

Streetcars

When I was a boy, I sold newspapers in Los Angeles, only I didn't have a route. I stood on a safety island in the middle of the street and sold papers to cars stopped at the intersection and people on the streetcars that stopped at the safety island..

From the 1820s to the 1880s urban transit in North America began when horse-drawn omnibus lines started to operate along city streets. When a wagon was drawn upon rails the rolling resistance of the vehicle was lowered and the average speed was increased. A horse or team that rode along rails could carry more fare paying passengers per day of operation. North America's first streetcar lines opened in 1832 from downtown New York City to Harlem by the New York and Harlem Railroad.

These streetcars used horses and sometimes mules. Mules were thought to give more hours per day of useful transit service than horses and were especially popular in the South. By the mid-1880s, there were 415 street railway companies in the USA operating over 6,000 miles of track and carrying 188 million passengers per year using animal-drawn cars.

Although most animal-drawn lines were shut down in the 19th century, a few lines lasted into the 20th century and later. 1860s to the 1890s, many streetcar operators switched from animals to other types of motive power. Before the use of electricity the use of steam dummies, tram engines, or cable cars was tried. One city that did not eliminate its cable car lines was San Francisco and much of its San Francisco cable car system continues to operate to this day.

The first electric street car in America was in in South Bend, Indiana in 1882. In 1883, Leo Daft built an experimental 2 ton electric locomotive in Newark, New Jersey, that was intended to pull passengers through the city's streets. By 1889, 110 electric railways had been started or were planned on several continents. By 1895 almost 900 electric street railways and nearly 11,000 miles of track had been built in the United States.

The rapid growth of streetcar systems led to the widespread ability of people to live outside of a city and commute into it for work on a daily basis. Another result was the rise of interurban lines, which were basically streetcars that operated between cities and served remote, even rural, areas. In some areas interurban lines competed with railroads.

Between 1895 and 1929, almost every major US city suffered at least one streetcar strike. Often these strikes were "marked by almost continuous and often spectacular violent conflict," at times amounting to prolonged riots and civil insurrection. These strikes rank among the deadliest armed conflicts in American labor union history. The San Francisco Streetcar Strike of 1907 saw 30 killed and about 1000 injured. Many of the casualties were passengers and innocent bystanders.

The Great Depression of the 1930s led to the closure of many streetcar lines . Declining ridership and traffic jam crowding of city streets by streetcars were often cited as reasons to shut down remaining lines. By the 1960s most North American streetcar lines were closed. City buses were seen as more economical and flexible. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streetcars_in_North_America]

