

Why We Ask Co-Operation

(Conclusion)

For nearly four months past, the Omaha & Council Bluffs Street Railway Company has published full page articles in the Sunday newspapers, for the purpose of making itself better understood by the public.

We have reason to believe that our efforts have met with a large degree of success. The facts presented were given in good faith and we believe the information was received in the same spirit in which it was given.

In taking the position that the public is entitled to know all the essential facts about our company, we recognized the mutuality of interest which exists between a street railway organization and the people.

Very little of the space used was devoted to abstract statements, and none to preaching. A determined effort was made to offer genuine information in a way that could be grasped by anyone who took the trouble to read it. Care was had to insure its reliability. No time was wasted in buncombe or in trying to represent conditions other than as they were.

The history of street railways in Omaha was traced from the organization of the first horse railway company by local men in 1867 to the present day. It was shown how large investments were made in horse, cable and electric railways, which were rendered worthless by the pace of improvements and reduced to junk value long before worn out. It was pointed out how the first complete *electric* equipment became wholly inadequate in less than a dozen years, and by 1902 sufficient only for a ground work on which to reconstruct and re-equip the entire system.

Different phases of operation were discussed and an earnest attempt made to give the public an adequate idea of what constitutes the street railway today, and of the tremendous improvements in urban transportation during the last twenty years.

It was shown by facts, figures and diagrams that the Omaha street railway passenger is today receiving far more for his nickel than ever before, although nearly every element entering into the cost of traction operation has, like the necessities of life, mounted upwards in the last ten or fifteen years.

It is proper and right that public service corporations should be required to bear their full share of the burden of taxation. The Omaha & Council Bluffs Street Railway Company pays annually **about one-seventh of all the personal taxes assessed in the city of Omaha.**

Upon the strength of the entire showing, we think we are justified in asking the co-operation of the public to the extent of meeting us in a friendly spirit in considering our problem and dealing with questions which affect us.

The co-operation we desire is not the kind that would perform our work for us or lift our responsibilities from our shoulders. Rather it is the same appreciation and encouragement which is accorded any worthy commercial enterprise whose labor and ambitions help to make the city great.

A large city cannot exist in the United States without street railways. Neither can street railways exist without cities. They are mutually dependent.

On the one hand, efficiently conducted railways enable the people to spread out over large areas and gain the ad-

vantages of cheaper land and rents and healthier environment; permit residence and manufacturing districts to be maintained in distant sections; prompt ease of communication and dispatch of trade, and make possible frequent journeys for recreation and amusement to theaters, parks and social gatherings.

On the other hand, the city and its population offer a patronage which should pay the cost of operation and maintenance, return a fair profit on a large amount of capital necessarily invested and allow a margin for depreciation to preserve the integrity of the property.

The street railway company that makes no profit is not a good thing for a city. The management of such a company is confronted with a constant struggle to make both ends meet, and this means the cutting down of expenses and consequent impairment of the service. The property of such a company is not kept up to operating efficiency; no depreciation fund can be provided and both the public and the corporation suffer.

Again, a profitless corporation finds it impossible, or very difficult, to sell bonds or stock to obtain money for improvements and extensions. It is forced to incur liabilities in excess of the actual capital obtained, and these liabilities must later be liquidated in full.

For thirty years there was no profit in Omaha street railways. It is only during the last ten years that the property has succeeded in properly establishing itself. It is now earning 4 per cent dividends on its common stock and 5 per cent on its preferred stock, and there is a healthy local demand for its securities.

The street railway system of Omaha today is recognized all over the country as a splendid system, in sound condition financially and physically, and in a position to obtain capital for improvements and extensions on fair terms. It is enabled to maintain its service at a high standard, and to meet the needs of a growing community as they arise. Its officers and directors are constantly engaged with earnest endeavor to secure the money necessary for the company to keep pace with the growing demands of this great city. We do not expect these demands will grow less, but rather that they will increase as time goes on, and it is a matter of grave importance that this company shall be able to continue its policy of expansion rather than be driven into the necessity of a more economical or parsimonious policy.

There seems to be much misconception about our use of the streets, and for that reason we wish to say here a few words on that subject.

The streets of cities are set apart for the use and convenience of the people, and it is proper and right that they should be used for the transportation of its inhabitants, whether by private or public conveyance. Our tracks are in the streets because the people want them there.

In conclusion, let us say that both utility managers and the people are beginning to realize that there is only one way of **getting** a square deal and that is by **giving** a square deal. All this company asks is a square deal, and no city can afford to grant less than this to its street railway corporation.

G. W. WATTLES, President,
Omaha & Council Bluffs Street Railway Company.