environment

From our reporter at the 5th International Conference on Urban Transportation last week in Pittsburgh

The Paris transit system

The Paris mass transit system, the Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens, is fully integrated with the present and future needs of the Paris metropolitan area, according to Pierre Weil, president of the system.

"The influence on town-planning of RATP networks is acknowledged by everybody," said Weil. "Accordingly the financing of the regional system, as far as civil engineering and equipment are concerned, is completely subsidized, 50 percent by the French Government and 50 percent by a regional agency."

All urban planning is coordinated with growth of the rapid transit system. "At a number of locations, administrative and commercial centers, as well as new towns with hospitals and schools, to be created in the midst of open fields, and which are expected to have a population of several hundred thousand inhabitants, are being planned around stations serving extensions of the subway system."

The emphasis in the system is on human needs, he added.

". . . It would be a shame," he said, "if moving from one area to another meant a trip under depressing conditions, with people degradingly packed together."

The system is being continually upgraded. For instance, four lines, including three of the busiest, were recently equipped with new rolling stock. Three of the lines have quiet, rubber-tired vehicles. Eight stations have been rebuilt, and moving sidewalks and escalators have been installed. Trains with linear induction motors are future possibilities, and an air-cushion line is now being planned.

Mass transit and new communities

Reston, Va., and Columbia, Md., are well-known planned cities in the Washington, D.C., area. But from the point-of-view of developing a total systems approach to transportation, they do not offer the opportunities afforded by balanced new communities within the central city, says Robert E. Kirby, president of Westinghouse Corp.'s Industry and Defense Co.

Kirby points out that Reston and Columbia, although thoughtfully planned communities, are located far from the central Washington area. They must, therefore, depend on the automobile for transportation.

Developments such as the proposed Fort Lincoln in northeast Washington, D.C., are far more suitable for an integrated transit system, he says. Fort Lincoln is a planned 335-acre complex of residences and offices for an economically diverse population of 16,000. A small, local transit system within the complex could provide easy access to shopping, to the offices and to a college planned for it. But this system would also be tied in with the larger Washington Metro system, now under construction.

Thus the Fort Lincoln development is one keyed to its transportation system. Likewise, a Memphis, Tenn., plan to tie together now fragmented downtown areas with a modern rapid transit system is one that will rely on integrating—economically and socially as well as geographically—a total community, with the transportation system being a major catalyst.

Promoting use of mass transit

Few studies have been done on the efficacy of various schemes for persuading the public that riding on mass transit systems is far less detrimental to the environment and to the community than commuting by automobiles. The Urban Mass Transit Administration of the Transportation Department has in its files one small study of the impact of advertising on ridership on an urban bus system. The impact seemed nil (SN: 12/19/70, p. 464).

Two spokesmen for the Delaware Authority for Regional Transit (DART) reported that preliminary indications show a broad-scale public education program in Delaware to have been highly successful.

"For the past few years a number of factors had combined to place a cloud of suspicion, doubt and disdain upon the role and the future of public transit in the Wilmington area," said Robert W. Lang of the Greater Wilmington Development Council, Now, according to Lang, the image has been reversed and ridership growth is accelerating.

The new name, DART, was a prime step in the program, said Lang. New signs, symbols and schedule formats were built around the new name. The need for mass transit was explained to such groups as the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women, the Chamber of Commerce and others. Radio and newspaper advertising was also expanded.

"We believed the best approach to the public was a straightforward one," said Robert W. Nightengale of Communications Consultants, which handled the program. The aim was to appeal "as best we can to their instincts and desire to help. . . . We decided to give everyone an opportunity to help—simply by riding DART." Although the program is new, all indications are that the approach was the right one, said Nightengale.

Metro-Mode exclusive bus lanes

Mass transit trains have the liability of a fixed route; buses offer flexibility in choosing routes (even directly to and from passengers' homes) but must cope with urban traffic.

In 1967 the General Motors Corp.'s Truck and Coach Division proposed the "Metro-Mode" system, which would set aside exclusive lanes for buses. The buses would have train-like speed on freeways and bus-route flexibility off the freeways.

Since then Metro-Mode has gone into operation in several cities with great success, reported Martin J. Caserio, general manager of GMC's Truck and Coach.

In the Washington, D.C., area, buses on nine miles of exclusive lane along Virginia's Shirley Highway have experienced a 75 percent increase in ridership, and travel time on the longest schedule has been halved. Similar projects in New York-New Jersey, Boston, San Juan and Seattle have reported success, and more programs are planned elsewhere in the nation.

"If necessary," said Caserio, "Metro-Mode could serve as an interim system." For instance, after a right-of-way is set aside for buses, if passenger travel called for it, the buses could be removed and rails be laid on the same right-of-way.