

Trolley Display Building Tour Flow

What was life before the Trolley Era? (Trolley Era approx. 1880-1940)

- Second Industrial Revolution or Technological Revolution, approx. 1870-1914
- Large cities or towns surrounded by farmland; no suburbs as we have today
- Transportation options: walk, horse, carriage (stagecoach, omnibus, etc)
- People limited where they could work and live
- Society not dependent on electricity as a power source

Horsecars: 1880s

- Got people quite literally “out of the mud” by using metal wheels on rails in the street
- Pulled by teams of horses or mules
 - Slow: about 5 mph, up and down the hills of Pittsburgh
 - Costly: food, drink, shelter, medicine, shoes, etc for horses
 - Messy: Horse droppings EVERYWHERE

Frank Sprague:

- Created a system of a spring loaded pole and wheel; when the wheel touched the electrified overhead wire, it brought power to the trolley
- Successfully implemented in 1888 in Richmond, Virginia
- Electric railways service opened in Pittsburgh in 1890

High Floor Car: 1900s-1910s

- Electric streetcars become a way of life; first time many people are seeing electric lights
- Large motors and therefore large wheels-trucks to power the car up and down the hills of PGH; still slow maybe 10-15 mph
- Difficult to board easily due to high step (hence high floor car); think about what women are wearing during this time and societal norms: long skirt, impolite to show ankle

Low Floor Car: 1920s

- Smaller, but still powerful, motors and trucks
- Easier to board thus making each trip faster and reducing labor costs
- Used as interurban cars; connecting cities and towns; increased the sphere of travel for people

PCC Cars: 1929-1936, modified until 1952

- Presidents' Conference Committee (PCC) cars are patented design attempt to modernize trolleys to increase ridership during a steep period of decline in the 1920s due to the emergence of the automobile.

- Pittsburgh was one of the first cities to operate the new cars in revenue service beginning in January 1937. At one time the city had 666 PCC cars and they ran in Pittsburgh until 1999 (4004!).

Other Talking Points

Single-Ended vs. Double-Ended Cars

- Ability for forward operation at either end of the trolley; “changing ends”
- Loops existed since horse car days, but became very popular in the 1920s, 30s and 40s because they saved equipment costs by eliminating a set of controls and a pole, and reduced dwell time at the endpoints of each route. They also kept the motorman from having to go outside to change ends during bad weather.

Peter Witt door arrangement

- Passengers boarded at the front door and left through the center one, where a conductor collected fares. Passengers who hadn't paid yet waited in the front section so the car could get underway while fares were still being collected. Boarding at the front also enabled loading before an intersection, so the car could take advantage of stoplight time, and again, get underway sooner.

Inter-city vs. Interurban cars

- Most trolleys operated *within* cities, traveling between neighborhoods in or along streets. Most passengers were commuters to workplaces that changed shifts at the same time, generating traffic spikes. So, city cars were usually built for capacity and ease of loading. Their evolution over time reflects improved technology and attention to attracting riders, response to competing modes of transportation, and decreasing profits. Interurban cars, on the other hand, traveled between cities and towns, and were built for greater comfort and speed early on.

Construction Cars

- Maintenance equipment kept the line running reliably and economically. Unlike rubber-tired vehicles on public streets, trolley companies had to maintain their own track and infrastructure with no public support. Street maintenance jobs like snow removal were often required for a franchise.

Immigration

- Trolleys considered a “rolling melting pot” as different neighborhoods interacted and blended together as a direct result of the trolley
- In Pennsylvania, trolleys connected many of the mining communities with nearby towns and were extended to industrial facilities near the cities. Much of the labor for the mills and mines came from countries in Eastern Europe.

WWII and Women

- Wartime brought temporary prosperity to the electric railway industry, largely due to the government rationing of fuel and rubber. Employment boomed, and meant heavily increased traffic for transit companies. Transit systems strained to handle the demands, which continued after the war's end until autos, gasoline and tires became available again.
- With many of the company's motormen serving in the armed forces during World War II, Pittsburgh Railways made a concerted effort to hire women for the job. These female operators were known as "motorettes." Some women continued to operate after the war; one even went on to operate the first car over the City's new light rail line through Beechview and Mt. Lebanon in 1987.

Trolley Suburbs

- Trolleys made it possible to have distinct and separate districts in an urban area where people could travel between work, shopping, and home
- Cities expanded along the streetcar routes built out from the city center. Local examples include Beechview, Brookline, Mt. Lebanon, and Bradford Woods (a community founded by the trolley company itself).

Car Cards

- Companies began advertising their products and services on streetcars nationwide in the early 1900s. By 1918, approximately 50,000 trolleys displayed advertisements or car cards in nearly 3,000 cities and towns to an average of 500 passengers a day. The most successful streetcar advertisements had catchy phrases, colorful images, and could be seen by the most riders.
- Much of this success can be attributed to one person, Barron G. Collier who formed the Consolidated Street Railway Advertising Company of New York City in 1893.