

percentage increase in riders has been white males earning over \$20,000 per year — perhaps the first group which abandoned public transportation years ago in favor of the automobile.

While Atlanta's bus ridership has increased from 45 million to 51 million per year, MARTA has sustained a \$8.9-million loss on fare revenues of \$8.7-million. Unlike its private-owned predecessor, MARTA does not have to show a profit, however; because of its public status, MARTA is partially subsidized through tax monies.

Of the 30 largest transit systems in the U.S., all are now operated by local government agencies. The trend toward expanding and improving public transportation leads the American Transit Association to predict that the traditional national decline in the use of public transportation may soon begin to reverse.

The new trend in transit usage reflects a change in attitudes concerning mass transit. Transit officials now believe that a transit line which serves its customers well is bound to be a money-loser. As a MARTA official put it, "In an office building, elevators are provided regardless of cost, so people can get to the upper floors. Well, public transit must be considered a horizontal elevator; a protection of the 'fifth freedom' — mobility."



Cleaner than clean?

Phosphates in detergents have long been of concern to environmentally-aware consumers who realize that they may contribute to water pollution. At long last, consumers will know exactly how much phosphates their detergent contains. The detergent manufacturers of America have agreed to uniformly label packages as to the percentage of phosphates in each brand.

The program is different from one proposed two-and-a-half years ago which would have required a warning which stated that phosphates contribute to water pollution. This aspect of the labeling program is being held up until the Environmental Protection Agency completes a study concerning the relationship of phosphates to water pollution. Some federal agencies and officials feel that phosphates are not as serious a water pollution problem as they were once believed to be.

Clean air diluted

Stringent enforcement of clean air standards met in a head-on battle with the "energy crisis" in early September and, as the particulate matter settled, it appeared that clean air was the loser. The Nixon Administration, in three closely related maneuvers, has proposed that power plants and other heavy coal-burning industries be barred from switching from coal to heating oil, and has eased clean air requirements for big coal-using industries which have had trouble meeting clean air standards. The last attack was the most direct, however, as Nixon urged an outright abandonment of clean air standards at the local level.

In announcing the ban on coal-to-petroleum conversions, White House energy chief John Love emphasized that the move will not be allowed to create public health hazards which may result from increased air pollution. The ruling, which will remain in effect for one year, is aimed at heading off the shortage of home heating oil foreseen for this winter and to offset the impact of ever-tightening oil supplies from the Middle East. The ban will supersede any state air quality regulations which require a switch to low sulfur fuel oils.

The anti-conversion regulation was authorized under provisions of the Economic Stabilization Act of 1970.

A week after Love's announcement, Environmental Protection Agency spokesman John Quarles announced a "liberalization" of Clean Air Act requirements as they affect stationary pollution sources such as power plants and copper smelters. Claiming that the technology needed to remove sulfur oxides and other air pollutants from industrial smokestacks has not been developed, Quarles described the agency's new "intermittent control" approach which will allow plants located outside of urban areas to dilute pollution. Coal-burning plants will be able to continue spewing air pollutants into the air unless climatic or atmospheric conditions create a dangerous air pollution problem. In that case, the plant will have to curtail its operations until the smog alert passes.

Quarles estimated that some 20 smelters and 50 coal-fired utility plants will be affected by the new proposal. In an attempt to head off expected criticism from environmentalists, Quarles assured the public that these plants must continue to work at cleaning up emissions before they leave the smokestack and that they will not be allowed to dump pollutants into the air indefinitely.

Environmentalists don't see the move in as favorable a light, however. The Natural Resources Defense Council (which is currently involved in a suit against EPA which contends that attempts to "dilute" pollution by allowing tall smokestacks to spread emissions over large areas is illegal) was harsh in its criticism of the move. NRDC Attorney Richard Ayres termed it "the saddest day in the history of the EPA."

The big bombshell hit on September 8 when the President announced the results of a marathon meeting with his top energy advisors: "It will be necessary for [clean air] standards at the state level to be modified. Unless [they] are relaxed, we could have a very serious problem this winter." Although the White House cannot override clean air standards there are administrative channels through which they can be modified at the state and municipal levels.

It is expected that restrictions banning the burning of high sulfur coal and oil will be overturned. The President also expressed support for the rapid development of alternative energy sources; he cited nuclear energy, coal gasification and the speeded up construction of offshore oil ports as possible means of lessening our dependence on oil — Arab-controlled oil in particular. The President also ordered the opening of a Naval petroleum reserve near Bakersfield, Calif. which can provide states west of the Rockies with 100,000 barrels of oil per day this winter.

All this adds up to a bleak winter for environmentalists — and everyone else who breathes urban air. Jim Conroy, Environmental Action's legislative coordinator, expressed disgust with the Administration's new policy: "With a little help from his friends John Love and the extractive mineral industries, Nixon seems to be determined to undermine all past gains in the battle for clean air. We can only hope that state and local officials will display a firmer commitment to the environmental goals that appear so often in the President's rhetoric."