

Viewpoints

Waiting for the streetcar

Last summer, I took a pleasure trip to San Francisco. Because I didn't plan on leaving the city, I decided to rely on public transportation instead of renting a car. Within the city, San Francisco's iconic cable cars are the most famous form of public transportation.

On the Powell-Mason cable car line you can ride from the shopping district on Market Street to Fisherman's Wharf. On the California cable car line you can travel from the Financial District, through Chinatown, over Nob Hill and to Grace Cathedral.

The two cable car lines cover a sizable portion of the city. However, the popularity of cable cars with tourists has greatly diminished their value as a form of public transportation. The line to board the cars looks like the queue for a Disneyland ride. If you want to travel to your destination in a reasonable amount of time, the cable cars are not the way to go.

While in San Francisco, I relied upon the bus. I never had to wait more than 10 minutes for a bus. The routes traverse the entire city, and a \$20 muni pass got me everywhere I needed to go during my stay. I didn't get lost. I was never approached by a panhandler.

For some reason, many people view the bus as an inferior way to travel. That hasn't always been the case.

As one of the voices of the beat generation, Jack Kerouac wrote, "Exhausting or not, there's no better way to see the West than to take a good old bus and go batting along on regular roads and come to all kinds of towns and cities where you can get out and walk sometimes a whole hour and see the world and come back to your bus and drive on."

When Dustin Hoffman whisked away Katharine Ross in the final scene of the

Graduate, they rode off on the back seat of a Santa Barbara municipal bus.

Salt Lake is trying to revive the popularity of the bus with a new system called bus rapid transit. The rapid transit buses have dedicated lanes of traffic and

computer interface with traffic signals to avoid delays. As a result, the rapid transit buses travel faster than regular automobile traffic and adhere to a highly reliable schedule. On the Salt Lake routes where the rapid transit busses have been added, ridership has doubled.

Many residents of Ogden are longing for the day when they can

move around town on a modern streetcar. Undoubtedly, a streetcar system would increase the use of public transportation in

Ogden. To verify this point you need look no further than Salt Lake City's experience with Trax.

Unfortunately, the reality of a streetcar system in Ogden is years away.

Alternative routes are still being debated. Once the route

for the streetcar is finalized, and hopefully this will be soon, an environmental study will need to be submitted to the Federal Transit Administration. The project will then compete for funding with transit projects across the country. Assuming funding is ultimately attained, it will take several years to construct the streetcar line. It could take the better part of decade for Ogden's streetcar system to become a reality.

When vacationing in San Francisco, I was unwilling to wait for the cable car, so I took the bus and found it to be a viable alternative. Those waiting for Ogden's streetcar system might consider doing the same.

Top of Utah Voices



Michael Vaughan

Commentary

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