

Letters

Our Favorite Polluting Private Vehicles

Your cover picture of Los Angeles (18 Sept.) is supposed to represent an example of a poor mass transportation system. I submit that the picture represents just the opposite. It represents a good mass transportation system—the automobile. Our city developed on the concept of automobiles and they serve us well. At one time we had an extensive rail system and it withered away. The harsh realities are that rail systems cannot economically meet the needs of this community.

We are geared to the automobile. There isn't a spot in that cover picture that I can't reach in a matter of minutes. Frankly, I wouldn't use a streetcar if it ran right past my house. I don't like to stand and wait for them. And when it comes to comfort, privacy, speed, package carrying ability, and overall convenience, there is no comparison between a streetcar and an automobile. Hanging a streetcar on a monorail and calling it rapid transit changes nothing.

Somebody had better wake up and realize that you are not going to sell the public something unless it is better than what it already has. These city dreamers should concentrate on improving the system that the public has demonstrated it wants. Let's clean up the engines and improve our road system. The only transit scheme so far proposed that offers any improvement over automobiles is the computer-dispatched vehicle that would carry from one to four passengers directly from origin to destination. But odds are that when we get to that stage, it will just be a modification of our privately owned automobiles.

Your cover caption states that Los Angeles is an example of unplanned growth beset by severe environmental problems. For a city that continues to absorb the greatest mass migration in the history of mankind, these problems

can't be too bad or people would not keep coming. The truth is that automobiles provide the best mass transportation system available and any attempt to substitute something less convenient on a mass scale is doomed to failure.

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Weather Watching

In response to Barber (Letters, 10 July), the United States effort for the World Weather Program, which includes the World Weather Watch (WWW) and the Global Atmospheric Research Programme (GARP), is explicated each year, with reasonably detailed budget information in the report of the President to Congress, "World Weather Program, Plan for Fiscal Year 19xx," available from the Government Printing Office. Equivalent information for other countries may not be so readily available.

Barber's information on the magnitude of the World Meteorological Organization budget is essentially correct. As a primarily coordinating body, WMO also has a technical assistance program for supporting new stations and special equipment in developing countries for completion of the global telecommunications network, and certain regional analyses and research centers. Funds for these programs come in a small part from the regular WMO budget, but mostly through contributions from developed countries and from the United Nations Development Fund. I feel confident that any bona fide inquiry concerning the annual budgets and general details of these programs would be answered, for this information is included in the records of the annual meetings of the WMO executive committee and the quadrennial meetings of the WMO congress.

The various satellite programs of the several countries stem from requirements to meet national operational meteorological needs as well as from the strong technological development programs in these countries related to advancement of "space grade" hardware (reliability, long life, micro-miniaturization, development of new materials, development of new sensors and data handling techniques). These programs are essential if these technologically advanced countries are to maintain their position in the forefront of rapidly evolving technology. It is hard to imagine, in this present period of world politics, that nations would yield to others their prerogatives to develop their own basic space meteorological systems; the fact that they overlap globally is merely an attribute of most satellite observing systems and can be turned to advantage because none of the systems are identical and hence yield different data.

The atmospheric fluid of this revolving planet is generally conceded to be one of the most complex nonlinear systems in nature. Current research on its circulation and predictability is pushing hard on the frontiers of knowledge in fluid mechanics. We ought not to discourage "duplication" in observing and understanding this system—we need to encourage it to hasten the understanding required to produce better forecasts, which are the goal of the effort, not a promise. We do not know whether or not we really can provide useful forecasts—say for one to three weeks—but we are seeking to find out if we can.

GARP, a fundamental research experiment, and the WWW, a gradually evolving operational effort, are responses to pleas in the United Nations to turn the power of space research to the good of all mankind. . . . One of the outcomes of GARP will be more secure understanding of the large-scale circulation of the atmosphere, its inherent predictability, and what observations are necessary for the purposes of prediction. The latter knowledge will be fed to the WWW global observing network, comprising surface-based and satellite-based techniques, so that it can further improve its output of data to meet the needs of the national weather services.

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