

**THE ROAD AND RAIL
TRANSPORT PROBLEM**

**BRIG.-GENERAL
SIR H. OSBORNE MANCE**

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BY

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TO THE INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

SIR ARTHUR SALTER, K.C.B.



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**TO MY COLLEAGUES
ON THE
ROAD AND RAIL COMMITTEE
OF
INDEPENDENT EXPERTS TO THE INTERNATIONAL
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

INTRODUCTION

I FEEL at once honoured and embarrassed by the invitation to contribute an Introduction to Sir Osborne Mance's book on the Road and Rail Transport Problem. His experience and qualifications in regard to all questions of land transport are so incomparably superior to my own. In South Africa, in East Africa, in Germany, in Austria, as well as in this country, he has borne direct and personal responsibility. As adviser to the British Peace Delegation, the Supreme Economic Council, the Court of International Justice and the League of Nations, and member of numerous international Conferences, he has studied the international aspects of transport, and as technical adviser to the Ottoman Bank he has studied their financial aspects. The mantle of Sir William Acworth has fallen on him.

Only a small part of my own administrative experience has been concerned with transport, and the greater part of that has been with sea, not land, transport. I have, however, seen enough of the latter to realize the difficulties of the subject of which Sir Osborne Mance treats in this book, and have been in enough Conferences with him to appreciate his unique qualifications. I remember coming back from Paris with him shortly after the last war. We travelled with great comfort by sea, and extreme discomfort by land, and I remarked chaffingly "I think my ships have scored over your railways." To which he at once replied, in one of the best retorts I've ever heard, "Yes, but God made your permanent way." I was to learn later, when I was Chairman of the Road-Rail Conference in 1932, how basic a factor this is in the whole controversy. Railways provide their own tracks, which are used by no other form of traffic. Motor transport uses roads provided for general public use by public authorities. It is, however, subject to special taxation. What rates of taxation, on the vehicle and on petrol, would be appropriate in these circumstances?

Similarly, railways work under statutory restrictions as to their tariffs and have uniform conditions as to wages and hours. What corresponding arrangements should be made for road transport? These were the immediate questions presented to my Conference, which was able to reach unanimous recommendations upon both. But underlying them was the real problem of the right division of function. What kind of goods between what destinations would be most economically carried by rail and by road respectively? It should be possible to obtain a scientific answer with the aid of appropriate research. But knowledge itself will not secure the desired result if different interests are involved, for both railways and road will try to get classes of traffic which, on any scientific allocation, would go to the other. On the other hand, if a monopoly were established, the consumer would encounter all the dangers against which he finds that competition is his best safeguard, and a principal stimulus to increasing efficiency would be removed.

What is the answer to this enigma? I have long cherished the idea that it would best be found in a financial amalgamation of the railways and the main road services, combined with freedom for businesses requiring transport to run their own vehicles. It would then be to the interest of the combined road-rail monopoly to allot traffic between rail and road on the most scientific basis and, with the economies so secured, to prove to the great businesses requiring transport that it would pay them to resort to the public service rather than use their own lorries. Thus, in principle, the advantages of monopoly and competition would both be secured. Sir Osborne Mance, after an exhaustive analysis of the whole problem, has shown the difficulties which would result from complete freedom for such "ancillary" transport, and undoubtedly *some* limitations would be necessary. I am still inclined, however, to think that the solution may be found along this line. In the meantime, Sir Osborne Mance has made an invaluable contribution, alike in his exhaustive analysis of the factors of the problem, his record of the

experience of other countries and in his own proposals, to one of the most important of the novel problems of our day. }

It is a novel problem, for the advent of the internal combustion engine as an economic, social and military factor of the first importance is a phenomenon of this century and of the present generation. The art of war, the basis of our economy, our social habits, the distribution of population and the location of industry have all been transformed by one of the three or four most important inventions in the history of civilized man. If we calculate the horse-power of the motor traffic now on our roads we shall see that, within the space of a few years, the internal combustion engine has placed a mechanized horse at the service of each man and woman in the country for the conveyance of themselves and their goods.

We are at present concerned more urgently with a problem which this same invention has presented to us in another sphere. The aeroplane, which it has made possible, is the principal menace to the insulated security in which we have hitherto been able to work out our economic and social evolution. But when the military struggle is over, and we can once more view our problems in a peace perspective, the one which Sir Osborne Mance has here discussed with such skill and knowledge will again resume its importance and its interest.



15th February, 1940

PREFACE

THE road and rail problem emerged immediately after the Great War; its magnitude and the rapidity with which it would demand solution were not, and perhaps could not be, fully appreciated; yet for nearly twenty years it has been the subject of constant argument and discussion among the transport interests themselves, has claimed the long-continued attention of three advisory bodies—the Royal Commission, the Salter Conference, and the Transport Advisory Council—and has occupied much Parliamentary time. Most of what has been done has been necessary and useful, but has not reached the heart of the problem of road and rail co-ordination. In this we in this country are not alone, as the problem has not yet been completely solved in any country.

Transport is a vital public service, and the road-rail question cannot be left to solve itself regardless of the interests of the community. The problem is complex, but the main difficulties have lain in the inability of the interests concerned to examine the matter objectively, the general reluctance even to consider measures which might involve a complete or notable departure from long-established practice and, in the background, the hesitation of Governments where so many voters are concerned. It has been evident for years that the resulting failure to reach a successful solution based on a long-range policy has led to a progressive deterioration of the situation, which can only be rectified at increasing cost to road and rail transport undertakings, to the taxpayer and the user, though certain classes of user may have temporarily benefited.

Much has been written on the subject, mostly on current aspects of the problem, but there is a lack of a concise objective exposé of the main issues at stake such as might be useful to those wishing to find some key to the present complicated

situation arising out of the "Square Deal" Report. I have, therefore, ventured to try and supply such a key. In doing so I have borrowed freely from my previous contributions before the Institute of Transport and other Societies, to *Modern Transport* and other papers, from memoranda prepared for the Committee of Independent Experts of the International Chamber of Commerce, from the Report of that Committee, and from my Report on the Co-ordination of Transport in East Africa. The fact of my being able to do so in a book which aspires to be up to date encourages me to think that my previous work has been on permanently sound lines, and has led by gradual development to the suggestions I shall have occasion to make. While any book on the road and rail question appearing at the present time must deal with certain aspects of transient interest, the ultimate object of this work is to provide an exposé on the more lasting aspects of the problem. It is hoped that the book will be useful, not only to transport executives and students and to the transport user but also to the taxpayer whose long-range interests have not hitherto received the consideration due to them.

In my endeavour to achieve this object, I have divided the book into two parts. The first eleven chapters are devoted to an economic exposé of the problem and to an account of the experience in certain countries, both of which are intended to be entirely objective. The remaining chapters, which are admittedly controversial, contain a critical analysis in the light of the preceding chapters of the proposals which have been made to solve the problem in this country, and suggestions as to the policy which might be adopted.

It is hoped that even in retrospect these chapters dealing with the current situation will hold their lessons—possibly at the expense of the writer who dares to venture on short-term prophecy.

The road and rail problem affects both passenger and goods traffic. As, however, the passenger side is comparatively simple, I have to a large extent concentrated on the

more difficult goods side of the problem to avoid complication, though the underlying principles apply equally to passenger transport.

I desire gratefully to acknowledge the assistance which I have received from many quarters and in particular, as regards the checking of the parts relating to road and rail developments in other countries, from Staatssekretär F. Kleinmann for Germany, on the basis of a translation by Dr. K. Hardt—one more example of the unfailing help I have always received from this quarter; for France from Monsieur L. Delanney, Head of the Transport Department of the International Chamber of Commerce, whose wide and detailed knowledge of the subject and unsparing willingness to help have alone made it possible for me to attempt perhaps the most complicated chapter in this book; for the U.S.A. from Dr. L. Homberger, of the American University Graduate School, Washington; and for Eire from Mr. R. W. Marshall of Dublin. I am also greatly indebted to my wife for reading the manuscript and assisting in the preparation of the index.

H. O. MANCE

30th August, 1939

THIS book was in the hands of the publishers on 30th August, 1939. Publication was suspended on the outbreak of the War. After four and a half months of war there is nothing in the book I should wish to alter. It is possible that war conditions may help to bring about some of the developments I have envisaged, thus rendering some of the arguments used superfluous, or may bring about quite unexpected situations. On the other hand, the outbreak of the War marked the end of a definite stage in the road and rail problem and, therefore, a convenient point for breaking off a study of this nature. The work is, therefore, submitted unaltered as an element of research for post-war reconstruction, and if force

of circumstances should necessitate fundamental changes of transport policy during the War, that is all the more reason for the result of this research being made available at an early date.

H. O. M.

22nd January, 1940

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