

# Transportation Value of the Nickel

The power of a 5-cent piece in buying clothing, food and other necessities has **decreased** at least 33 per cent since 1898. The power of the same 5-cent piece in buying transportation through Omaha and suburbs has **increased** 50 per cent in the same time.

In 1898 the longest local street railway ride that could be purchased for 5 cents was eight miles. Now the same coin will buy any one of several rides each about twelve miles long. Furthermore the money buys transportation in larger, roomier, safer, easier riding, swifter and more comfortable cars.

Forty years ago 5 cents spent in car fare in Omaha procured a ride of but one mile in a creeping horse car, unheated, poorly lighted, cramped in space and having a chronic habit of jumping the track.

In 1872 the nickel was good for a ride of two miles in the same kind of a conveyance, the increased purchasing power being due to a reduction in the fare of from 10 to 5 cents.

By 1888 the nickel was good for a cable or horse car ride of three miles, stoves having replaced hay heating.

In 1898 the 5-cent ride was good for a maximum of eight miles in small electric cars run on 45-pound rails, the service being excellent for the period.

In 1909 the nickel buys a maximum ride of twelve miles in a smooth-running, 42-foot, hot-water heated, air-brake car, traveling over heavy rails on a firmly constructed roadbed and driven by energy distributed from a 10,000 horsepower central power station.

In serving the community the Company ignores the artificial lines of corporate limits and regards Omaha, South Omaha, East Omaha, Florence, Benson, Dundee and immediate territory as a single district to be served impartially and without discrimination. The nickel is good for a ride from any point in this territory to any other point on the lines of the system. A universal transfer system, which permits travel in the the same general direction at any junction, enables this accomplishment.

The territory described contains over 38 square miles and about 170,000 people. There are approximately only 4,473 persons to each square mile, meaning an extremely scattered population.

In Omaha and environs there are 112 miles of track, giving the extremely high ratio of .659 mile of track for each 1,000 of population.

Compared with other cities of the United States the population per square mile of Omaha is very low

and the mileage of track per 1,000 of population is very high.

The effect of these conditions upon street railway operation causes low gross earnings per car mile. In order to retain the 5-cent fare for the large number of long rides, which are unprofitable, it is necessary to do a heavy short-haul business. Beyond a certain limit, (about five miles), no profit whatever is earned on the passenger carried. He is hauled at a loss.

To Omahans it is almost unnecessary to call attention to the fact that one can, for 5 cents, ride from the southern limits of South Omaha to Florence, East Omaha, Benson or Dundee. These are the particularly long rides, but there are many of from eight to ten miles which are made daily with and without transfers.

Before the street railway bridge was constructed the only means of mechanical transportation between Omaha and Council Bluffs was by steam train, or "dummy," operated over the Union Pacific bridge. The

rate of fare was 25 cents each way, or 50 cents for the round trip. Street railway transportation at both ends of the "dummy" line brought the total round trip fare up to 70 cents.

The electric lines perform the same service (round trip) for 20 cents cash fare, or 10 cents by use

of commutation books.

Before the electric line was built to Florence about four years ago bus fare from Florence to Ames Ave. was 10 cents and car fare to the Omaha business district 5 cents additional, bringing the total fare one way up to 15 cents, or 30 cents for the round trip.

Dundee and Benson originally had independent horse railways and for a time collected an additional 5-cent fare from passengers bound to and from Omaha.

In closing this installment it may not be out of place to remark that it has seemed curious to street railway operators, who, after many profitless years have succeeded in placing their property on a paying basis, to witness attempts to reduce the rate of fare in a time when street railway transportation is one of the few things greater in quantity and better in quality offered for the same unit of charge which prevailed ten and fifteen years ago.

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(Next Sunday's Article Will Discuss the Improvements and Needs of the Future.)

## CARRYING POWER OF THE NICKEL.

1869 ■ 1 MILE.

1872 ■ 2 MILES.

1888 ■ 3 MILES.

1898 ■ 8 MILES.

1909 ■ 12 MILES.