ES., to the NEWS

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STREETCARS AND BUSES

One of the hit tunes from Judy Garland's movie "Meet Me In St. Louis" was "The Trolley Song." "Clang, clang, clang, went the trolley." About the time that movie was released in the 1940s, there was a drive to eliminate streetcars for urban transportation and replace them with buses. This had nothing to do with the movie, but a great deal to do with the economic interests· of those who would profit from the sale of buses.

In any event, it became popular to portray streetcars as leftovers from a romantic bygone era and the switch to buses as the obviously progressive path to the future. After all, as Judy Garland fans know, streetcars were used as long ago as the St. Louis World's Fair of 1904.

The switch from trolleys to buses proceeded rapidly and inexorably, thanks to aggressive lobbying by bus and gasoline interests. Trolleys were ridiculed as "toonerville" and "lum bering," while buses were hailed as "streamlined" and "sleek." Local politicians okayed the phase-out of streetcars and the purchase of thousands of buses. In record time, car tracks were blacktopped over or ripped out of the streets, and overhead electric lines were dismantled. Some tracks were ripped out by WPA workers.

The fact is that, when it comes to urban transportation, streetcars are far superior to buses, and some cities are now

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considering bringing them back to life. Streetcars on tracks give a smooth ride conducive to reading the newspaper or taking a nap, whereas buses are bumpy.

Streetcars efficiently travel in a straight line, while buses weave in and out of traffic to the annoyance of other drivers. Streetcars, which run on electricity, are pollution free. Buses are smelly and belch pollution with a vengeance.

The first trolley cars manufactured in more than 23 years (275 of them) are now being assembled for Boston and San Francisco. The $330,000 price is a long cry from the $18,000 paid in the 1930s. The long-abandoned trolley lines in those cities are being upgraded and additional routes are being planned. Other cities that are including streetcars in their urban transportation plans include Newark, New Orleans, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Rochester, Dayton, and Shaker Heights, Ohio.

The stunning silence of the environmentalists during the changeover from streetcars to buses casts serious doubt on their sincerity in forcing consumers to spend money to stop pollution from automobiles. Gas-guzzling pollution controls have added more than $150 to the price of each automobile and reduced gasoline mileage by some 20 percent below what it was a few years ago.

Now we are told that it is possible that the catalytic converter may actually pump a new poison into the air more dangerous than the pollution it was designed to control.

The lesson of all this seems to be that progress does not consist in discarding the true for the new.

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