

Coordination or Competition: State Regulation of Motor Buses under Private Ownership and the Decline of Mass Transit in Pittsburgh

IN 1973, ALLEGHENY COUNTY'S PUBLIC transit agency, the Port Authority, declared bus driver Leonard Bruno "Driver of the Year." A decade earlier, Bruno was not a government employee, but an entrepreneur who drove and maintained his own bus in a one-man operation, Carnegie Coach Lines. However, like all transit firms in Pennsylvania, his company was not free from government oversight. The route he drove, the fares he charged, and other aspects of Bruno's business were regulated by the state Public Utility Commission. The commission relinquished regulatory control when the Port Authority bought Carnegie Coach Lines and thirty-two other privately owned transit companies in Allegheny County in 1964 and 1965.¹

In 2012 and 2013, Pennsylvania legislators re-empowered state regulators to grant private firms rights to operate transit routes in Allegheny County and called for study of further privatization options. With chronic budgetary woes, service cutbacks, and political battles over state subsidies, the Port Authority is already compelled to share responsibility for transit service with other nonprofit associations (suffering their own problems accessing public funding) and a private bus operator.²

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¹"PAT Riders Go Out of Way to Praise Retiring Driver," *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 21, 1983.

²"Oversight of County Transit to Shift from Port Authority to Public Utility Commission," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 11, 2012; "Braddock Nonprofit Says Commuter Shuttle Has Enough Cash for One More Week," *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, June 25, 2013; "Urgency Sought for Funding Pennsylvania Roads and Transit," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Aug. 22, 2013; An Act Amending the Act of April 6, 1956, Known as the Second Class County Port Authority Act, Further Providing for Membership of the Authority; and Providing for Department of Transportation Regionalization and Privatization Study, 2013, Pa. Legis. Serv. Act 2013-72.

Ironically, decades earlier the Port Authority was charged with saving mass transit, which had suffered chronic ridership and revenue loss under fragmented private ownership, by bringing order and financial stability through consolidation. This was part of a national trend of public buyouts of ailing privately owned urban transit companies, but combining so many separate transit lines into a single system was a unique challenge. The Port Authority consolidated over thirty separate companies—which included Pittsburgh Railways, a large trolley company with a subsidiary motor bus fleet centered in the county's urban core, as well as numerous smaller independent bus firms from the county's periphery—into a single, integrated transit system.³

Far from encouraging such consolidation efforts, earlier public policy had energetically promoted transit fragmentation in Pittsburgh. Since the 1910s, privately owned mass transit was regulated by a state government commission. Between the world wars, regulatory policy shifted with dramatic change in state political leadership. Whereas in the past regulations had protected and promoted the territorial monopoly of Pittsburgh Railways, new policies encouraged independent bus lines to expand into trolley territory at the expense of the older corporate firm. By midcentury, Allegheny County transit was a motley collection of bus and streetcar routes—a tangible reflection of the inconsistent regulatory policies fostered by transformation in Pennsylvania politics.

This essay is, in part, a case study in mass transit and urban history. As was the case in many American cities, Pittsburgh's public transit did not simply fall victim to automobile superiority or conspiracy. Financial and regulatory problems hurt trolleys' and buses' ability to compete with the supposed convenience and freedom of automobiles. Various scholarly and popular accounts condemn a corporate cabal led by General Motors that, beginning in the 1930s, purchased trolley systems through subsidiary holding companies and converted them to bus lines in spite of alleged popular preference for streetcar service. The basic story is most often attributed to Bradford Snell, a congressional researcher who wrote an exposé of GM's

³The Port Authority was created by 1956 legislation to build and manage a freight terminal for river and rail commerce. In 1959 it was repurposed to take over the county's mass transit. Sherie Mershon, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Urban Revitalization: The Allegheny Conference on Community Development, 1943–1968" (PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 2000), 592. "As far as can be learned," a 1953 study commissioned by county government concluded, "there are a greater number of mass transportation companies supplying local service to the immediate Pittsburgh District than is the case in any other American city of comparable size and importance." *Report of the Allegheny County Mass Transit Study Committee* ([Pittsburgh], 1953), 53.

business practices in the mid-1970s. Several historians have pointed out that this popular theory is problematic; by the 1930s, most streetcar firms had already lost ridership, revenue, and public credibility. Buses were a practical means of replacing aging streetcars, and in the comparatively few places the GM group acquired trolley firms, they supplied a line of credit otherwise unavailable.⁴ The story of Pittsburgh's mass transit suggests an alternative bus history altogether. GM's minions never troubled—nor did they rescue—Pittsburgh transportation. It was mom-and-pop firms, not powerful corporate interests, that made buses their business in the Steel City. Local politicians charged that the big trolley company (owned by holding company interests outside the region), rather than a motor bus Moloch, was unresponsive to Pittsburghers' needs.

The story of Pittsburgh's motor buses is also a local history that illustrates links between national- and state-level politics, public regulation, and the local services available to people and neighborhoods. Focusing primarily on national-level or large-scale regulation and enterprises, Thomas McCraw and Richard Vietor argue that the models devised by historians, economists, and political scientists in the effort to build simple generalizations about regulatory behavior break down under historical scrutiny. Regulation and industries shape each other in myriad ways, each influenced by internal or external social, political, ideological, or economic factors. Did state regulators protect the public interest from powerful corporations, or did they hurt business creativity, efficiency, and provision of goods and services to the public? At various times in Pennsylvania, regulation both helped and hindered different types of private transit operators. Was Pennsylvania regulation "captured," and, as historian Gabriel Kolko and economist George Stigler suggest was common, did it serve the interests of powerful businesses ostensibly regulated in the public interest? Yes, but not permanently. And when critics of big utilities subsequently won state government, regulation did not necessarily serve the public interest, either—if serving the public interest meant delivering efficient transit service.⁵ Reg-

⁴ Bradford C. Snell, *American Ground Transport: A Proposal for Restructuring the Automobile, Truck, Bus, and Rail Industries* (Washington, DC, 1974), 26–38; David W. Jones, *Motorization and Mass Transit: An American History and Policy Analysis* (Bloomington, IN, 2008), 66–68; Robert C. Post, *Urban Mass Transit: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport, CT, 2007), 149–55; Zachary M. Schrag, "The Bus Is Young and Honest: Transportation Politics, Technical Choice, and the Motorization of Manhattan Surface Transit, 1919–1936," *Technology and Culture* 41 (2000): 53–54.

⁵ Thomas K. McCraw, *Prophets of Regulation: Charles Francis Adams, Louis D. Brandeis, James M. Landis, Alfred E. Kahn* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 300–302; Richard H. K. Vietor, *Contrived Competition: Regulation and Deregulation in America* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 310–13.

ulation consisted of shifting preferences for different businesses, technologies, or arrangements of private enterprise instead of either a simple brake or boon to a monolithic industry. Pittsburgh's early bus story links state politics to local streets, showing how political contingency shaped both regulatory policy and people's rides to work, school, or marketplace.

In this respect, this motor bus story is inspired by another: Zachary Schrag's account of bus triumph in Manhattan. As in Pennsylvania, New York City politicians hostile to streetcar company domination of Gotham's streets encouraged small-time bus operators to competitively needle the trolley firms. Under such relentless political pressure, which also included burdensome taxes on streetcar franchises, New York's trolley interests converted to buses by the mid-twentieth century. The Big Apple bus story, Schrag concludes, illustrates a case of utilities regulation where "rival technologies became, in large part, proxies for questions about who would provide the service in question and under what regulatory regime." This was equally true in Pittsburgh between the world wars.

But in Pittsburgh, different regulatory development resulted from a dissimilar political context, and both in turn created a different mass transit situation. There, early mass transit regulation was entwined with politics surrounding the electric power industry. In the 1920s, while New York trolleys suffered (municipally backed) bus competition, Pennsylvania regulation banished small-time buses to the farm-and-town country outside Pittsburgh's urban core. While most of Manhattan's bus lines were subsequently consolidated under a single company, Pittsburgh's transit became a hodgepodge of trolley and bus routes, under various owners, until government takeover in 1964. In Pittsburgh, inconsistency in state regulation made for inconsistency in transit operation.⁶

Before Buses: Pittsburgh Railways Company

Pittsburgh had electric streetcars since the 1890s, and, as in other cities, the Steel City's trolleys had serious financial and political problems before automobile competition appeared.⁷ Prior to the twentieth century, numerous firms operated streetcars in different parts of Pittsburgh, sometimes competing with each other along a few routes. Local businessmen gradu-

⁶ Schrag, "The Bus Is Young and Honest," 51–79.

⁷ For the problems of early trolleys, see: Jones, *Motorization and Mass Transit*, 31–56; Martha J. Bianco, "Technological Innovation and the Rise of and Fall of Urban Mass Transit," *Journal of Urban History* 25 (1999): 348–78.

ally combined these lines into fewer, bigger firms. In 1902, consolidation culminated in the Pittsburgh Railways Company (PRCo), which ran the region's trolley service as a monopoly operation.

PRCo's routes mostly formed a radial system centered on downtown Pittsburgh, splaying out through urban neighborhoods to industrial towns and emerging suburbs. Trolleys struggled through narrow, congested streets in the central city. Beyond the urban neighborhoods, the streetcars meandered between towns crammed into valleys or perched on hillsides and ridgelines, with intervening stretches of sparse settlement.⁸

Due to its Gilded Age construction, Pittsburgh Railways was burdened with enormous fixed costs for most of its corporate life. Prior to 1902, businessmen combining trolley lines into bigger systems bought or rented the various routes at high prices. Between 1902 and 1951, PRCo was obliged to pay the resulting rents and debts. In fact, PRCo chronically failed to pay much of this and was in bankruptcy from 1918 to 1924 and from 1938 through 1950.

Pittsburgh Railways' first bankruptcy occurred despite aggregate ridership increases in its first two decades. Through 1917, Pittsburghers paid a nickel to ride in the city and some of the surrounding boroughs and additional fare to reach towns further out. The nickel fare was an institution by the 1910s, while PRCo managers struggled with ways to limit or cut costs. General economic downturns, especially after 1907, resulted in short-term, costly ridership dips. Horrendous inflation during World War I erased profits with soaring costs.⁹

Further complicating matters, Pittsburgh Railways was itself owned by Philadelphia Company, a utilities holding firm that by World War I owned most of the city's electric power and gas utilities as well. Philadelphia Company in turn was controlled by a holding company outside of Pittsburgh. Ownership above that level was, until after World War II, a series of shifting holding company layers typical of American utilities between the world wars. Top-to-bottom, PRCo's byzantine orga-

⁸ James D. Callery, H. S. A. Stewart, and C. A. Fagan, memo, "To Trainmen," June 5, 1918, photocopy, Pittsburgh Railways Company Collection, Miller Memorial Library, Pennsylvania Trolley Museum, Washington, PA (hereafter PRCC); E. K. Morse, *Report of the Transit Commissioner to the Honorable Mayor and the City Council of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1917), 15–17.

⁹ Bion J. Arnold, *Report on the Pittsburgh Transportation Problem, Submitted to Honorable William A. Magee, Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1910); *Report of the Engineers Valuation Board in re Pittsburgh Railways Company, Submitted to the Public Service Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, August 1919* (Harrisburg, PA, 1919); *City of Pittsburgh v. Pittsburgh Railways Company et al.*, docket 1571, Mar. 22, 1920, *Public Utilities Reports* (1920C): 486–87.

nization and the confusing organization of its ownership were a political liability. Progressive and New Deal reformers decried pyramided utility company organization as bad business. These complicated corporations, critics charged, enabled greedy investors to siphon profits from operating utilities that should instead offer consumers lower rates or better service.¹⁰

By World War I, PRCo was infamous among its ridership. Pittsburghers rode trolleys in increasing numbers but resented company policies that seemed greedy—such as stingy transfer privileges and unsanitary cars. The biggest cause for complaint was overcrowding, especially at rush hours. Public officials alternated between negotiating with, criticizing, and threatening the company, all while commissioning a series of engineering experts to study the situation.¹¹ But local governments in Allegheny County acquired little regulatory power over mass transit.

Instead, a state Public Service Commission, created in 1913, became the regulatory agency for public utilities—including streetcars and, later, motor buses—statewide. State regulators could uphold or veto trolley management decisions such as route changes and fare increases. By creating the Public Service Commission, Pennsylvania's political leaders reconciled with monopoly operation of utilities.¹²

In the United States, state regulation of public utility companies began in 1907. Public officials generally hoped that regulatory commissions would balance “natural monopoly” economics in urban streetcars and other public utilities with righteous public expectations toward utility companies. In contrast to the widespread American faith in competition, the concept of a “natural monopoly” suggested that consumers were better off when certain heavy capital industries were overseen by regulators rather than subject to competition. The mission of state regulators was not just to

¹⁰ The name “Philadelphia Company” was a historical anomaly and did not reflect any particular relationship to the city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia Company, *Helpful Information for Employees* (Pittsburgh, 1931), 7–8. For the politics surrounding public utilities and holding companies in this era, see Thomas K. McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight, 1933–1939* (Philadelphia, 1971), 7–25, 82–85; Philip J. Funigiello, *Toward a National Power Policy: The New Deal and the Electric Utility Industry, 1933–1941* (Pittsburgh, 1973), xiii–xvi.

¹¹ Memo, “Pittsburgh Railways Company, Rail Operation: Total Revenue Passengers,” n.d., photocopy, PRCC. For examples of complaints against PRCo, see: “Wants Good Order on Trolley Cars,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, June 10, 1906; “To Stop Packing the Trolley Cars,” and “Packing the Streetcars,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, Sept. 8, 1906; “Injustice of Transfer System Arousing Many,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, Dec. 7, 1907; “Street Widening before Trolley Ills are Cured,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 19, 1909. For experts’ reports to city officials, see, for example: Emil Swensson, *Report to the State Railroad Commission [on Pittsburgh Railways]* (Harrisburg, 1910); Arnold, *Report*; Morse, *Report*.

¹² Public Service Company Law, 1913 Pa. Laws 1374.

protect the public against excessive utility profiteering but also to ensure that monopolistic utilities earned a fair return on investment. In practice, state regulation was fraught with controversy and only partially effective. Legal and political struggles ensued before regulatory commissions, appellate courts, and, occasionally, the reading public, over what a “fair return” on a utility’s investment meant. Utility holding companies, sprawling over regions or even the nation, were not subject to state regulation.¹³

Like their sibling railroads and electric power firms, trolley systems were capital-intensive enterprises; tracks, electric power systems, streetcars, support facilities, and franchised operating rights exacted heavy interest payments, rentals, and taxes. A trolley company, therefore, could be maximally efficient as a monopoly operator, not when sharing a local population with a more or less duplicate, competing system. Bigger systems could achieve greater economies of scale and better balance profitable and unprofitable areas. Transit expert Bion Arnold, hired in 1910 by the City of Pittsburgh to help in its ongoing disputes with Pittsburgh Railways, was no particular friend of PRCo. However, he advised Pittsburgh’s Mayor William Magee that although Pittsburgh Railways was overcapitalized and mismanaged, it was appropriately the sole operator of the city’s trolley system. “*Transportation in a city is a natural monopoly*,” Arnold insisted; “*therefore no district should be served with two competing transit systems when one can furnish better service than with the business divided*.” It was up to public regulation, not competition, the engineer-expert counseled, to ensure that private management was honest and diligent.¹⁴

Moderately honest or diligent streetcar management had little to fear from the Pennsylvania Public Service Commission, which by the 1920s was an example of regulatory capture. Just after World War I, *Electric Railway Journal*, a trade publication supportive of streetcar companies, especially liked the Pennsylvania regulators. Between 1915 and 1932, the commission chairman was attorney William D. B. Ainey. In 1919 Ainey assured Pennsylvania trolley men that his commission was not a tribunal but, rather, a helpful, problem-solving authority that regarded corporate utilities as essential to the public. Ainey dismissed the “great majority of complaints” the commission received against utilities as “inconsequential.” The chief regulator “wanted to get away from the idea that the public utilities

¹³ McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight*, 4–15; McCraw, *Prophets of Regulation*, 7–15; Morton Keller, *Regulating the New Economy: Public Policy and Economic Change in America, 1900–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 58–65.

¹⁴ Arnold, *Report*, 18. Italics in original.

commission should occupy a position of antagonism toward the railways.” In 1921, the journal reiterated that the Pennsylvania commission was a model of ideal regulation.¹⁵ At some point Ainey began taking bribes from utilities, but fundamentally, Pennsylvania’s state government in this era was famously pro-business Republican. Pennsylvania industrialists did not object to active government friendly to large corporations and welcomed such interventions as navy armor plate contracts, tariffs on imported products, or state regulation protecting established utility corporations.¹⁶

Before any serious competitive threat, the Public Service Commission upheld Pittsburgh Railways’ monopoly on transit in the Steel City by keeping PRCo glued together. After declaring bankruptcy in 1918, the trolley system faced possible fragmentation through foreclosure of underlying, rented streetcar lines, which could have created several smaller trolley companies operating in the region. In 1920, the Public Service Commissioners headed off that possibility by authorizing PRCo to raise trolley fares. After 1920, the trolleys charged a dime for a single ride, or three rides for a quarter (with additional fare to travel to the most distant locations). However, the resulting arrangements did not reduce PRCo’s fixed costs and only temporarily suppressed PRCo’s long-term financial and political woes.¹⁷

In the 1920s, new management at Pittsburgh Railways tried to defuse public rancor over the higher fare by providing better trolley service. State regulation preserved PRCo’s mass transit monopoly, but the trolleys increasingly competed with cheap automobiles. Within its budgetary limits, PRCo invested in some new equipment, better salesmanship, and more efficient operation and maintenance. Trolley leaders compromised with city officials and downtown merchants on route changes. PRCo tempered the fare increase by adding transfer options, offering some low-cost fare zones on certain lines, and instituting a \$1.50 ride-all-week pass.¹⁸

¹⁵ “Optimism Prevails at Pennsylvania Association Meeting,” *Electric Railway Journal*, July 5, 1919, 13–14; “Commission Popular in Keystone State,” *Electric Railway Journal*, July 30, 1921, 162.

¹⁶ David Cannidine, *Mellon: An American Life* (New York, 2006), 110–11, 266–67.

¹⁷ *City of Pittsburgh v. Pittsburgh Railways Company et al.*, Mar. 22, 1920; “Receivers File Final Report on Management of Traction Lines,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, Apr. 2, 1924; “Pittsburgh Railways Company,” in *Pittsburgh Railways Company System: Historical Cost* (Pittsburgh, 1919), Pittsburgh Railways Company Records, 1872–1974 (AIS.1974.29), box 1, vol. 10, p. 59, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh; Exhibit C in W. D. George and Thomas Benner, “Plan of Reorganization for Pittsburgh Railways Company and Pittsburgh Motor Coach Company, Comprehending the Reorganization of the Pittsburgh Railways Company System,” July 1, 1940, PRCC.

¹⁸ Charles K. Robinson, “The Fate of the Five-Cent Fare. I. Pittsburgh: A New Contract Brings Mutual Understanding,” *National Municipal Review* 15 (1926): 459–65.

Despite these improvements, PRCo struggled to overcome a legacy of public disappointment and a surge of mass-market automobility. Even before the Great Depression, Pittsburgh Railways Company began losing riders.¹⁹

Bus Beginnings in Allegheny County

The earliest motor buses in the Steel City appeared just before World War I. For the next half-century, buses were peripheral transit providers, supporting or competing with the core electric streetcar system. Like the trolleys, all were privately owned through 1963. Some were operated by Pittsburgh Railways. Others were owned by a variety of smaller companies—often families or partnerships—that ran various types of buses, routes, and services.

Determining the size, type, and number of these “independent” bus companies (so termed by contemporaries) depended on somewhat arbitrary distinctions. In 1951, one observer counted sixty bus firms in total, but twenty-one ran long distance routes to faraway cities, providing only minor local service. Thirty-nine bus companies provided local transit service somewhere in the county. By the 1950s, some had several dozen buses, but none approached the size of a big city transit system, and many remained smaller operations with only a few coaches. Most of these were based in the county, but many supplied service that crossed county lines. Smaller enterprises appeared or disappeared frequently and were inconsistent record keepers, complicating efforts to assess them all. In 1964 and 1965, Port Authority acquired thirty bus lines in addition to Pittsburgh Railways.²⁰

Many an early bus owner started out by operating a jitney, an entrepreneurial fad that had first appeared in California in 1914. Automobile owners earned nickels by running cheap transit service that was as scheduled, consistent, and extensive as they pleased. Many jitney men sold rides only occasionally: on evenings, on weekends, around sporting events, or whenever they had time to kill. A favorite tactic was wheeling up to a crowded streetcar stop and offering waiting patrons a more exciting ride than the

¹⁹“Pittsburgh Railways Company, Rail Operation: Total Revenue Passengers.”

²⁰Milton Cooke, *Mass Transportation Study of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Part 2* (Pittsburgh, 1951), 79; The Port Authority Act of 1959 required Port Authority to take over any company running 80 percent of its routes in Allegheny County. Port Authority of Allegheny County, *First Annual Report* (Pittsburgh, 1964), 2.

dowdy old trolley. Predictably, streetcar management roundly condemned jitneys and called on local or state government to stop them.²¹

An early Pittsburgh jitneyman was A. F. Hardy, a former machinist at the Homestead Steel Works, who in March 1915 drove his touring car around downtown Pittsburgh. His ambition, he told the *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, was to ferry passengers between Liberty Avenue and the North Side on a regular schedule, charging a consistent five cents, rather than to accept varying payments for rides in any direction a passenger wanted to go. The newspaper photographed Hardy in his Ford, holding his sign reading “Jitney Bus”—a combination of words that, together with his plans for regular service, suggested the connection between the wildcat jitney and the later bus company. What became of Hardy is unclear, but other jitney-men, operating in outlying areas of the county, became bus operators.²²

Around World War I, Pennsylvania’s state regulators prohibited the casual jitney and made resulting bus carriers support the big trolley companies. In 1915, the Public Service Commission assumed authority over jitneys and buses and compelled jitney-men to either invest more time, effort, and money into operating under regulatory guidelines or quit the business. Jitney or bus entrepreneurs had to submit to the legal process (and costs) involved in obtaining and maintaining proper licenses to operate and demonstrate, in the commissioners’ opinion, financial ability or responsibility. Operators had to run appropriate vehicles over stipulated (road-by-road, turn-by-turn) routes, at scheduled times, frequencies, and fares. By requiring greater investment, regulators stamped out most (but never all) wildcat, casual, holiday, evening, and weekend jitneyism. With all of that trouble and expense, many drivers sought a bigger vehicle and a route with patronage enough to make it pay; jitney-men became bus drivers.²³ And with control over each route, state regulators prevented buses from swarming over the most profitable trolley routes and competitively “skimming the cream” from trolley system lines.

²¹ Post, *Urban Mass Transit*, 66–67.

²² “Hardy Machinist Starts City’s First ‘Jitney’ Bus,” *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, Mar. 6, 1915. For other examples of jitney-men who became bus owners, see Oliver Miller and Raymond Foley, “The Pittsburgh Independents 8: Braddock and East Pittsburgh Local Lines,” *Motor Coach Age*, June 1977. Miller and Foley wrote a series of articles on the Pittsburgh independents for *Motor Coach Age*, a popular enthusiast magazine, in the 1970s. These are valuable secondary sources on the topic.

²³ “How the Motor Bus Serves Pennsylvania,” *Bus Transportation*, Apr. 1922, 228–35; Irwin Rosenbaum and David Lilienthal, “The Regulation of Motor Carriers in Pennsylvania,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review and American Law Register* 75 (1927): 696–722. Jitneyism did not end with regulatory prohibition. Jitneys continued, illegally, particularly in low-income, inner-city areas. “Pittsburgh Jitney Service Illegal, but Thriving,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Sept. 7, 2013.

By protecting existing streetcar service and profits, the Public Service Commission claimed to protect the efficiencies of natural trolley monopolies. As early as 1916, the commission declared that “auto-buses . . . would be useful where there is no trolley operated or where it can be made an auxiliary of a trolley system.”²⁴ They conceded the possibility that at some point, buses might become able to haul more people than streetcars, and more cheaply. But until then, regulators insisted, more efficient trolley systems were best for Pennsylvanians, collectively. During the 1920s, bus owners needed to serve areas as yet without transit, preferably linking these areas with existing trolley routes. State regulators saw motor buses as auxiliaries, not competitors, to the immense private investment in electric railway mass transit that already existed.²⁵

With one significant exception, regulation prevented the growth of independent bus lines in Pittsburgh Railways’ territory. The exception, John Gerlach, was an early motor-taxi operator who began his bus line in 1912, running touring routes with double-decker buses to and from city parks. Gerlach morphed this into an expensive commuter operation with routes between Pittsburgh and East Liberty as well as the elite Squirrel Hill neighborhood. The Public Service Commission probably permitted Gerlach’s service additions because he was not competing much with trolleys. His buses charged a twenty-five-cent fare and used the trolley-free Bigelow Boulevard. In 1925, Pittsburgh Railways Company bought Gerlach’s outfit and renamed this fleet “Pittsburgh Motor Coach Company” (PMCo), but they continued to operate it as Gerlach had: as a premium auxiliary transit service. Until the 1930s, PRCo and its bus arm had exclusive control of its operating territory in and around the city of Pittsburgh, the industrial towns along the rivers, and some trolley-era suburbs up-country from the urban riverbanks.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Pittsburgh Motor Coach specifically targeted automobile-owning suburbanites who increasingly abandoned trolleys. With this “de luxe” service, residents of “high-class residence district[s]” could ride upholstered, advertisement-free coaches, avoiding the hassle of driving or parking their own cars and of mixing with the common lot aboard streetcars. PMCo gradually expanded this system of bus routes connecting upscale neighborhoods to the downtown district, taking advantage of the city’s growing boulevard access to the Golden Triangle.

²⁴ Quoted in Rosenbaum and Lilienthal, “Regulation of Motor Carriers in Pennsylvania,” 710n.

²⁵ “How the Motor Bus Serves Pennsylvania,” 228.

During the 1930s, PRCo used buses to create a handful of “feeder routes” connecting new territory to existing streetcar lines and converted a few trolley lines to buses. However, after 1924 Pittsburgh Railways had only minor geographic expansions via trolley or bus.²⁶

Beyond the Trolleys: The Independent Buses

Because of state regulation, in the 1910s and 1920s Allegheny County’s entrepreneurial bus operations grew outside Pittsburgh Railways territory. In 1922, the journal *Bus Transportation* complained that the Pennsylvania Public Service Commission “has consistently refused to acknowledge the necessity of highway transportation in direct and parallel competition with rail lines.” Instead, most independent bus proprietors ran small routes between crossroad hamlets, mill towns, and mining villages, beyond the reach of PRCo’s trolley tracks and bus lines.²⁷ These areas featured sparser settlement but were poised to grow with later suburban development. Because the independents frequently reached PRCo’s outer trolley stops, state regulation essentially encouraged formation of a de facto multienterprise, regional system of trolleys and buses.

Ambitious drivers, often brothers, saw opportunities to be their own bosses by scraping together the means to buy a bus, navigate the regulatory maze, secure routes, and attract ridership. In this, the Oriole Motor Coach Company was typical. In 1918 coal miner Joe Supan began running a jitney bus for fellow miners in the Bridgeville area, southwest of PRCo territory. For several years Supan and his brothers ran the Supan Auto Bus & Taxi Company, but in 1928, they combined forces with another set of bus-driving brothers, the Collavos, to form “Oriole Motor Coach,” a commuter line for the emerging suburb of Green Tree. Through to 1964, the Supans remained primary owners of Oriole, but in 1934, most employees were part owners of the firm, too. Then, William Supan was president of the company, but also a driver and mechanic.²⁸ Through the 1920s, other local men ventured into busing, such as John and George Sauers, who ran buses to the west of Pittsburgh from 1922, or August Bamford, Gustav Popper, James Dawson, Leonardo Burelli, Gust Saihos, and Byrum McCoy,

²⁶ [Miller and Foley], “Pittsburgh Motor Coach Co.,” *Motor Coach Age*, Mar.–Apr. 1925, 4–8; W. T. Noonan, “Congestion Relief with De Luxe Coaches,” *Electric Railway Journal*, Feb. 12, 1927, 298–99.

²⁷ “How the Motor Bus Serves Pennsylvania,” 228–35.

²⁸ “15-Cent Fare Bus Company to Pay 2 Percent Dividend,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 14, 1934.

who drove among the smoky mill-and-tenement towns along the Monongahela River (locally called the “Mon Valley”).²⁹ In the following decades, other people and families moved in and out of the business as their fortunes or inclinations permitted.

Throughout the private era, many independent bus firms developed from and were involved in other related businesses. The Sauers brothers, A. J. Poskin, and William and Sara Shafer were trucking businesspeople who got into buses. (Sara, a former schoolteacher, ran the bus company, while William continued to run his trucking firm). A few bus companies were spin-offs from interurban electric trolley companies, such as Penn Bus Lines and Harmony Short Line. In 1929, two automobile dealers purchased the remains of a little local trolley company to form a bus line, Duquesne Motor Coach; at the same time, they remained in automotive sales and service.³⁰

Independent bus companies grew in tandem with the suburbs. Bus owners supplied day-trip and commuter transit for residents in outlying areas of Allegheny County to reach the core areas of Pittsburgh. While not as great as in the post-World War II period, suburbanization in the region was vigorous in the 1920s and persisted in some parts even during the Depression. The growth of “mom-and-pop” bus outfits demonstrated that, despite the availability of cheap automobiles in the 1920s, there was demand for transit service at or beyond the fringes of Pittsburgh Railways’ trolley system.³¹ The early independent buses served sparser ridership but did not have as burdensome capital or labor costs as Pittsburgh Railways, and they effectively extended the trolley system’s reach when the streetcar company could not afford to expand.

²⁹ Miller and Foley, “The Pittsburgh Independents 4: Western Allegheny County and the Ohio River Valley,” *Motor Coach Age*, July 1976, 7; Miller and Foley, “Braddock and East Pittsburgh Local Lines,” 4–17; Miller and Foley, “The Pittsburgh Independents 7: Boulevard Lines,” *Motor Coach Age*, Feb. 1977, 11; “Obituary: August Bamford, Former Owner of Bus Company,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Apr. 5, 1991.

³⁰ Miller and Foley, “Western Allegheny County and the Ohio River Valley,” 7, 16–17, 20; Miller and Foley, “The Pittsburgh Independents 1: McKeesport Local Lines,” *Motor Coach Age*, Feb. 1976, 5; Miller and Foley, “The Pittsburgh Independents 6: Allegheny Valley Lines,” *Motor Coach Age*, Dec. 1976, 4; Miller and Foley, “The Pittsburgh Independents 9: Homestead and Duquesne Lines,” *Motor Coach Age*, July 1977, 7–9.

³¹ “How the Motor Bus Serves Pennsylvania,” 228–35; Steven J. Hoffman, “‘A Plan of Quality’: The Development of Mt. Lebanon, a 1920s Automobile Suburb,” *Journal of Urban History* 18 (1992): 144, 154, 174; “City Population Spread” and “Homeseekers Here Gradually Moving to Suburban Areas,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1930. Miller and Foley, “The Pittsburgh Independents 2: The Monongahela Valley and South Hills Lines,” *Motor Coach Age*, Apr. 1976, 8, 14–15; “South Hills Plan Opens,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 15, 1937.

From the Public Service Commission, bus entrepreneurs received many rights to run service between outlying areas and PRCo's urban trolley network. Ezio Bigi's bus rumbled along the leafy creek valleys between Bridgeville and Dormont, where passengers could transfer to trolley cars for the trip downtown. August Bamford started a line feeding PRCo streetcars in the Homestead area. In 1922, four buses ran between the streetcar terminus at Brentwood and points south; two years later, PRCo constructed a new track loop there, adding a paved driveway for the buses. Across the city to the north, Culmerville Auto Transit carried passengers from areas north down to Etna and the PRCo trolleys there. After 1925 the Deere Brothers' buses connected PRCo trolleys in Wilkinsburg to points to the northeast. In and around Braddock and East Pittsburgh, motor buses served the industrial plants and hilly terrain between the northwest-southeast trolley lines. In 1922 a swarm of motor carriers converged on McKeesport, at the southeastern corner of PRCo territory. Oriole Motor Coach ran to downtown Pittsburgh from Green Tree, but through PRCo territory; it did not stop for passengers, so regulators (and PRCo) did not object to the route.³² As they had done by approving PRCo's steep fare raise, state regulators protected Pittsburgh Railways Company's territorial monopoly and obliged the bus entrepreneurs to cooperate, rather than compete, with the trolleys.

Subsequently, after (different) state regulators allowed the independent buses to reach downtown Pittsburgh and in places compete with the PRCo, Pittsburgh Railways felt the loss of this regulatory support. By the mid-1940s, PRCo officer M. L. Merlo wistfully recalled that in 1922, the Public Service Commission forbade Ezio Bigi from competing with the streetcars and compelled him "to cooperate with Pittsburgh Railways by transporting persons to points of connections with Railway lines." Similarly, Merlo recalled, "all of the Brentwood [bus] operations radiated from the Carrick-Brentwood district and all acted as feeders to our lines

³² In the 1940s, PRCo employee M. L. Merlo studied the local independent bus scene by consulting regulatory records and riding the bus lines. He subsequently compiled reports for PRCo's internal use. M. L. Merlo, "Bigi Bus Lines: History of Development," Oct. 15, 1946, 3; Merlo, "Bamford Brothers Motor Coach Lines: Route No. 1—Whitaker-Homestead," Apr. 17, 1946, 4, all in Independent Motor Bus Collection, Miller Memorial Library, Pennsylvania Trolley Museum (hereafter IMBC); Miller and Foley, "Monongahela Valley and South Hills Lines," 16; Miller and Foley, "Allegheny Valley Lines," 16; Merlo, "Deere Brothers Bus Lines: History of Development," June 9, 1947, 1, IMBC; Miller and Foley, "Braddock and East Pittsburgh," 4; "How the Motor Bus Serves Pennsylvania," 235; "Bus Analysis to be Made by Trade Body," *Pittsburgh Press*, Oct. 24, 1929.

rather than competitors.”³³ But during the 1920s, Pittsburgh Railways Company did little to *actively* cultivate cooperative relationships with the bus start-ups through any incentives or even transfer schemes. Nor does it appear that state regulators prodded trolley leadership to do so.

The Un-coordination of Allegheny County Mass Transit

In the 1930s, Pennsylvania state regulation, following bigger political trends, shifted from protecting PRCo to promoting independent bus operators. Nationally, the decade began with damaging congressional and Federal Trade Commission investigations of electric utilities and their holding companies. Beginning in 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal coalition targeted utility corporations for reform. This reform entailed outlawing complicated utilities holding company structures as well as federal development of hydroelectric power as a “yardstick” with which political leaders and citizens could judge the performance of privately owned electric companies.³⁴ Pennsylvania reformers joined this attack on the power of big utilities. Pittsburgh Railways and Pittsburgh’s electric company, Duquesne Light, were owned by holding firm Philadelphia Company, itself at the bottom of a stack of utilities holding companies. The independent bus operators had no such political liabilities.

In Pennsylvania, political animosity toward corporate utilities predated triumph of the state’s Democrats and their “Little New Deal.” Gifford Pinchot, the old Progressive and (Teddy) Roosevelt Republican, was re-elected governor in 1930. Pinchot had been critical of the state’s utility corporations in an earlier gubernatorial term, and he made regulatory reform a central part of his electoral campaign. Amid the deepening Depression, he railed against a utility “conspiracy” allegedly dominating politics in the Keystone State. Pinchot and his political faction believed that corporate power was fostered by a complicit Public Service Commission.³⁵

By 1934, Pinchot’s allies overhauled the regulatory agency. Pinchot’s administration exposed where utilities’ management (including Philadelphia Company’s) had bribed members of the commission, notably

³³ Merlo, “Big Bus Lines,” 3; Merlo, “Brentwood Motor Coach Company: Route No. 1—Brentwood-Pittsburgh,” Feb. 18, 1946, 5; and Merlo, “Brentwood Motor Coach Company: Route No. 3—Curry-Pittsburgh,” Mar. 22, 1946, 6, both in IMBC.

³⁴ Funigiello, *Toward a National Power Policy*, 113–19; McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight*.

³⁵ Irwin F. Greenberg, “Pinchot, Prohibition, and Public Utilities: The Pennsylvania Election of 1930,” *Pennsylvania History* 40 (1973): 21–35.

its longtime chairman, William Ainey. With Ainey and other commissioners ousted, the *Pittsburgh Press* reported, Pinchot's four replacement commissioners represented a quorum that could implement "the theories of utility regulation [Pinchot] has been preaching up and down the state for more than a decade." The *Press* anticipated that locally, the Pittsburgh Railways-Motor Coach monopoly might be in trouble and that "small bus operators" throughout the state would get more sympathy from state regulators. The Public Service Commission thereafter failed to live up to Pinchot's militancy, and changes in Pittsburgh's transit situation were not abrupt. But in the long run, the *Press* was prescient.³⁶

After Pinchot, the Democratic Party won state government and further purged the state's regulators. In spring 1937, the Democrats replaced the seven-man Public Service Commission with a five-man Public Utility Commission (PUC) that was itself unabashedly Democrat. In October 1937, supporting the Democratic Party in upcoming elections, the PUC chairman promised a wide-ranging investigation of Pittsburgh Railways Company and its practices. Compared to its predecessors, the PUC was even more distrustful of Pittsburgh's trolley firm and friendlier to the independent bus companies' ambitions.³⁷

The Public Service Commission felt pressure to shift its policies even before Pinchot's faction seized control of state government. Since 1928, the Pittsburgh-area Allied Boards of Trade, a confederation of local trade organizations, complained to the commission about Pittsburgh Railways' monopoly and policies. The Allied Boards protested Pittsburgh Motor Coach's "exorbitant" twenty-five-cent bus fare and rejected the anti-competitive logic of regulation, arguing that the independent buses should be allowed to compete with PRCo buses and trolleys within the core communities of Allegheny County.³⁸

³⁶ "Pinchot Surges to Power over Public Service Commission as Ainey Quits, Ending Feud," *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 3, 1932; "Ainey Resigns P.S.C. Post on Eve of Senate Inquiry," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Aug. 3, 1932; "Pinchot Will Fight for Quiz," *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 3, 1932. Pinchot subsequently had a falling out with one of his chosen commissioners. "Two Chairmen Will Take PSC Fight to Court," *Pittsburgh Press*, May 7, 1933; Orren C. Hormell, "State Legislation on Public Utilities in 1934-35," *American Political Science Review* 30 (1936): 85-86.

³⁷ Orren C. Hormell, "State Legislation on Public Utilities, 1936-38," *American Political Science Review* 32 (1938): 1,134; "Earle Signs PSC 'Ripper,'" *Pittsburgh Press*, Apr. 1, 1937; "PUC Orders Trolley, Bus Rate Inquiry," *Pittsburgh Press*, Oct. 27, 1937; "Democrats Veto 'Sulk' Tactics," *Pittsburgh Press*, Nov. 14, 1938.

³⁸ "Fight to Cut Bus Fares Is Launched Here," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Oct. 24, 1929; "Trade Boards Continue War on Bus Fares," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Sept. 25, 1930; "Trolley, Bus, Taxicab Fares Facing Attack," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jan. 8, 1934.

Beginning in 1931, the Public Service Commission permitted bus companies in the Pittsburgh area to carry passengers through streetcar territory. Brentwood Motor Coach chief Daniel Feick applied for the first of these extensions, offering to carry passengers of his existing routes, which then terminated at the trolley terminus in Brentwood, to downtown for an additional fifteen cents. Feick claimed his passengers wanted this service and insisted he would not much compete with PRCo along their tracks, although residents around the Brentwood trolley terminus could obviously use his buses instead of trolleys. Over Pittsburgh Railways' protest, state regulators granted Feick his request.³⁹ As PRCo officials feared, other bus companies surrounding Pittsburgh Railways requested and received similar rights to run downtown and then ceased being feeders for the trolleys.

Through the mid-1930s, the Public Service Commission granted these downtown extensions with the stipulation that the independent buses could not pick up or drop off passengers along PRCo's trolley and bus routes. To that extent, the commission ostensibly upheld PRCo's exclusive territorial control. In practice, the regulators did not entirely insulate PRCo trolleys or buses from all possible competition. As in the initial Brentwood case, a few local residents here and there could, from their porch, walk in one direction to take a trolley downtown or another to take an independent bus.⁴⁰ Probably the most notable example of this phenomenon was in spring 1933, after Bamford Brothers asked and received permission to carry passengers from Mon Valley steel towns—Munhall, Homestead, and Duquesne—to Pittsburgh's central business district. Restrictions prevented the Bamfords from servicing some areas along the route, but the steel town residents could choose between Bamford buses or PRCo trolleys to reach the department stores, theaters, or other venues in the city. Subsequently the Bamfords made their service especially attractive by keeping their bus fares close to trolley fares.⁴¹

³⁹ "Bus Fare Cut to Brentwood Hit in Protest," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1930; "New Bus Line to Brentwood," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Apr. 21, 1931.

⁴⁰ Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In the Matter of the Application of Oriole Motor Coach Lines, Inc.: Certificate of Public Conveyance" (Report and Order of the Commission, docket nos. 12430 and 19680, June 15, 1937), and "In re: Applications of Brentwood Motor Coach Company . . ." (Report and Order of the Commission, docket no. 21418, Apr. 19, 1937), photocopies in IMBC. PRCo's Merlo regarded the downtown extension grants of the Public Service Commission as opening the door to serious competition, "in the sense that much of the traffic which formerly transferred to our service is now carried directly" by the bus companies. Merlo, "Deere Brothers Bus Lines: History of Development," June 9, 1947, 1, IMBC.

⁴¹ "New Bus Line Permit Issued," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Mar. 8, 1933; August Bamford, 17 Pa. P.U.C. 354 (1937), photocopy in IMBC.

Finally, in August 1936, the Public Service Commission gave Brentwood Motor Coach permission to compete with Pittsburgh Railways along a two-mile stretch of highway in the South Hills. Here, PRCo's trolley lines ran along a hillside somewhat secluded from residential areas, and PRCo's Motor Coach affiliate ran very infrequent service. While it did not represent an area for heavy competition, the Pittsburgh newspapers recognized the decision as a precedent. "A little competition might result in lower fares and improved service," the pro-New Deal *Pittsburgh Press* editorialized. "Both seem to be out of the question so long as the existing monopoly is permitted to continue."⁴²

Subsequently, the Democratic Public Utility Commission was more aggressive than its predecessor in granting intrusive and competitive rights to independent buses. Most competition took place in the fast-growing South Hills suburbs. After 1936, state regulators lifted restrictions on several Brentwood, Bigi, and Oriole routes. By mid-1938, Bigi's buses elbowed Pittsburgh Railways vehicles for passengers along densely settled West Liberty Avenue. Outside the South Hills, the PUC removed nearly all restrictions on Bamford Brothers' Mon Valley routes, allowing them to compete with the trolleys between the mill towns, Pittsburgh's South Side neighborhoods, and downtown. In 1938, the PUC permitted the Shafers to compete with trolleys in the "residential and industrial district in and around Coraopolis, Neville Island, and McKees Rocks."⁴³

Transit competition in Allegheny County was always inconsistent and incomplete. The PUC left in place many restrictions against independent bus competition with PRCo vehicles and with each other. The commissioners probably did not grant competitive rights to a bus operator until he made at least a plausible case for it. Regulators claimed to prohibit competitive bus service if it only paralleled trolley tracks and did not also reach beyond the PRCo system into suburban areas not served by streetcars.⁴⁴ But Pittsburgh

⁴² "New Bus Firm Gets Permit," *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 5, 1936; "Rival Bus Line Authorized in Fight on Fare," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Aug. 6, 1936; "A Proper Decision," *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 6, 1936; Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In re: Applications of Brentwood Motor Coach Company."

⁴³ Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In the Matter of the Application of Oriole Motor Coach Lines"; M. L. Merlo, "Bigi Bus Lines: Route No. 1, Bridgeville," Sept. 4, 1946, 5, IMBC; August Bamford, 17 Pa. P.U.C. 354 (1937); quote is from Merlo, "Shafer Coach Lines: Aliquippa-Pittsburgh Route," Jan. 16, 1947, 1-5, IMBC.

⁴⁴ Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In the Matter of the Application of Oriole Motor Coach Lines"; Phillip Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*, vol. 1 ([Pittsburgh], 1949), 24.

Railways no longer enjoyed unconditional regulatory protection of its monopoly on mass transit in Pittsburgh and its surrounding communities.

Railways management consistently opposed the new independent bus grants before the state regulators. In vain, PRCo leaders maintained that the best transit service was a monopoly streetcar operation with buses as an elite auxiliary, because trolleys were the most efficient crowd haulers. Forcing the trolleys to compete with either PRCo's own buses or independently owned coaches, PRCo leaders said, was bad policy because it eroded the revenues and efficiency of a single transit system.⁴⁵

As state regulators allowed the independents to drive into PRCo territory, they offered several reasons for the policy change. One was public demand for buses or for shorter, more frequent, nontransfer rides to center city. It was no longer reasonable, the PUC argued in 1937, to expect suburbanites to watch independent buses roll by while waiting for a PRCo trolley or bus. Indeed, the bus companies often garnered support among the riding public. In November 1940, PRCo management complained to its employees on West End routes that nearby Shafer Coach Lines had marshaled "over a hundred witnesses" to support Shafer's application for competitive service; these same witnesses testified to the Public Utility Commission about "inadequate and irregular" PRCo service.⁴⁶ In 1932, the Public Service Commission had denied Oriole Motor Coach the right to compete with PRCo in Ingram, but in 1937 the PUC reversed this, denying PRCo the chance to start a feeder bus line in the same territory. Here, the PUC declared that members of the local population, which had grown in the interim, were uninterested in transferring from a feeder bus to a trolley. By 1940, the PUC expressed doubts about trolleys altogether, noting that buses seemed to be replacing streetcars everywhere else in the United States.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "Ruling Is Due on Five-Cent Bus Fare Plea," *Pittsburgh Press*, June 12, 1932; "Plea for Bus Line Opposed," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Feb. 10, 1933; "Trolley Firm Facing Crisis, Says Manager," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Feb. 16, 1933; "Munhall Bus Line Asks Route Change," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 29, 1934; "Bus Line Wins Fight for Baldwin Route," *Pittsburgh Press*, May 18, 1935; "Brentwood Bus Victory Fought in High Court," *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 18, 1936.

⁴⁶ Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In re: Applications of Brentwood Motor Coach Company"; J. S. Buzzard, memo, "Operation on Route 26—West Park," Nov. 4, 1940, PRCC.

⁴⁷ Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In the Matter of the Application of Oriole Motor Coach Lines; Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "Order, In re: Application of W. D. George and Thomas Benner, Trustees of Pittsburgh Railways Company, Debtor, and of Pittsburgh Motor Coach Company, Subsidiary—For Approval of the Plan of Reorganization of the Pittsburgh Railways Company System as Filed in the District Court of the United States for the Western District of Pennsylvania" (docket 59706, Nov. 27, 1940), 4, PRCC.

Moreover, the Democratic PUC was getting tough toward Pennsylvania's large corporate utilities and explicitly favored small, family-run bus lines in Allegheny County.⁴⁸ In 1937, the PUC pointed out that Pittsburgh Railways and its subsidiary bus line had only promised better service along Saw Mill Run Boulevard when Brentwood Motor Coach applied to compete there. "Utility regulation must protect the public against arrogant disregard of its convenience," the commission declared, "and also must protect the vigilant and progressive utility from public oppression." By implication, the trolley company and its limited bus adjunct were the "arrogant" problem, and so Brentwood, the "progressive utility," should not have been hampered by public policy. In several subsequent rulings, the PUC referred to this decision as a precedent.⁴⁹

The independents became an additional liability to Pittsburgh Railways in local politics. Beginning in 1933, New Deal Democrats entering city and county government attacked Pittsburgh Railways as an ungovernable, unfair monopoly committed to outmoded streetcars. These new leaders rejected PRCo's policy of using buses primarily as a separate, elite transit system, with a twenty-five-cent fare. Pittsburgh city officials, who increasingly favored motor buses, derided PRCo management's insistence that trolleys were the best mass transit vehicle for Pittsburghers. The city council hired an independent expert who in 1935 declared that buses were the future of mass transit and that PRCo was misguided to cling to trolleys. By World War II, the city's Democratic leadership called for PRCo to begin converting trolley lines to bus lines.⁵⁰ Pittsburgh Railways' leadership, however, continued to invest in electric streetcars, and they remained the core of PRCo's system.

The independent suburban buses became rhetorical weapons in the city's fight against PRCo. Most of the independents charged higher fares than streetcars but, until 1937, lower fares than PRCo's bus subsidiary,

⁴⁸ See for example: "Light Rates Cut \$1,250,000," *Pittsburgh Press*, July 27, 1937.

⁴⁹ Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In re: Applications of Brentwood Motor Coach Company"; Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, "In the Matter of the Application of Oriole Motor Coach Lines."

⁵⁰ "City Traction Pact Hinges on Joint Meeting," *Pittsburgh Press*, Mar. 21, 1934. The city's hired expert was John Bauer, who had been a champion expert for city administrations elsewhere battling utility corporations. John Bauer and Alfred Shaw, *Report on the Conditions and Requirements of Modern Mass Transportation in the Pittsburgh District* (Pittsburgh, 1935). The City of Pittsburgh continued to have a generally antitrolley attitude into the 1950s. See Anne Alpern, "Brief on Behalf of the City of Pittsburgh, Complainant before the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission," [1952], box 1, folder 2, Anne X. Alpern Papers, 1918–1974 (AIS.2002.01), Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh Motor Coach. Even in the well-to-do South Hills, the independents typically charged twenty cents cash, with possibly lower fares (fifteen cents) via tickets or tokens. A few bus lines in the Mon Valley ran at or around streetcar fares. In early 1937, PRCo caved to political pressure and dropped bus fares to ten cents via tickets. This prompted price drops among the more expensive suburban lines, making all bus fares closer to streetcar tokens and heating up competition still further.⁵¹ But by then, PRCo policies had helped make heroes of the independents among many Pittsburghers. In 1934, the *Pittsburgh Press* commended the Supans' Oriole Motor Coach for offering a fifteen-cent fare, suburban commuter service to downtown Pittsburgh, and a 2 percent dividend to its employee-investors. In 1936, city council pointedly endorsed Brentwood Motor Coach's request to state regulators to compete with the trolleys. This was despite the advice of the city's pro-bus expert consultant, who believed monopoly operation of mass transit was required for efficiency.⁵² Although they ran a few carefully chosen routes and often charged higher fares than streetcars, the independent bus companies represented to public officials (and riders) beneficial competition with the corporate transit utility.

Many of the independents thrived during the 1930s. In 1931, five buses belonging to the Bamfords provided 114,500 rides. A decade later, the Bamfords' twenty-five buses carried over 2 million riders in a single year. In 1935, Ezio Bigi's seven buses hauled 64,609 passengers. Bigi died in

⁵¹ Memo, "James J. Dawson. A. 20528. Folder No. 5," Oct. 29, 1937, PRCC; Miller and Foley, "Homestead and Duquesne," 17–20; Miller and Foley, "Braddock and East Pittsburgh," 4; "Stay Granted Bus Company on Fare Slash," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Nov. 24, 1934; "Bus Firm Offers 15-Cent Fare," *Pittsburgh Press*, Nov. 9, 1936. IMBC contains early schedules and fare information for some companies: Brentwood Motor Coach, "Route between Curry—Pittsburgh and Brentwood—Pittsburgh," Jan. 18, 1937, and "Library—South Park and Baptist Rd. to Pittsburgh," Sept. 26, 1938; Oriole Motor Coach, "Ingram, Ingram Ave, W. Prospect Ave, West End and Pittsburgh," Mar. 6, 1938. This can be compared to PMCo's rates in "Pittsburgh by Trolley and Bus," PRCo Timetable, June 1937, PRCC; "Fares Reduced, Firms Report Business Gains," *Pittsburgh Press*, Feb. 7, 1937; "Two Bus Lines Offer Slashes," *Pittsburgh Press*, Feb. 9, 1937; "Bamford Line Cuts Fares 25 Per Cent," *Pittsburgh Press*, Feb. 12, 1937.

PRCo's decision to reduce fares on its own buses made them competitive with PRCo's streetcars. Thereafter, PRCo management likely maintained these duplicate routes out of fear that state regulators would grant more competition to the independents by allowing them to replace PRCo buses if PRCo ceased serving those routes. Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study*, 1:24.

⁵² "15-Cent Fare Bus Company to Pay 2 Percent Dividend," *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 14, 1934; "Intolerable Bus Service," *Pittsburgh Press*, July 6, 1936; Anne Alpern to Pittsburgh City Council, Aug. 28, 1936, *Municipal Record* 70 (1936): 495–96; Resolution No. 153, Index, 408–9, and Resolution 168, Index, 414, *Municipal Record* 70 (1936); "City Advised to Make New Railway Pact," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Jan. 16, 1936; Bauer and Shaw, *Conditions and Requirements of Modern Mass Transportation*, 104–5.

1937, leaving his business to his wife, and in 1939 her thirteen buses carried 198,696 passengers. Brentwood Motor Coach's ridership more than doubled during 1937, to over 1.6 million fares collected that year. Begun in 1937, the Shafers' bus operations to the west of Pittsburgh hauled 895,525 passengers on fourteen buses in 1939.⁵³

This growth did not come simply at the expense of Pittsburgh Railways Company. The families running these buses worked hard to build their businesses, whether through suburban boom or Great Depression, and they often drove the buses they owned. They capitalized not only on changes in state regulation but also on road building by taxpayers. In the 1930s, for example, Brentwood, Bigi, and other prosperous independents reached downtown via the new Liberty Bridge and Tunnels, completed in 1928.⁵⁴

However, the independent bus firms clearly benefitted under the new regulatory mood, and Pittsburgh Railways felt the competition. Between 1929 and 1941, PRCo service cuts and some bus replacements took 186 streetcars out of the downtown evening rush hour. During the same period, 142 independent motor buses joined the rush-hour jam, twice the number of buses operated by PRCo's bus subsidiary. By 1939, the independents together hauled an estimated 13 million riders in and out of downtown Pittsburgh—a small sum compared to the trolleys' 145 million. But for PRCo, in desperate financial condition and measuring ridership growth in single-digit percentages, small losses mattered.⁵⁵ Official PRCo orders to "trainmen" in January and July 1938 read like military communiqués of a losing army; Carson street trolleys were "now flanked on each side by competing bus lines," which threatened revenues, trolley service, and jobs. Motormen must "do everything in their power to make the street car service more attractive than that of our competitors."⁵⁶ In 1948, a ridership

⁵³ M. L. Merlo, "Bamford Brothers Motor Coach Lines: Operation Data," Apr. 17, 1946, 4; Merlo, "Bigi Bus Lines: Operation Data," Oct. 15, 1946, 2; Merlo, "Brentwood Motor Coach Company: Operation Data," Apr. 12, 1946, 5; and Merlo, "Shafer Coach Lines: Operation Data," Dec. 30, 1946, 3, all in IMBC.

⁵⁴ "How Allegheny County Spent \$40,114,800 on Public Improvements in Four Years," *Pittsburgh Press*, Apr. 3, 1928; "Brown Tells of Progress on Projects," *Pittsburgh Press*, Jan. 4, 1929; John Baumann and Edward Muller, *Before Renaissance: Planning in Pittsburgh, 1889–1943* (Pittsburgh, 2006), 213–15, 233–35.

⁵⁵ W. S. Menden, *Report on Pittsburgh Mass Transportation* ([Pittsburgh], 1941), 15–16, 30–31, photocopy in PRCC.

⁵⁶ J. S. Buzzard, memos, "Removal of Restrictions on Bamford Brothers, Pittsburgh-Munhall Bus Route," Jan. 8, 1938, and "New Bus Route to Operate between Aliquippa and Downtown Pittsburgh via Neville Island and McKees Rocks in Direct Competition with Street Car Service Now Furnished in this Area," July 28, 1938, PRCC.

survey revealed that the buses did brisk business in parts of PRCo territory. Where they could, 28 percent of riders chose Brentwood's buses, nearly 49 percent chose Oriole's buses, over 46 percent boarded Shafer's, and over 62 percent rode Bamford's buses instead of boarding PRCo trolleys or buses offering the same respective trips.⁵⁷

During World War II, the trolley and bus companies together profited by restrictions on individual automobile driving as well as wage and price controls. Between 1939 and 1944, when both PRCo and the bus companies enjoyed tremendous ridership, the buses gained a greater percentage of the county's total transit riders, from 12 to 19 percent. In 1944, 142 independent bus routes carried 74 million riders, about half of whom rode routes to and from downtown Pittsburgh.⁵⁸

However, the new opportunities did not mean runaway success for all bus operators. While some independents expanded their routes and competed with Pittsburgh Railways, others remained small lines that did not extend to downtown Pittsburgh. Those with competitive routes were not necessarily so profitable, either. In 1937, James Dawson received rights to compete with PRCo trolleys on a route in the Braddock-Wilmerding area. But Dawson could not make the route pay, and in early 1946, he ran only a single, hourly bus, which did not capture much trolley ridership.⁵⁹ Dawson's mixed fortunes foreshadowed the plight of many of the operators in the postwar era.

With the return of Republican domination in Pennsylvania state government in the 1940s, regulatory attitudes shifted back toward protecting what remained of Pittsburgh Railways' exclusive territorial rights, although the independents kept their newly won regulatory gains. In April 1940, Pittsburgh Railways was joined by their operator's union, Division 85 of the Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railways and Motor Coach Employees, in protesting yet another grant of competitive rights to Bamford Brothers. The Bamfords won again, but since PRCo had entered bankruptcy in May 1938, one PUC commissioner expressed misgivings about granting further competitive bus rights that further undermined the

⁵⁷ Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study*, 1:102.

⁵⁸ *Report of the Allegheny County Mass Transit Study Committee*, 54; Subcommittee on Mass Transit of the Committee on Public Improvements, Allegheny Conference on Community Development, *Mass Transit Report No. 1* ([Pittsburgh], 1947), 10, 25–26, in PRCC.

⁵⁹ "James J. Dawson. A. 20528. Folder No. 5," Oct. 29, 1937; M. L. Merlo, "James J. Dawson: Braddock-East Pittsburgh Route," Oct. 22, 1946, IMBC.

financial future of the core transit supplier. By 1941, the PUC declared that it would rather see a restoration of PRCo's monopoly.⁶⁰

Postwar Problem: Disintegrated Mass Transit

In the late 1940s and 1950s, Allegheny County mass transit's decline was an ongoing problem for Pittsburgh's urban renewal program. The area's transit companies experienced rising costs and declining ridership. Local public officials interested in urban renewal—revitalizing and preserving the values of the core areas of Pittsburgh—came to see uncoordinated, competitive mass transit as inefficient and unattractive. So when Port Authority was given the task of salvaging the area's transit service in the early 1960s, its first big job was to unite the trolley and bus companies into a single system. Monopoly mass transportation returned to Pittsburgh as a local public agency, not regulated by the state.

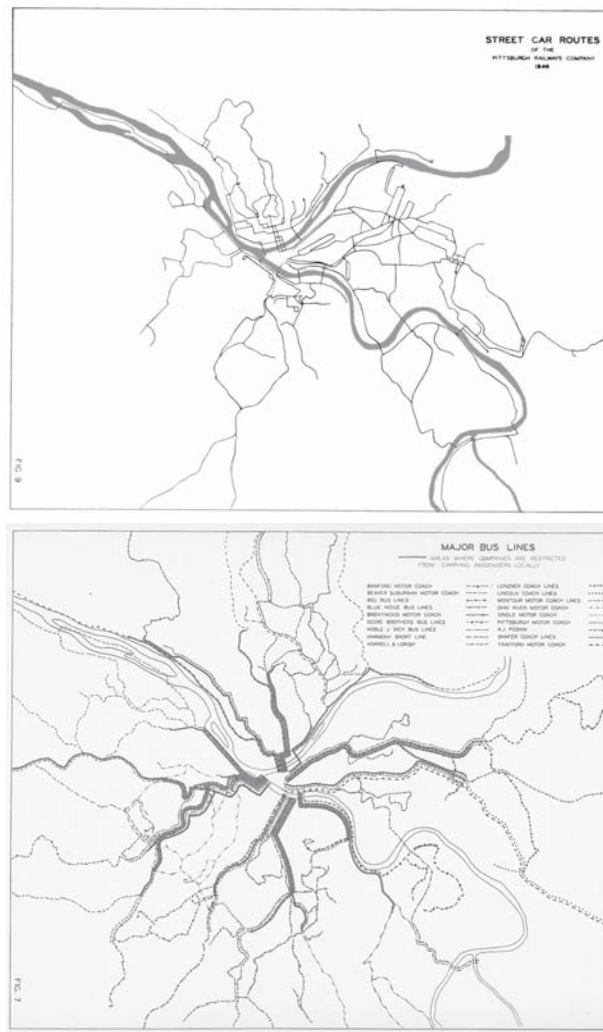
As with transit lines elsewhere in the United States, Allegheny County's transit companies suffered in competition with private automobiles that were supported by public investment in roads and widespread suburbanization. Construction of highways—such as the Parkways East and West, completed in 1960—gave motorists (somewhat misplaced) confidence in greater automobile access around the region. The city of Pittsburgh and the older industrial towns lost residents after 1950, but population grew within the rest of the county, in rapidly developing suburbs.⁶¹ Overall, the transit lines lost patronage. On its trolleys and buses, Pittsburgh Railways sold 290 million rides in 1947, but only about 76 million rides in 1960, an astonishing 73.8 percent loss. The bus companies carried around 32 million passengers in 1960, down from over 39 million in 1955. Meanwhile, between 1947 and 1960, passenger automobile registrations more than doubled.⁶² Transit ridership predictably remained strongest on routes in the older, more densely settled sections of the county. In 1949, for example,

⁶⁰ August Bamford, 21 Pa. P.U.C. 75 (1940), photocopy in IMBC; "The Plight of Mr. Driscoll," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Mar. 5, 1940; "Mr. Driscoll's Choice," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Mar. 7, 1940; W. D. George and Thomas Benner, 23 Pa. P.U.C. 69 (1941), photocopy in State Regulation Collection, Miller Memorial Library, Pennsylvania Trolley Museum.

⁶¹ Mershon, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Urban Revitalization," 553–55. For an overview of the parkways (and other highways), see Jeffrey J. Kitsko, "Pittsburgh Expressway System," Pennsylvania Highways, last updated Dec. 20, 2012, <http://pittsburgh.pahighways.com/expressways/>.

⁶² Coverdale and Colpitts, *Report to the Port Authority of Allegheny County on an Integrated System of Mass Transportation for Allegheny County* (New York, 1961), 1:27.

These 1949 maps illustrate the dis-integration of Pittsburgh transit by mid-twentieth century. The first shows Pittsburgh Railways' extensive street-car network. The second shows motor bus routes in the area, divided by company, and including PRCo subsidiary Pittsburgh Motor Coach. Shaded areas show where state regulation still prevented some bus routes from competing, either with PRCo or with each other. But even where they did not compete, these transit routes ran uncoordinated, disconnected, and duplicate service. Adapted from Phillip Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* (1949). Used with the permission of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and Affiliates.



two-thirds of people entering the downtown triangle arrived via streetcar or bus.⁶³ But fare increases and service cuts, survival measures by transit companies, also probably hurt ridership.

After the war, the area developed one of the nation's pioneering urban renewal efforts. Local business elites and elected officials formed the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD), a networking association, research organization, public policy consultancy, and clearinghouse for information on the state of the region. The ACCD informed, oversaw, and guided a series of public infrastructure initiatives since known as the "Pittsburgh Renaissance." This included downtown developments such as Point State Park, the Civic Arena, and new parking facilities. Although preserving the value of the urban core was a major Renaissance priority, through the ACCD local leaders worked with state officials to build much new highway infrastructure, which encouraged suburbanization and automobile use. Renaissance leaders fretted over mass transit's declining ridership, particularly because transit was so vital to the continued value of older, core areas of the city, including the central business district.⁶⁴ But building a political coalition around transit revival was much more difficult.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Pittsburgh Renaissance leaders commissioned several expert studies that criticized fragmented transit management. Pittsburgh Railways' declining ridership in the older regions of Pittsburgh was obviously cause for concern. While the bus companies carried fewer riders than PRCo, they were based in the suburbs, the fastest-growing neighborhoods of the Pittsburgh area. The various expert consultants, and eventually Renaissance leadership, concluded that the county's transit needed to be combined under a single management, reviving the public policy view that competitive and uncoordinated mass transit was bad for the community.⁶⁵ In 1947, an ACCD transit subcommittee (that included a PRCo officer) proposed a new planning agency in county government that could perhaps "supplement the work of the PUC" and better coordinate the local transit routes.⁶⁶

⁶³ Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study*, 1:17.

⁶⁴ Mershon, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Urban Revitalization," 552–53; Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study*, 1:18; *Report of the Allegheny County Mass Transit Study Committee*, 59.

⁶⁵ Mershon, "Corporate Social Responsibility and Urban Revitalization," 572–80. In addition to the studies specifically cited below, see Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study*, 1:23–25.

⁶⁶ Subcommittee on Mass Transit, *Mass Transit Report No. 1*, 26.



The Brentwood Motor Coach garage during the 1940s. Used with the permission of the Miller Memorial Library, Pennsylvania Trolley Museum.

In 1953, a Mass Transit Study Committee convened by Allegheny County's government summed up the prospects for unifying the county's transit routes. Unification would mean higher costs, bringing all employee wage and benefit scales to the level of the highest (those of Pittsburgh Railways). But a single management, the committee urged, would allow standardization of equipment (buses), and associated economies in procurement, maintenance, and administration. Routes, schedules, and fare incentives could be coordinated into a single set, which separate private operators never attempted. Rerouting would also eliminate "uneconomic competition" and duplication between trolleys and buses. A publicly owned authority could bring particular benefits (such as tax relief). A *coordinated* transit system under a public authority, the 1953 report concluded, would be easier and more attractive to ride and could potentially restore ridership. By implication, the powers granted to a transit authority would release most aspects of Allegheny County transit from state regulation.⁶⁷

The prospect of transit unification under a single company or a public agency seemed politically remote in the early 1950s. Historian Sherie

⁶⁷ *Report of the Allegheny County Mass Transit Study Committee*, v–viii, 55–58.

Mershon points out that some suburbanites opposed having their local independent bus line combined with a countywide system, fearing transit consolidation was somehow a step toward municipal consolidation. Moreover, many residents—including some ACCD and political leaders—were reticent to consider public ownership of mass transit, viewing the possibility as “a manifestly socialistic step that would discomfort many business people.” In 1937, county voters had defeated an initiative for a transit authority. The local bus leaders themselves formed the “Independent Bus Operators Association,” a lobby credited by newspapers with stalling authority-takeover legislation in the state assembly in 1955. The ACCD publicly endorsed unification of the area’s mass transit lines, but both the ACCD and local public officials shied away from strongly promoting a public transit agency until the late 1950s. Without sufficient political drive, the issue stalled until a two-month-long Pittsburgh Railways labor strike highlighted years of transit service deterioration, ridership decline, and public neglect.⁶⁸

In October 1959, local leaders secured from the state General Assembly the ability to acquire, consolidate, and operate transit through the Port Authority of Allegheny County. The independent bus owners’ effort to obstruct this move ostensibly suggests that they simply resisted a government takeover of their property and businesses. Some owners opposed the 1959 Port Authority Act. “I am grieved to no end by having to lay down a life’s work, which I and my family have enjoyed so much,” William Shafer wrote to the Port Authority in late 1963. The Shafers’ enterprise was reasonably profitable and had, relative to other companies, a young bus fleet. They lobbied against the 1959 legislation.⁶⁹

Profitable or not, it must have been difficult for other owners and managers to part with the product of their hard work. Among those who sold to Port Authority were owners who had been present in the earliest days of their firms. In 1963, Mary Bigi, wife of Ezio, was listed both as office secretary and “Founder.” Byrum McCoy, August Bamford, and Leonardo Burelli sold their bus lines to Port Authority; Gust Saihos passed away only weeks before. By midcentury, women held positions of responsibility

⁶⁸ Mershon, “Corporate Social Responsibility and Urban Revitalization,” 576–93. “Transit ‘Takeover’ Bill Set Up,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Apr. 6, 1959; “Transit Bill Meets Stiff Opposition,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Apr. 7, 1959.

⁶⁹ William Shafer to Harley Swift, Dec. 17, 1963, IMBC; Coverdale and Colpitts, *Report to the Port Authority*, 1:43; “Private Bus Company Owner, Housing Developer in Moon” (obituary), *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Oct. 12, 2003.

at several bus companies, handling the firms' finances and (as in the case of Sara Shafer) sometimes more. In the process of acquiring their lines, Port Authority leaders dealt with Sara DeBolt, general manager of the DeBolt family's bus line, and Minnie Markitell, president of Trafford Coach Lines.⁷⁰

The absence of persistent, ideologically charged protest from the bus companies, however, belied strong, common resolve to continue entrepreneurial transit. As early as 1953 the Mass Transit Study Committee reported that "the owners of three of the independent operations having routes into the downtown district have indicated that they are willing to sell their properties, if they can get out whole." Others probably wanted to sell, the committee speculated, "but will attempt to drive a harder bargain."⁷¹ In 1959 the Harrisburg representative of the Independent Bus Operators Association insisted that the bus owners were not desperate for a buyout and were "making money." On the other hand, he added that they opposed the latest transit-takeover bill "in its present form" and merely sought more favorable terms for negotiating the purchase of their lines.⁷² After negotiating with each, in 1964 and 1965 Port Authority rapidly acquired the bus companies from their owners. As predicted, the public agency brought all driver compensation to the level of Pittsburgh Railways' unionized operators, which often meant substantial pay raises for bus drivers.⁷³

Many owners might have been resigned to the takeover because the business had lately been difficult. In the 1950s, bus firms appeared and disappeared as before, with many new bus lines also remaining small-time operations. Some companies, particularly the bigger South Hills commuter lines, prospered or at least held their own, often with relatively higher fares. Many other bus operators struggled, and overall the trade was marginal at best. Independent companies running buses into downtown Pittsburgh aggregated a net deficit between 1949 and 1951. Many of the bus lines

⁷⁰ Mary Bigi, Byrum McCoy, and Sara DeBolt were identified on an untitled handwritten chart showing office and management staff of the bus companies that was part of the documentation for Port Authority's takeover. DeBolt and Markitell signed correspondence with Port Authority leadership in 1963 and 1964. In several firms, women (such as Jane Lampe at Oriole) handled bookkeeping. All in IMBC. Miller and Foley, "Braddock and East Pittsburgh Local Lines," 14; see below for Burelli and Bamford.

⁷¹ *Report of the Allegheny County Mass Transit Study Committee*, 55.

⁷² "Transit 'Takeover' Bill Set Up"; "Transit Bill Meets Stiff Opposition"; "Bus Operators Throw Sand in Gears Again," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Apr. 8, 1959.

⁷³ Port Authority, *First Annual Report*, 2-3; *Report of the Allegheny County Mass Transit Study Committee*, 56.

had always relied on secondhand or older buses, and in the 1950s many remained in the black by deferring bus replacements. At the end of 1951, around 30 percent of the independent buses running in and out of downtown were over eight years old, “an age generally accepted as representing the useful life of a bus.”⁷⁴ By 1959, around half of the county’s independent buses were over eight years old. Just before Port Authority took over the bus companies, one of the larger regional firms, Harmony Short Line, went out of business, abandoning its multicounty route system.⁷⁵ Consultants in 1961 suggested that acquiring Pittsburgh Railways and the various bus companies was urgent because their collective performance over the previous half decade “show[ed] many instances of deficit operation or of very meager earnings.”⁷⁶ That a few lines might have been able to turn a profit, attract riders, and maintain fleets of adequate buses did not offset Renaissance leaders’ concern that collectively, Allegheny County’s mass transit system was deteriorating.

After the war, bus companies acquired problems long familiar to Pittsburgh Railways. City councilmen forgot about their previous endorsement of the independents and carped that the buses congested traffic as they dropped off and took on passengers at downtown curbs.⁷⁷ Bus companies that had grown on family and other low-cost labor during the Depression now faced labor unrest as their larger workforces demanded wages commensurate with postwar standards of living.⁷⁸ Reacting to higher operating costs, the bus companies periodically raised fares or trimmed

⁷⁴ *Report of the Allegheny County Mass Transit Study Committee*, 11, 21–26; Miller and Foley, “McKeesport Local Lines,” 4, 28. Transit consultant and former PRCo executive Milton Cooke pointed out in 1951 that among the bus companies running downtown service, two very lucrative firms earned most of the recorded combined profit. Robinson et al., *Mass Transportation Study*, ed. Cooke, 2:82.

⁷⁵ Coverdale and Colpitts, *Report to the Port Authority*, 1:50–51, 61; “Harmony Short Line,” Antique Motor Coach Association of Pennsylvania, updated Nov. 8, 2006, <http://www.amcap.org/history/alleghenycounty/harmony.shtml>.

⁷⁶ Coverdale and Colpitts, *Report to the Port Authority*, 1:50.

⁷⁷ “New Bus Line Terminal Building Urged at Wabash Site,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Jan. 4, 1948; “Bus Firms Facing Fines after Week,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Feb. 24, 1948; “Only Way to Get Action,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Feb. 26, 1948; “Bus Line Agrees to Rent Space in Wabash Terminal,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Feb. 29, 1948; “Traffic-Jamming Buses Get Another Reprieve in Dispute with City,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Mar. 2, 1948; “Bus Terminal Plan Dropped in Downtown,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 18, 1948; “Oriole Told to Stop Wild Dash for Buses,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Jan. 21, 1951.

⁷⁸ “Oriole Accuses Bus Union of Trying to Ruin Firm,” *Pittsburgh Press*, July 3, 1950; “Bus Strikers Plugging for \$1.50 Wage,” *Pittsburgh Press*, May 20, 1950; “Oriole Bus Grants 9-Cent Package,” *Pittsburgh Press*, May 9, 1954; “Bus Union to Vote on Ending Strike,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 22, 1956; “Oriole Buses Halted by Walkout,” *Pittsburgh Press*, May 1, 1956; “Bus Strikers Fired by McCoy,” *Pittsburgh Press*, May 29, 1957; “Debolt Strike Ends with 34-Cent Pact,” *Pittsburgh Press*, May 22, 1958; “The Buses Must Run,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 12, 1960.



Burelli Transit Service Inc.'s office and garage in March 1964. Used with the permission of the Miller Memorial Library, Pennsylvania Trolley Museum.

their service.⁷⁹ If ridership and revenues were not steadily increasing, perhaps it was time to get out.

Bus firms in the river valley industrial communities—often lean outfits, with fares close to those of trolleys—found it particularly tough going after World War II. “They have been raised with this business,” old Leonardo Burelli said of his sons, who drove his buses, “and it has been a hard one under severe conditions due to the available finances of this company.” In late 1963, he promised that his boys “would do an excellent job for the Port Authority of Allegheny County in whatever they are required to do.”⁸⁰ A Port Authority agent visited McCoy’s garage in April 1962 and described

⁷⁹ “Bamford Wins on Whitaker Fares,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Mar. 6, 1948; “Bamford Bus Line Inquiry Ordered,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 12, 1948; “Oriole Bus Asks Fare Increase,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Nov. 26, 1951; “Harmony Bus Fare Increased,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Jan. 27, 1953; “New Bus Fare in Brentwood,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 8, 1954; “Bus Firm Seeks to Raise Fares,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Mar. 21, 1954; “Duquesne Bus Fare to Rise,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 14, 1954; “Two Firms Win Bus Fare Increase,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 7, 1956; “Two Bus Firms to Raise Fares,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Jan. 6, 1958; “Bus Firm Asks Fare Raise,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Oct. 1, 1960; “Mt. Lebanon Protests Bus Service Cuts,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Sept. 9, 1947.

⁸⁰ Leonardo Burelli to Harley L. Swift, Dec. 20, 1963, IMBC.

the firm as “old-time rough, ready, round-the-clock, sleep on a cot on premises operators.” Operating out of old and “rickety” buildings, with few on-hand spare parts, the agent reported, the McCoy men realized “that the take-over by the Port Authority is almost inevitable and are reconciled.” Between 1955 and 1960, the McCoys had lost over half their ridership. Even the seemingly prosperous Shafer line, running up the Ohio Valley, had begun suffering slow but steady patronage loss in the final years.⁸¹

The postwar plight of the Bamford line dramatically illustrated the situation. Since the 1930s August Bamford and his family competed with PRCo’s trolleys between the Mon Valley and downtown Pittsburgh, but after World War II, their firm fell on hard times. It had been a stalwart of cheap, frequent bus service, with fares that hovered around or just above streetcar rate. Many of the working people of the valley rode Bamfords’ buses, but expenses caught up with the company after the war. Pittsburgh and state officials decried the unreliability of the Bamford lines, and state police condemned the Bamford fleet, largely bought used, as unsafe. Service was stopped by repeated disputes between management and drivers, including a two-month-long walkout in early 1949. In that year, August Bamford sold his downtown bus routes, as well as some buses, in order to keep the remainder. Thereafter, while he maintained high ridership on his remaining lines, Bamford did so only through minimal maintenance of his equipment.⁸² When in 1963 Port Authority inquired about any Bamford office staff who might join Port Authority’s ranks, old August Bamford explained: “We don’t have any supervisory employees. Edwin and I do everything are selfs [*sic*] and I am going to retire, so that just leaves Ed.”⁸³ The Bamford story highlights many of the problems that, to varying degrees, afflicted the independent bus firms and likely encouraged their acquiescence in Port Authority’s takeover.

⁸¹ Memo, “McCoy Bros. Bus Lines; Wm. Penn Motor Coach,” Apr. 5, 1962, IMBC; Coverdale and Colpitts, *Report to the Port Authority*, 1:43.

⁸² “Bamford Motor Coach Lines,” Antique Motor Coach Association of Pennsylvania, updated June 13, 2008, <http://www.amcap.org/history/pgghistory/bamford.shtml>; Miller and Foley, “Homestead and Duquesne Lines,” 17–20; “Bamford Bus Line Inquiry Ordered,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Aug. 12, 1948; “Bamford Bus Strike End Not in Sight,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Sept. 27, 1948; “Bamford Buses Called Unsafe,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 2, 1948; “Buses Not New, Official Admits,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Dec. 28, 1948; “Bamford Buses Start Tomorrow,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Mar. 10, 1949; “Bamford Bus Feud Settled Out of Court,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Apr. 28, 1949.

⁸³ August Bamford to Harley Swift, Dec. 23, 1963, IMBC.

One System, Local Authority

Public ownership of mass transit by Port Authority in 1964 was in large part an effort to salvage transit service by creating a regional system instead of the hodgepodge of routes fostered by unstable state regulation. Earlier, diverse regulatory policy represented not only different responses to the Pittsburgh Railways' chronic financial misery but also bigger political disputes over the economy of utility services. Because of state (and national) politics, Pennsylvania regulation of mass transit was not simply a constriction or benefit of privately owned transit firms but instead a shifting, inconsistent, and somewhat haphazard set of policies that variously favored one form of private enterprise over another. The county's mass transit could ill afford such additional complications while facing formidable competition from automobiles. Indeed, integrating all the bus and trolley lines did not radically transform transit's fortunes in Pittsburgh after 1964. Port Authority has suffered its own business woes since. But the pre-Port Authority bus business highlights the regulatory dilemma between centralizing efficiency under elite management versus promoting the rights and opportunities of entrepreneurs.

Canisius College

MARK GALLIMORE