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Go the Trolleys

By JOYCE SMITH

Each of the four sisters stands nine feet tall, weighs two tons, dresses exclusively in red and green and is about as shapely as your average cracker box. Although the oldest is only 2½ years old, these beauties already traverse the University campus daily, recognized and appreciated by thousands of students, faculty and visitors. They are, of course, Boomer-ville, Soonerville, Big Red Express and the Spirit of Oklahoma — the campus trolleys.

The acquisition of the picturesque trolleys was the brain child of Dr. Arthur J. Elbert, OU's vice president for administrative affairs. Elbert presented the idea to the transportation advisory committee after returning from a trip where he had seen the nostalgic San Francisco-type vehicles in use. He felt he had found the angle the committee needed to promote campus mass transit among commuters and resident students.

On-campus parking was — and is — a monumental problem, but Elbert wanted to avoid destroying additional grassy areas of the campus by building more parking lots.

"We needed a gimmick," explains Conley Weiss, director of auxiliary services. "Elbert presented this idea so well that we thought it might catch on — and did it ever! We're sure that we are the only school with a trolley service of this kind, because we get calls from lots of other schools requesting information on its operation."

The 32-passenger Boomer-ville and Soonerville, the first OU trolleys, were manufactured by Boyertown Auto Body Works of Pennsylvania. Big Red Express and Spirit of Oklahoma, which will accommodate 36, were purchased in January 1983 from Transportation Vehicles, Inc., of Florida. All have light colored hardwood interiors, globe ceiling lights and brass handrails.

The boxy bodies are powered by 440 and 336-cubic-inch engines in Dodge and GMC truck chassis. Their accessories include heating and air conditioning, automatic transmissions, AM radios, walkie-talkies for driver/headquarters communication, and, most impressive, brass trolley bells to alert passengers of departure. The older two trolleys have hydraulic

front and rear doors; the newer ones have hydraulic front doors, while rear doors swing open onto a boarding porch.

The advance publicity for the trolley system was extensive and included T-shirts, bib caps, billboards and radio spots. "Name-the-System" and "Name-the-Trolley" contests were held with more than 1,600 entries vying for prizes. In addition to the individual trolley names, judges selected CART — Campus Area Rapid Transit — for the new transportation system, which went into operation in August 1980.

While the trolleys are the show-piece of the system, CART also has in service nine red 44-passenger buses and employs 12 full-time and 9 part-time student drivers.



Sleepy commuters take the first trolley of the morning on the Express route.

More than 6,500 students a day use the CART system. Commuter students park their cars at Lloyd Noble Center and walk to the nearby trolley "turn-around", where trolleys and buses on the Express route depart at 6-minute intervals from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., taking passengers directly to the heart of the campus. The Parkview/Yorkshire Loop and the Boyd Street Loop operate from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., giving access to outlying campus buildings and housing facilities, the Campus Corner and the northern part of the main campus.

In addition to their regular duties, the trolleys and buses also are used on home football Saturdays to transport between 4,000 and 4,800 fans from the Lloyd Noble parking lots and Max Westheimer Field to Okla-

homa Memorial Stadium. Originally these rides also were free, but a charge of 50 cents from Lloyd Noble and \$1 from Westheimer was instituted last fall to cover expenses.

OU's first attempt at mass transit was a tram system which had a brief life during the early '70s. The routes were basically the same, and the tram rides also were free of charge.

"The trams were as unique as the trolleys, but we used them until they literally fell apart," recalls Student Affairs Vice President Anona Adair.

The six trams — three stand-up and three sit-down — were red trailers with red and white canopies, pulled by red and white International jeeps. Their ridership was not as good as the trolleys, however, because the trams were open-air vehicles.

For about a year afterward, OU had no transportation system. Then the University leased school buses to try to revive the system but failed to attract the necessary ridership.

The trolley proposal was greeted with some initial skepticism based on cost — they sell for twice as much as a bus — and capacity. "The trolleys are expensive," Weiss admits, "and they don't transport as many passengers per trip as the buses do, but without the trolleys, I feel that the system wouldn't have been as successful."

Student riders seem to agree. "The trolleys sure have saved a lot of wear and tear on me," Fine Arts Senior Erica Thomas explains. "When I hear someone say 'Here comes the trolley,' I find myself thinking, 'What a way to go!'"