

In TRANSIT, author Cliff Slater takes us through each twist and turn of public transportation history, so we understand why in the 1970s Congress and local governments killed the largely private and profitable transit bus industry.

Slater makes the case that Congress, prodded by the Amalgamated Transit Union, produced legislation that while ostensibly espousing private enterprise at President John Kennedy's urging, was in reality ensuring that the private companies would not survive.

The act President Lyndon Johnson signed, following Kennedy's assassination, was the antithesis of what Kennedy wanted and what the bus industry needed. The subsequent surprising fight for transit funding by President Richard Nixon, ensured the disappearance of the 1,107 independent bus companies.

The new legislation sought to revive commuting by transit and mitigate suburbanization and automobile growth. It failed miserably.

Slater follows the waste that developed once transit was untethered from the discipline of the marketplace. Between 1975 and 2019, it took \$1.8 trillion in 2019 dollars to keep U.S. transit ridership at the same level as 1880, before streetcars were invented.

The last chapter considers the post-COVID-19 era. Transit ridership has stalled at 35% below 2019, despite auto travel and employment returning to normal.

Other problems facing transit include the continuing rise of companies such as Uber and Lyft, expanding remote work, and reduced federal funding after COVID. In time there will be the threat of autonomous vehicles.

Slater concludes that the combination of tightening government budgets and a more assertive entrepreneurial class is likely to bring back exciting days for private urban mobility.