

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

ORDER NO. 822a

IN THE MATTER OF:

Served July 18, 1968

Order to Institute Investigation)
of Devices and Practices for)
Driver Safety on Buses of D. C.)
Transit System, Inc.)

Docket No. 178

SUPPLEMENTAL OPINION

Pursuant to Order No. 822, the scrip system for making change on D. C. Transit buses was instituted on June 11, 1968. The increasing rate of driver robberies, climaxed by the tragic murder of one of them, created the necessity to find the means of increasing driver protection. We evolved the scrip system as a device for doing away with the making of change on buses, thus eliminating the incentive to commit a robbery of a bus driver.

We are interested in trying the scrip plan on a 24-hour-a-day basis if this is in the best interests of all concerned. However, the plan was entirely novel, never having been tried in any other city. Hence, we determined to institute it at first during the evening hours, when passenger levels are lower and the risk of robbery was at its highest. This would give us a record of experience, on the basis of which we could determine whether a test on a 24-hour-a-day basis would be wise.

As directed by our order establishing the scrip plan, the staff of the Commission has filed a report with us following the first 30 days of scrip usage providing us with information on how the plan has worked during the nighttime hours and with facts pertinent to the feasibility and wisdom of trying the plan on a 24-hour-a-day basis.

Certain facts are clear from the staff report. The scrip plan has been a complete success during the evening hours. The public has cooperated extremely well and 99 percent of those

boarding the buses during the hours the scrip plan is in effect are presenting the exact fare. Thus, scrip need only be issued to 1 percent of riders. This amounts to about only 200 pieces of scrip per night. As of the date of the Staff Report, no complaints had been received concerning the operation of the scrip plan. The most satisfactory point that we note in the staff report is that there has not been a single driver robbery since the plan went into effect. Due to the really admirable manner in which the community has responded to a serious problem, this new and radical means of fare collection has been instituted successfully.

We can now turn to a consideration as to whether the success of the nighttime usage of scrip demonstrates the wisdom and feasibility of testing the plan on a 24-hour-a-day basis. In Order No. 822, in which we instituted the scrip plan, we indicated our desire to try the plan on a 24-hour-a-day basis within 15 days of receiving the staff report, if the staff report so warranted. It is clear from the staff report that we will not be in a position to try a full-time scrip test immediately. We say this because of the status of the program to establish widespread locations for the sale of tokens off the D. C. Transit buses. Having an adequate off-bus token sales system is an absolutely essential prerequisite to the institution of a scrip plan on a 24-hours' basis. Such a plan presupposes that no tokens will be sold on the bus. The presently established fares give a price advantage to those who choose to use tokens. At present, almost two-thirds of D. C. Transit's riders take advantage of that price savings. It would make a mockery of the fare structure which gives an advantage to those who use tokens if such tokens were not conveniently available to those who wished to use them.

The staff report indicates that to date, D. C. Transit has been able to establish 126 off-bus locations for the sale of tokens. As of today, the figure has risen above the 150 mark. The company is presently selling about 1,300,000 tokens per week.

We wish to make it perfectly clear that D. C. Transit has been making thorough and exhaustive efforts to estab-

lish this off-bus token sale system and our conclusion that the number of locations presently available is inadequate does not reflect adversely on their good faith and commitment to achieving success in this program. The Commission staff has maintained extremely close liaison with D. C. Transit in its efforts regarding off-bus token sales and we are convinced that the present results are the best that D. C. Transit could have possibly achieved during the time it had available. The Mayor's office has mounted a major drive to set up many more outlets in the next few days.

We have concluded that it is not wise to test the scrip system on a 24-hour-a-day basis until at least 300 token sale locations are set up. As important as the total number is the location of these outlets. They must be broadly distributed throughout the entire service area and must be readily available at varying hours of the day and night in all sections of the city and suburbs.

The Commission is aware that intense promotional activity for a week or two before starting the full-time system is an absolute necessity.

We wish to make clear that when we say test we mean just that. The results of the nighttime use of scrip, as outlined in the staff report, have been most satisfactory. However, the report contains facts which raise the question whether that success can be translated into similar success on a 24-hour basis. While a 1 percent issuance rate for scrip is entirely acceptable for the volume of riders carried during the nighttime hours, the same rate produces substantially higher absolute numbers when applied to 24-hour ridership. Specifically, 1 percent of nighttime ridership amounts only to about 200 pieces of scrip issued per day. One percent of 24-hour ridership amounts to 4,000 pieces of scrip per weekday and about 20,000 pieces per week. The experience to date, with night use only, does not give us much guidance as to whether this higher level of scrip issuance would be acceptable to the public. Further, we have no positive way of determining whether the 1 percent rate experienced during the nighttime hours would also apply during the day. There is only one way to find out the answers to these questions and that is to give the plan a test.

The redemption of scrip is also a problem to which the carrier will have to address itself. The six locations for redeeming scrip may not be able to handle the anticipated volume if the full-time system should generate 4,000 pieces of scrip per day.

Taking into account all the possible difficulties in implementing the full scale system, we think they can be overcome by an intensive educational program which will enlist the cooperation of transit patrons in making the system work smoothly; the main point is that transit patrons should make an effort to have tokens or the exact fare before boarding the bus and they should use the scrip only as a last resort.

If a distribution system, which in our judgment is satisfactory, is in place and ready to operate -- and we think that this can be done by August 1, 1968, and certainly by August 15, 1968 -- we will then undertake a test of the scrip system on a 24-hour basis.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMISSION:



MELVIN E. LEWIS
Executive Director