

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

ORDER NO. 822

IN THE MATTER OF:

Served June 1, 1968

Order to Institute Investiga- )  
tion of Devices and Practices ) Docket No. 178  
for Driver Safety on Buses of )  
D. C. Transit System, Inc. )

By Orders Nos. 820, 820a, and 821, we have instituted an investigation into devices and practices for the safety of drivers on the D. C. Transit system. By Order No. 821, we directed that a hearing be held on certain specific proposals on driver safety which will be discussed later. The time is now ripe for decision on certain aspects of this matter and the purpose of this order is to render that decision.

It would be well to begin with some background facts. Over the period of the last year, or slightly more, the problem of robberies of bus drivers has become of more and more serious proportions. In the twelve months ending April 30, 1968, there were 479 such robberies. Naturally, this has caused increasing unrest among the drivers because of fear for their personal safety. The fears of the drivers reached crisis proportions when, on May 17, 1968, one of their number, Mr. John E. Talley, was the tragic victim of murder in the course of a robbery. Shortly thereafter, the executive board of the drivers' union adopted a policy that drivers on night runs would refuse to carry any money for change purposes on their buses at night. The company, on the other hand, took the position that operators would not be permitted to take buses out unless they carried change which would enable them to collect fares from passengers. As a consequence there has been no night service in the area served by D. C. Transit and its subsidiary, W. V. & M. Coach Company, since Monday, May 20, 1968. On May 23, 1968, a mass meeting of the union membership was held in which there was discussion on the question of whether the day drivers should also refuse to carry change in support of the demand

that change be eliminated from night time runs. It was voted at that meeting to delay decision on action by the daytime drivers for a ten day period. We are informed by those who attended the meeting that there was very strong feeling on the part of the drivers that they would not carry change at night.

The Commission has been very concerned with the fact that the community is being deprived of bus service at night and the possibility of a complete work stoppage if no solution to the problem is found. We have been actively attempting to seek out a resolution of the matter, both in discussions with the interested parties and by means of staff work on means of solving the problem. At the hearing held on May 30, 1968, pursuant to Order No. 821, we had before us two proposals which would resolve the immediate problem.

First, there was a plan worked out by the Commission's staff for the use of scrip in lieu of change. The method proposed by the staff is simply a "scrip" or redeemable slip given in lieu of cash to any passenger who, not having the exact fare, proffers coins or bills in payment of his fare. For example, a passenger boarding a bus hands the operator a one dollar bill. The operator would take a scrip slip and fold it in half, then punch a hole in the amount of fare. He also punches the amount received. One half of the slip, together with the dollar, is inserted in a small envelope and dropped in the fare box. The operator gives the remaining half-slip to the passenger. The passenger could get his slip redeemed for cash only by taking it to designated offices of the transit company.

At the hearing, the Commission's Chief Engineer, Charles W. Overhouse, stated that the scrip plan was capable of being used on a 24-hour basis but recommended that it be tried at first during the evening and night hours in order to determine its feasibility and its effects upon the company at a time when the possible adverse impact is at a minimum.

The company put forth a substitute proposal in discussions prior to the hearing and at the hearing.<sup>1/</sup> They suggested doing away with the sale of tokens and interline tickets on buses on a 24-hour basis, substituting therefor a widespread system for the sale of tokens and tickets at many locations throughout the entire community. This would result in a very substantial reduction of the cash carried by the driver during the day time hours. The company further proposed that during the evening and night hours the driver would have available only \$10 with which to make change. It was the opinion of the company's experts that this would provide the amount of change needed by the driver if tokens were widely available at locations other than on the bus and concerted efforts to alert the public to have the exact change when boarding the bus were undertaken.

At the hearing, the company raised objections to the scrip plan. These objections fell into three basic categories. First, they express real concern about the inconvenience which the plan would entail for members of the riding public. Second, they expressed concern about the expenses which would be involved in implementing the scrip plan, expenses which would not be taken into account in establishing fare levels until such time as a rate case including such expenses had been completed. Third, they raised certain technical objections to the plan. As discussed in the following paragraphs, we find none of these objections of sufficient weight to cause us to reject the scrip plan out of hand.

We do not regard the problem of public acceptance as an insurmountable obstacle. Basically, it seems to us the use of scrip would be a measure of last resort. The problem with carrying no change whatever on the bus is that it leaves no

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<sup>1/</sup> The company asserts that the basic problem is one of crime prevention and control. It asserts that a basic means of dealing with the problem is more effective police and crime prevention work. This is certainly an aspect of the problem which cannot be ignored. The company specifically suggests that it obtain (1) a HUD grant for installation of two way radios on its buses; (2) additional police protection for buses. Neither of these objectives can be granted by us, of course. However, we regard them both as valid and will use our good offices in assisting the company to obtain them.

means of dealing with the passenger who does not have the exact fare, other than giving him a free ride. We cannot condone the former solution since it constitutes an illegal and discriminatory fare arrangement under which certain persons would be paying while others would be riding free. We do not believe that refusing a ride to those persons who do not have the exact fare constitutes an adequate level of service. The scrip plan provides a solution to this dilemma by providing a means of fare payment for those who simply do not have the exact change. We believe that the vast majority of the community recognizes the problem of driver safety and is willing to play a role in solving the problem. There have been overwhelming indications of public support for the idea of requiring exact change since this crisis arose. Local newspapers have endorsed it. We have received much mail supporting the idea. Further community support can be engendered by an intensive campaign to bring the problem to the attention of the public and we have assurances that the resources of the community will be brought to bear in such a campaign. Hence, we would expect that the scrip would be used only in a limited number of instances. Moreover, the inconvenience involved in the scrip plan with which the company is concerned, provides a natural incentive to the riding public to cooperate by having the exact fare when they board the bus. For these reasons, while we recognize as valid the company's concern about public acceptance of the scrip plan, we do not regard it as an insurmountable obstacle to the plan.

The company's concern with the expenses involved is almost entirely obviated by testimony placed in the record of the hearing on the scrip proposal by a representative of the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Mr. William Hurd of that Department indicated that his Department would underwrite 100 percent of the administrative costs involved in an experiment with the scrip plan under the HUD demonstration project program. Thus, the company will be relieved of the major cost burden involved in testing the scrip plan.

The company's technical objections need not be discussed in detail. Almost all of them involved the basic assumption that the issuance of scrip would be frequent and widespread.

We do not regard this as sufficient reason to regard the technical problems raised by the company as insurmountable obstacles to testing the plan since, as previously discussed, we believe that most persons will board with the exact change.

The company's substitute proposals are not entirely without merit. There is no reason why, if a widespread distribution system for tokens is set up throughout the entire community, we could not eliminate the sale of tokens on the buses at all times, thereby eliminating a large part of the funds which are now necessary for a driver to carry. The proposal to limit the amount of change carried during the evening hours to \$10 might indeed solve the problem. However, it would not be as complete and satisfactory a solution as the scrip plan, which would eliminate all change money entirely and, thus, reduce the threat of robbery to the minimum possible levels.

These, then, are the alternatives before the Commission:

1. We could take no action whatever. We regard this as an abdication of our responsibility to deal with this serious problem.
2. We can require the adopting of the scrip plan.
3. We can authorize the adopting of the company's \$10 limitation.

We believe that the wisest course is to undertake a fair test of the scrip plan. The plan has considerable merit. It enhances driver safety to the maximum degree possible by eliminating all change money on the bus when it is in effect. It provides a natural incentive to have the exact fare when boarding the bus which would generally benefit the movement of traffic. On the other hand, the record indicates, and we believe it to be true, that the plan is highly innovative. We know of no other city where it is in effect or has been tried. The company has pointed out certain problems which the plan may entail. Some of these problems might indeed arise. We have no way of knowing

how serious they will be, although we do not believe that any of them on their face make it impossible to try the plan. We must, of course, be concerned with the financial impact of the plan upon the company. The financial burden involved in the administrative costs of testing the plan will be assumed by HUD. By testing the plan initially on a limited basis, the other possible financial impact, such as that caused by passenger resistance, will be held to minimal levels during a test period. The validity of the technical problems raised by the company can only be determined by trying the plan out.

In sum, we think the scrip plan is worth a test. We think the best way to go about testing it is to put it into effect initially during the evening and night hours when traffic on the system is at lower levels than those reached during the day. This will enable us to evaluate and solve the technical problems. It will permit us to gauge the acceptability of the plan to the public. It will test the public's willingness to cooperate with the plan while limiting the financial and operational impact which would be involved in a failure by the public to cooperate. It will permit time for an intensive public educational program. We believe that the public will fully cooperate with the plan and we urge them to do so. We will require the staff to observe the results of the test closely and, if the results so justify, we will test the plan further on a 24 hour a day basis.<sup>2/</sup> However, we cannot firmly commit ourselves to such a test until we have evaluated the results of the experience of night time use of the plan. In the meantime, we will provide day time drivers with the substantial added protection which is involved in adoption of the company's plan to eliminate the sale of tokens and tickets on the buses, thereby reducing the amount of cash carried very significantly. This latter measure cannot,

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<sup>2/</sup> We hope, and we believe, that the test will be successful. We must, in order to avoid future misunderstandings, however, make it clear that if it does not prove workable, we will put the system aside and seek other means of solving the problem.

of course, take place until the company has provided alternative means for the sale of tokens and tickets which will, in the Commission's judgment, be adequate to serve the public interest. The company will be directed to undertake to establish such alternative means forthwith.

We believe that testing of the scrip system is consistent with the furnishing of adequate and efficient transportation service at the lowest possible cost since it permits all persons presenting themselves for carriage to make use of the company's service. We believe that testing the system on the basis we have outlined, i.e., with HUD grants for administrative costs and with use during evening hours when the impact on traffic carried is minimized, is consistent with the carrier's revenue needs. Since all persons desiring to ride may do so, we do not believe that the system would interfere with the inherent advantages of the transportation service offered by the company.

**THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED:**

1. That D. C. Transit System, Inc., shall forthwith undertake the necessary steps to institute a scrip system, as described in the foregoing opinion, for providing change to those passengers who do not present the exact fare between the hours of 8:00 P. M. and 4:00 A. M.; said system shall be devised in such manner that it can be instituted in not more than ten days from the date of this order and shall remain in effect for a period of at least 60 days, unless otherwise ordered, during which its effectiveness and workability shall be determined.

2. That D. C. Transit System, Inc., shall, at least three days prior to the institution of the scrip system, submit, for Commission approval, a report on the system covering:

- a. The design of the scrip ticket, and
- b. The mechanics of scrip redemption.

3. That D. C. Transit System, Inc., shall file the necessary tariff changes to incorporate the scrip system within its tariffs.

4. That the staff of the Commission shall undertake a continuing study of the effectiveness and workability of the scrip system and shall render a written report to the Commission on the system not more than 30 days after the system goes into effect.

5. That, unless the aforementioned staff report, in the Commission's judgment, demonstrates to the contrary the Commission will undertake, within 15 days of receiving the staff report, a test of the scrip system on a 24 hour a day basis to determine its effectiveness and workability under those conditions.

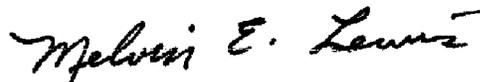
6. That the staff of the Commission is directed forthwith to undertake preparation of the papers necessary to obtain from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development a demonstration grant to defray the costs of the aforementioned test of the scrip system.

7. That D. C. Transit System, Inc., shall undertake forthwith a program to establish numerous and widespread locations for the sale of tokens and interline tickets other than on D. C. Transit buses, said program to be completed within 30 days of the date of this order.

8. That, when there has been established a program as described in the preceding paragraph which, in the Commission's judgment is adequate, the Commission will authorize D. C. Transit System, Inc., to refrain from selling tokens and tickets on its buses.

9. That the provisions of Orders Nos. 820 and 820a limiting the amount required to be changed to \$1 and eliminating the sale of tokens on buses during certain hours be modified to provide that the said restrictions and limitations be in effect from 8:00 P. M. each day to 4:00 A. M. the following day.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMISSION:



MELVIN E. LEWIS  
Executive Director

JUNE 1, 1968  
STATEMENT OF GEORGE A. AVERY, CHAIRMAN  
WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT COMMISSION

As you are all aware, we have been wrestling with the problem of the safety of the D. C. Transit bus driver. Basically, the problem is, because of the increasing crime rate, the drivers have been refusing to carry change at night and the company has been refusing to let the buses operate without change. Hence, we have been without night bus service for several days now.

The Commission has been searching for a means of resolving the dispute so that the buses could start running again. In the past week, our consideration has come down to two proposals.

First, the so called scrip plan evolved by the Commission's staff. Briefly, when the plan is in effect, the driver will carry no change. In those instances where the passenger does not have the exact fare, whether change or token, the driver will accept whatever denomination of currency the passenger offers and will give the passenger a validated form of scrip which can be redeemed for change at a later time at several locations throughout the city where D. C.

Transit has facilities. The money and duplicate scrip coupon is deposited by the driver in the farebox where it is not susceptible to robbery.

The other proposal is the company's suggestion that tokens be sold at many wide-spread locations throughout the city so that sale of them on the buses may be eliminated. This would very substantially reduce the amount of money which the drivers must carry during the day. In addition, the company would agree to limit the amount of change the drivers would carry during the evening hours to \$10.00, an amount which they feel would be sufficient during those hours for those who need change.

We held a hearing on both of these proposals and are now in a position to announce our decision.

We have decided to try the scrip plan. The company pointed out certain problems with it. Basically, they were concerned with its acceptability to the public. All of the information which we have been able to obtain indicates that the public will accept the plan. If most people have exact change and the scrip need only be used in a limited number of instances, it is perfectly workable and acceptable to the public. Basically, it would be a measure of last resort for

the person who finds himself without the correct change when he boards the bus. On this basis, the administrative burden and the inconvenience to the public involved in the scrip plan are within acceptable limits. The problem of the cost to the company of adopting the plan has been taken care of by HUD's statement of its willingness to underwrite its costs as a demonstration project. This was a very helpful and constructive step by HUD and we are grateful to them for their quick action and cooperation.

One problem we had to resolve was whether to try the scrip plan immediately on a 24 hour basis or initially on a more limited basis. We have determined that the wisest course is to try it initially on a limited basis. Specifically, we will authorize its use during the evening and late night hours. These are the hours when the vast majority of bus robberies have taken place and they are also the hours when usage of the transit system is at its lowest levels. Thus, we can attack the problem of driver safety where it most needs attacking, and at the same time, minimize the burden and the impact of the scrip plan while finding out how well it works. We will also test it on a 24 hour basis if the results of the initial test during the night time hours does not indicate that this would be unwise.

We find considerable merit in one of the company's proposals, also. By making tokens broadly available throughout the community and eliminating the need to sell them on the bus, much of the money presently carried on the bus would be eliminated. With the cooperation of the federal and district government and the business community, such a new system of token sales can be set up, and it appears that that will be possible. The Mayor and others will be discussing that point after I finish my statement.

We believe that these measures together constitute an effective solution to the problem of driver safety. We know that these approaches are novel, particularly the scrip plan. We believe, however, that the community is fully aware of the problem of bus driver safety and is willing to do its part to cooperate. The cooperation of the public is essential to the success of the plan. A great majority of patrons must board with the exact fare if the scrip plan is to be workable. We hope and believe that they will do so.

We will proceed with further hearings to consider whether other solutions to the problem are available or desirable. Other methods of approach to the problem of

driver safety will continue to be explored. This includes effective police protection and the possibility of such additional measures as the installation of two-way radios on buses. We hope that the concerted approach being announced here today will provide bus drivers with the measure of protection which they need and should have.

I might add only one thought. It will take several days to actually institute the scrip plan, since time is needed to work out the mechanics and obtain the necessary equipment and materials. I sincerely hope that the city will not be deprived of night bus service during the time while this is being done. I urge the company and the union to sit down and work out a reasonable basis on which night time service can be resumed immediately while the work of instituting the scrip plan and the other measures set forth in our order go forward.