluting and quietest vehicles available.

Metro's search for a new power source now is concentrated on a bus engine fueled with liquified natural gas. It generates fewer pollutants, has no odor and is quieter than a diesel. It also costs slightly more to fuel and to purchase. It is not now in use except on a small scale in a few areas. But a manufacturer is prepared to build the bus for sale.

Q. What will the Metro system cost?

A. Metro's transit-planning consultants have estimated the cost through 1980 at about \$96 million.

Q. Who would pay for it?

A. By approval of the increase in the sales tax, county residents would provide the "seed" money to attract federal and state funds that would pay nearly 87 per cent of the cost of buying new buses and constructing other transit facilities.

That tax would raise about \$10 million a year in the county for transit use. It would entitle Metro to receive a like amount from the state's motor vehicle excise tax, a subsidy source now supporting several transit systems in the state. It also would provide the matching funds required to qualify Metro to receive federal funds for the purchase of buses and development of parking lots and other features of the plan.

Q. Can't the people who ride the bus pay for it?

A. It has been shown na-

tionally that farebox revenues are insufficient to pay operating costs of transit systems. Increasing fares drives down patronage and penalizes those who have no other method of moving around a city.

Q. What would the Metro fare be?

A. The Metro Council has adopted a base fare of 20 cents and a zone fare of 10 cents.

In Seattle, that fare would mean reduced costs for about one third of all transit riders—those who travel only within one zone. Those who make two zone trips—about half the riders—will pay the same amount. The few who ride through three zones (less than 1 per cent) would pay more.

In other areas of the county, the fare structure would produce marked savings in bus riding costs. It now costs \$1.20 to ride a Metropolitan Transit Corp. bus from Auburn to downtown Seattle. Under Metro the fare would be 60 cents.

Another example: Bellevue to downtown Seattle now is 60 cents; it would be cut to 40 cents with the Metro system.

Metro's intent is to make each community a single zone so passengers may ride within their area without paying zone fares.

Q. Why should there be zone fares?

A. Zone fares have been adopted by many transit systems to assure that persons making long trips pay a fair share of the cost of providing that trip. If a flat fare were charged a person riding from Ballard to the University of Washington, he would, in effect, be subsidizing a person who paid the same fare to ride from Bothell to the university.

Q. Why Metro?

A. Original metropolitan district enabling legislation listed transportation as one of several functions. Metro, since its inception, has worked only in the water pollution-control field and has gained an international reputation for its success.

The Legislature since has given Metro transit-planning authority. Metro, however, needs a vote of the public to put it into the transit business.

Q. How did Metro develop its transit plan?

A. Metro, working with the Puget Sound Governmental Conference, retained Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall, consultants, to identify transit needs and to prepare a plan that would satisfy those needs on a regional basis.

The foundation of much of the plan was a series of 52 public meetings held throughout King County last winter and spring. Persons attending the meetings told planners what they wanted and where they wanted to go. They expressed a desire for frequent, fast and on-time service. They urged the use of funds to improve service, not to provide frills.

From that, and from the consultant's own experience, grew the multicenter concept of public transportation.

Q. How would Metro set up its bus system and when would it begin operating?

A. If voters approved the plan September 19, Metro would take over regional transit operations January 1.

Metro would acquire the Seattle Transit System from Seattle and would purchase the Metropolitan Transit Corp., which is owned by the American Transit Co., a division of the Chromalloy America Corp., a large business conglomerate. It has been estimated the two systems are worth about \$7.8 million, although the purchase price would be based on careful appraisals by experts.

Service in the first few months would be similar to that provided by the two systems today. It would be expanded and improved as new equipment is obtained, parking lots developed and Metro Flyer stops built.

The Metro plan will be on a "pay as you go" basis through 1980. Metro will sell no long-term bonds to finance the work, thus saving on interest costs associated with bond financing.

Q. How much will that extra sales tax cost?

A. It has been estimated that a family of four with an annual income of \$10,000 will pay \$13 a year in added taxes.

In Seattle, however, that will be offset by dropping

the present household business tax, which costs households \$6 a year. The Citizens Transit Committee, which is promoting the Metro plan, also has estimated that Seattle residents are paying about \$5 a year household for transit subsidies via payments to transit from the city's general fund.

Thus, approval of the Metro plan could save Seattle households about \$11 a year. The new tax would be \$13, causing a net increase of only \$2.

Q. What is the financial condition of Seattle Transit? Of Metropolitan Transit?

A. Seattle Transit's operating deficit will exceed \$4 million this year. That's the difference between money dropped in the farebox and the cost of running the buses and paying employees.

The deficit probably will increase next year, adding a financial burden to the City Council, which this year appropriated \$1.5 million from general funds to Transit. The household tax, the state subsidy and federal aid for the Blue Streak program helped pay the rest of the deficit.

Although Transit is limping along, it is unable to do much to improve its position through the acquisition of new equipment or through the development of new programs and services that might attract new riders.

Council members have said the Metro system — with its sound financial base — would be the best way of protecting and improving the relatively good service provided today by Seattle Transit.

Service to suburban communities by Metropolitan Transit is kept alive by financial aid from smaller cities and King County. The county is contracting with Metropolitan to continue providing suburban service. That financial assistance is shaky, however. Some of the cities have said they are unable to continue providing it much longer.

And Metropolitan Transit has said that without such assistance it will have to discontinue or sharply reduce its service. The need for Metropolitan's suburban operations is illustrated by a King County study which showed that 77 per cent of its riders needed a bus to get to work and 60 per cent had no other means of transportation.

Q. Is there opposition to the Metro plan?

A. Yes, but organized opposition is confined to small, special-interest groups.

Some people object to the regressive nature of the sales tax; others say the system doesn't do enough for Seattle and the suburbs will benefit at the city's expense.

A few complain that the Metro Council "is not representative" because council members are not directly elected.

There have been other complaints that Metro is basing some of its system on yet-unbuilt but planned highways and thus indirectly is encouraging construction of more streets and highways.

Q. Why should the person who doesn't use transit help pay for the system?

A. Take the selfish viewpoint. If more persons ride buses, there will be fewer cars in the freeways and arterials morning and evening.

Another argument is that everyone at some time may need transit — when it snows, for example, when the family car is disabled or someone else needs it for a day.

Probably the most important reason, but not one well recognized or accepted, is that transit is just as much a public service and function as police and fire protection, libraries and health services. Most people help pay for those services through taxes — even though they may receive no direct personal benefit until an emergency occurs.

The reasoning is that if those other services are worthwhile — even though the average individual seldom has direct contact with them — then transit is equally deserving of public support.

Q. Will there be changes or reduction in bus service January 1, if Metro takes over?

A. No. The Metro Council has promised its early service will be equal to that in effect when it assumes control of the two transit systems. There will be no reduction in service.

War and peace

Congress as Peacemaker team interviews candidates



Joel Pritchard

Differing views on the Vietnam war, military spending, amnesty and other war-peace issues were made public today from three candidates for Congress from the 1st District.

Interviewed by a team from the Congress as Peacemaker program were Joel Pritchard and Dr. C. Y. Chiang, Republican candidates, and John Hempelmann, Democrat candidate.

Congress as Peacemaker is a program of the United Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Church of Christ and the Church of the Brethren in the Pacific Northwest.

A report on the Pritchard-Chiang-Hempelmann interviews was made by Vern Hathaway, chairman of the 1st District team of Congress as Peacemaker. He described the program as an attempt "to explore the way in which candidates for Congress view Congress as a peace-making force."

Hempelmann told interviewers he viewed the Vietnam war as an abuse of



John Hempelmann

American military might and that, if elected, he would move to cut off all appropriations for the war.

He emphasized his view that Congress should assume more control of the ability of the United States to go to war.

PRITCHARD'S RESPONSE was that the Vietnam experience illustrated the difficult time the United States has had in finding its proper role in world affairs.

Pritchard told interviewers this indicated an immature longing to want to be loved by the rest of the world and a lack of judgement in not being able to reverse earlier decisions once a commitment had been made.

Dr. Chiang told interviewers the lesson to be learned from Vietnam was the danger of responding to events rather than governing events. He said a constitutional crisis has developed because the United States has drifted into a war which Congress has not declared.

The three candidates agreed that the first objec-

tive of the United States foreign aid should be humanitarian, responding to the needs of people.

Questioned about military spending, Hempelmann told interviewers he was in favor of maintaining United States defense, security and the ability to influence world affairs, such as by supporting Israel in the Mediterranean.

Hempelmann said he was more interested in people programs than in having the best weapons systems and that he was optimistic both Russia and the United States would be able to cut back military spending.

Pritchard told interviewers that he felt spending less on the military should be a national objective, but that the military budget was tied to international tensions.

DR. CHIANG SAID the defense budget did not reflect his sense of priorities. He proposed an institute for peace to be established at Seattle to research and discover steps toward world peace.

Dr. Chiang said he was in



Dr. C. Y. Chiang

favor of amnesty for those who have refused military service if they are willing to give one year of service to the country as a part of their return.

Hempelmann said he was in favor of selective conscientious objection for those morally opposed to a particular war and that this status should be granted retroactively to those willing to do alternative service.

Pritchard disagreed that the country was split on the amnesty issue and he said he sensed 90 per cent of the voters opposed amnesty.

He told interviewers he thought amnesty was not an appropriate discussion topic until the prisoners of war were returned, but that he also felt it wrong to discard people.

Some conditions would have to be worked out for the granting of amnesty, Pritchard said.

The three candidates have agreed to take part in a public forum on Congress as Peacemaker on October 29 at Plymouth Congregational Church, Hathaway said.