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CHICAGO'S GREAT DOWN-TOWN NUISANCE—THE UNION LOOP

Elevated Railroad Structure Which Occupies Four Busy Thoroughfares Proves Itself a Serious Hindrance to Traffic and a Constant Menace to Life and Limb.

CHICAGO has a great down-town nuisance—one that for widespread vexation, trouble, and even actual damage is unequaled throughout the city. This great public bummer causes enough annoyance, enough delay, and enough real loss to earn it the title of the champion nuisance in the recent history of the municipality. It is the Union elevated loop.

Spread over such a wide and important space in the heart of the business district, the structure of the elevated loop may easily claim first honors as an obstacle to traffic. Wabash avenue, Lake street, and Fifth avenue, three of the most important thoroughfares of the city, have half of their usefulness ruined by this great sprawling snake of iron. And Van Buren street, last to fall into the baneful coils, has only escaped at the sacrifice of a portion of its sidewalks and its street intersections.

The trouble is nothing new, though the immensity of it is just beginning to be apparent in these days of prosperity teaming. Every owner of a vehicle in the city knows it. Long and loud have been the complaints since the elevated structure was put up, but complaints do not change structural iron. Nowadays, finding out from bitter experience that protests will not cure, the driving public has learned to bitterly endure.

Means Heavy Financial Loss.
In this city, where time is money, delays and disturbances to the traffic interests, even though slight, mean heavy financial losses. And when an obstruction exists day after day, week in and week out, always causing its steady hindrance to the transportation of goods and the transaction of business, the damage done in the course of years is fairly incalculable. Such is the effect, now thoroughly recognized, of the Union loop.

It is not merely in the fact of the elevated structure being over several of Chicago's most important streets that the trouble is felt, though that in itself is something of a drawback to certain kinds of teaming. The difficulty is caused by the placing of the supporting columns. These, instead of being set on the curb line or within it, are stationed in the middle portion of the street, in just that part most needed for the many turns, movements, and avoidances which are absolutely necessary in the present crush of traffic in this city.

Just how these supports came to occupy their present undesirable positions seems to be something of a question. Apparently it was to make a saving in expense that the columns were placed as they are. Putting them in the street instead of on the edge of the sidewalk means a shortening of girder length and a saving in structural iron. Putting them within the curb line would have meant a street saved for the people. If this choice was made on these lines it was a dear economy, for now daily the merchants of the city are footing the bills.

What Road Officials Claim.
But the people connected with the beginning of the enterprise tell a different story as to the placing of the uprights. They declare the present position of them was indirectly insisted upon by a number of property owners themselves. It was due to a distrust of the Union Elevated Loop company and a general belief on the part of these property owners that the concern would ultimately put four tracks on the loop if they got the chance, in spite of all promises to the contrary. For this reason the many signers of frontage consents along the right of way insisted that the structure should be made so narrow that only two tracks could possibly be used.

In this way, neglecting a greater evil to avoid a less, the property owners along the loop streets, it is claimed, became responsible for the greatest nuisance at present existing in the city. This is the unofficial story of the Union loop projectors. They add the prophecy that it will not be long before the sidewalk supports will have to be installed, and say they are glad of it. Whether or not this idea of the danger of four tracks was put into the heads of the frontage owners to save expense in the reconstruction of the loop, it is certain that the latter effect was accomplished. Yet the saving, estimated by reliable bridge engineers, is not a great amount. If all the time lost and damage done by the present position of the loop supports could be turned into their equivalent of money the city would pay in a few months several times over the cost of building the structure on sidewalk supports. This is the estimate of merchants located along those thoroughfares which have had half their usefulness ruined by the great iron posts. Its cost can be seen any hour of the day on any street, Wabash avenue, or Fifth avenue. It is patent to anybody who cares to make a trip down one of these thoroughfares. And the avoidance of the trouble could have been perfectly easy at an increased expense in the first place. That is the appalling part of it to those who daily suffer from the present outrageous conditions.

Location of the Loop.
The Union elevated loop, as all Chicago people know, occupies the square of streets bounded by Lake street, Wabash avenue, Van Buren street, and Fifth avenue. There are four extensions designed to connect the loop with the four suburban lines with the city terminal, but they are inconsiderable in comparison with the central structure of iron.

The loop was made possible by virtue of an ordinance passed by the City Council, and preceded by an agreement on the part of the Union Loop company and the city, whereby a period of time from Jan. 8, 1890, to June 29, 1890, beginning with a certain date on Lake street and ending with the passage of an ordinance for Van Buren street, was set aside for the construction of the Union loop.

was first completed. Previous to the passing of an ordinance for it by the City Council a petition was circulated by agents of the Union Loop company and was signed by a majority of the people owning frontage on the thoroughfare. It was this petition which was taken as the basis for the ordinance requiring the supporting columns to be put in the street itself.

How Structure Fills Streets.
In the three streets where the great nuisance exists—Wabash avenue, Lake street, and Fifth avenue—the iron columns are about fifteen inches square, with bases standing up a few inches above the pavement. The distance from post to post varies from thirty-five to fifty feet, according to conditions. The bases of the latter are placed at from three and one-half feet to four feet outside of the street car tracks, making the spaces from the curb to them in the neighborhood of ten feet wide. The distance across the tracks from post to post is about twenty-five feet, and the height of the structure above the pavement fourteen feet.

These conditions of building, as might have been seen in advance, interpose certain obvious obstacles on the traffic in the streets occupied by the elevated structure. In the first place, the height of fourteen feet will not permit high loads of boxes or crates to go under the girders. As late as

last week Buffalo Bill's band wagon met serious trouble in trying to cross the right of way of the Union loop, and hay wagons have often been obliged to give up the attempt in disgust. But of course the greatest drawback to teaming is the posts set in the street.

With a space scarcely more than ten feet wide on each side between the curb and the line of columns, and with the uprights as near together as thirty-five feet, it is evident that there is room for only one team at a time between a post and the sidewalk, and small chance for a heavy dray to turn out or into the narrow passageway afforded. For this reason one horse and wagon standing alongside a curb throws its third of the street out of use for the space of a block. And where teams remain along the sidewalk on both sides of the way the entire traffic is crowded to the street car tracks in the center. Here, if the number of wagons and electric cars is at all great, a solid procession is formed, in which the pace of the whole is the pace

Also, at times, digging and repairs in the street add to the straitened circumstances of the unfortunate city drivers.

Wabash avenue has the lightest team traffic of the three streets, and the circumstance is most fortunate for it on account of the great number of cable trains running.

Nuisance in Wabash Avenue.
Between Madison and Randolph streets, in Wabash avenue, an unusual condition of the car tracks exists. Owing to the fact that the two lines there are parts of loops the cars are forced into a left hand running. This fact most of the drivers know and remember, but now and then a heavy load will take the right hand track by mistake and, hampered by the lines of iron posts and the general narrowness of the way, there usually ensues a blockade which ends in a fight of police protection. This condition exists up to Randolph street, where the Wabash avenue street car line makes another dangerous turn, missing the side posts by a distance considerably less than

of the roadway are cut off by standing teams and the travel is relegated to the central procession of vehicles in the middle. Then, when the great intersection of State street and Lake street is reached, the driver's woes are mountainous.

Rules State Street Corner.
State street, with its great width, would have made a most comfortable intersection with Lake street, in spite of the two curves of car tracks there, had not great iron sheathed posts been placed in the middle parts of the open space. As it is, what with the constant streams of teaming intersecting at right angles, and the two busy street car lines making oblique plunges into the struggling maze of drivers, horses, and vehicles, the place is scarcely safe for a human being and is the center of endless delays, difficulties, and damage.

Beyond State street again the old procession forms, which proceeds by jerks and intervals in soul trying circumstances. From this point west the electric cars are a complication carefully to be shunned,

Grievous Injury Done to the City by Placing the Posts Which Support the Tracks in the Middle of the Streets Instead of Extending Them to the Curb.

wagons constantly stand along the curbing. The result is a combination which the jehus of the city unhesitatingly pronounce the worst in Chicago. The two street intersections a block on either side of it are first cousins.

The throng of vehicles on the streets of Chicago, when put into numbers, always proves a great astonishment to those unfamiliar with the actual teaming going on. A large part of the tremendous array of teams and drays is employed in work which

minutes to cover the part of Fifth avenue obstructed by the Union loop, six minutes to cross Van Buren street, eleven minutes to go up Wabash avenue, and twenty minutes to ride down Lake street to the starting point at Fifth avenue. This trip the driver declared unusually lucky and short in consequence. Turns, twists, and avoidances were made that would have been utterly impossible for any kind of a loaded wagon. The same number of blocks covered on the ordinary business streets of the city took fifteen minutes.

In the great square of iron studded streets about the business district delay, and damage are his constant portion.

It Affects Business Houses.
But the proprietors of the big wholesale houses along the loop thoroughfares are the real sufferers. The difficulty of getting their teams and merchandise out and in and to and from the railroads and warehouses is daily increasing and is a tremendous item in their business. The object of their principal grievance, naturally, is the loop structure, and they are loud in their condemnation of the short-sighted policy which placed the posts in the street. Here is what two or three of the principal wholesalers along Lake street, from Wabash avenue to Fifth avenue, had to say:

Brands It as a Nuisance.

"We recognize the supports of the loop structure as the biggest kind of a nuisance and hindrance to our city trade," said Addison D. Kelley, of Kelley, Mann & Co. "They should have been put within the curb line. Besides the general hindrance to traffic all along the street the posts cause us actual damage as well as delay. Two of our horses have had their hoofs cut nearly off in the last few months and two more have been knocked down by passing street cars on account of entanglements with the columns."

"Our wagons and goods also suffer considerably. In backing wagons up to the curb to load or unload the posts are always in the way, and the stream of wagons outside often causes minor collisions and smashups. In starting teams out, also, it is often nearly impossible to break into the steady procession of passing vehicles crowded by the posts into the center of the street. Altogether our actual loss by reason of the position of the loop structure amounts to considerable in the course of a month."

It Hurts His Business.

W. Vernon Booth of the Booth Packing company has several accounts to square with the Union loop. It has greatly diminished the retail business of his firm, it delays and obstructs the company's teams, and it interferes with his own personal convenience, he declares. And all these results are caused by the placing of the posts. Said Mr. Booth:

"The Union loop structure has undoubtedly damaged the merchants along the streets which it occupies most considerably. Whether the business houses a block or two away have profited a like amount or not I do not pretend to say, though I doubt it. The greater part of the injury is caused by the frightful congestion of traffic along the loop streets caused by the way in which the supports are placed. This prevents people with wagons from trading here when they can find other stores much more readily accessible by team. We estimate that our retail trade has fallen off on account of this more than 25 per cent since the Union loop was built."

"Any one can see for himself that a great iron post sticking up out of the middle of the street is a tremendous obstacle to drivers. And when these posts are placed in two rows every fifty feet or so the nuisance is enormous. Our teams find that it takes as long to cover one block on a loop street as three on other streets."

"In my own personal case I have given up going to the Northwestern railroad depot by carriage. I find there is only one way practicable—to walk."

Men to Guard Teams.

When the Union loop was contemplated in Wabash avenue Franklin MacVean & Co., at the corner of Lake street and Wabash avenue, announced their intention to move on account of the nuisance caused by the elevated structure. They said, however, and now state the existence of the iron work, while a great bother to them, has not proved as serious a drawback as they expected. The reason seems to be that the blockade formed by the cable trains and numerous teams standing in front of their store has resulted in driving a large portion of the traffic to take some other more possible route. By keeping a man constantly employed looking after the teams standing in front they have succeeded in conducting business fairly well, a result which was sorely hoped for when the loop was built. W. T. Chandler of the firm said on the subject:

"We are not hindered nearly as much as we were at first by the presence of the Union loop. The reason appears to be due to a considerable diminution in the traffic on our corner. There are no electric cars here, either on Wabash avenue or Lake street, and but a single track of the cable road. I think, of course, the posts would be much less of a nuisance to the public if they were placed in the sidewalk, since it would give much more street room in that arrangement. But we expected it would be almost impossible to carry on our business when both of our frontages were walled in by posts, and are now agreeably surprised."

A serious condition here confronts Chicago. Three of its most important streets, girdling the heart of the business district, are so obstructed that the limit of their teaming facilities is almost reached already. With the rapidly growing traffic of the present revival of business the congestion is daily becoming greater, the delay and damage more costly. At the bottom of all the trouble—the only condition which forethought and public interest could have easily avoided—stands the Union elevated loop.

HOW THE UNION LOOP IMPEDES TRAFFIC IN DOWN-TOWN THOROUGHFARES.



even on an open street where no iron columns fence off the greater part of the roadway. Practically all the electric cars from the North and Northwest Sides come in over these tracks, and the average frequency of them is four to a block.

When the Clark street or Dearborn street bridge is open there are lively times on Lake street. Then the great stream of vehicles from the center of the city outward is checked in its course by the open draw and piles up on itself until the congestion is tremendous.

It would be hard to find a livelier corner than Fifth avenue and Lake street, though they do exist. Here three out of the four approaching ways are disfigured by the posts of the elevated structure, and the fourth has but a short day of grace left. Car tracks curve in and out of the tangle of iron posts in a bewildering manner and add to the troubles of the way, while a constant crush of vehicles all day long makes the place a sight to behold but a spot to be avoided.

Fifth avenue and Randolph street, Fifth avenue and Washington street, Fifth avenue and Madison street are three plague spots to the drivers of Chicago following. The worst of them all is the intersection with Washington street. There the West Side cable cars curve to the south and run straight across, while the electric car lines make the crossing north and south. Large posts of the elevated railroad supporting the station framework stand in the sides of the intersection. On either side of Fifth avenue, a short distance from the corner,

enables it to keep away from the nuisance of the elevated loop, but enough wagons are compelled to take the obstructed thoroughfares to make amazing figures. In a count made for THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE during half an hour at the corner of Washington street and Fifth avenue the average passage of vehicles of all descriptions per minute was a little over fifteen, or at the rate of seventy-seven each five minutes. This means practically as fast as they can get by each other, for when the number of wagons on the scene increased too greatly the rate of their passage fell off proportionately. In other words, there are practically as many teams on hand at this corner during the business hours of the day as can get through. What the result would be if the teaming of the city increased 50 per cent makes an interesting question.

The rate of movement at Clark and Lake streets is a trifle faster than at Fifth avenue and Washington street, being about eighteen a minute, or eighty-eight every five minutes. This is due to the square intersections of the street car lines, apparently, and to extra efficiency of the policemen on the crossings there. In both cases the rate of motion is from one-fourth to one-eighth that of streets unobstructed by elevated track supports.

Laying it down as a general rule the drivers of the city stage that in equal crushes of traffic it takes just about as long to make three blocks on an open street as one under the Union loop structure. This was tested last week by a reporter for THE SUNDAY TRIBUNE, who made the trip around the loop in a cab and then drove about other streets in the business district as a basis for comparison. It took fourteen

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of the slowest—a death march walk. And when an obstruction is met, an accident happens, or the intercepting stream of vehicles at a cross street is reached, the whole line stops. Progression under the circumstances is like that of a line of snails.

Minor Causes of Trouble.
There are other difficulties peculiar to the particular places along the route of the Union loop—drawbacks caused, either directly or indirectly, by the placing of the columns supporting the structure. These further complicate the progress of a vehicle up the important streets now nearly ruined. The distance is so small from the curb to the nearest iron posts that the owners of abutting property cannot realize the damage doing much damage by using the space of the pavement, or by using the space of the pavement, or by using the space of the pavement.

ly to be found. Around the corner on Lake street the cable train is moved to the side of the middle part of the road, and thus greatly increases congestion. Still all the way to the curve at State street the side third

safety should require. North of Randolph street Wabash avenue has one car track in the middle of the space between the two lines of posts, and a poorer arrangement could not well be devised. Between the street cars and the upright columns there is not nearly room for a team to pass, and the lines of wagons standing on either side of the way prohibit the possibility of using any but the center of the roadway. Drays going in an opposite direction to the cable trains here meet trouble invariably. It is most fortunate that the distance is short and traffic has learned to shun the spot.

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