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Metro Author's New Book Highlights LA's Red Car Trolleys

- 'Readers will be surprised' by system's reach, Jim Walker says
- Book signing Thursday afternoon in the Metro Store

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 20, 2007) On pages 28 and 29 of a new book by Metro's Jim Walker is a map of the Pacific Electric Red Car lines as they were in the early 1920s. The reach and breadth of the system is astonishing.

From Redlands on the east to Santa Monica on the west, and from Mt. Lowe on the north to San Pedro on the south, a spidery octopus of rail lines – 1,164 miles of track – is sketched with the communities they served presented like tendrils along the system's branches.

"Readers will be surprised how far it went and how many lines there were," says Walker, an archivist in the Metro's Dorothy Payton Gray Transportation Library, and author of "Images of Rail – Pacific Electric Red Cars."

Walker will be available for a book signing from 1:30 to 3 p.m., Thursday, when his book goes on sale in the Metro Store on the Plaza level of the Gateway

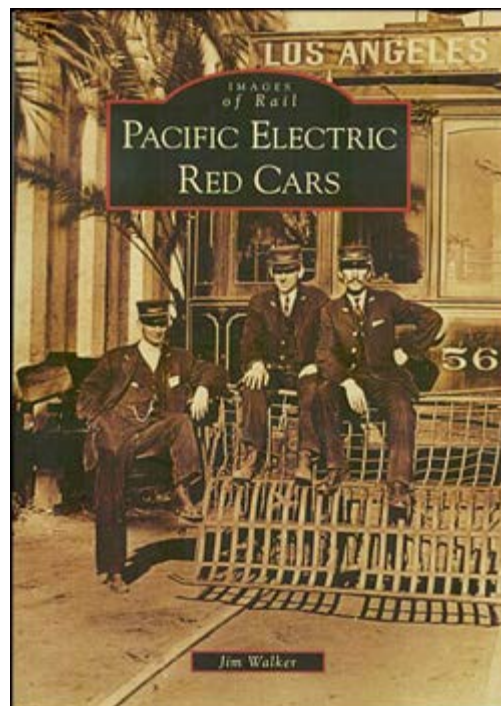
Building. The book, which will sell at a discounted \$17 to employees, also will be available on the store's web pages at [www.metro.net](#). Walker has designated the book's 8 percent royalties to the agency.

The soft-cover, 128-page book begins the tale of railways in Los Angeles in 1874 when the first horse cars roamed the streets, to be followed by cable cars, which eventually were replaced by electric streetcars.

Highlights Huntington's role

Published by Arcadia Publishing, the book highlights the role of Henry E. Huntington, a land developer who established some of the first rail lines to serve the suburban communities he built.

Packed with 205 photos, maps and illustrations, the book's nine chapters



Jim Walker's new book is a retrospective of Los Angeles.

take the reader from the founding of Pacific Electric through the early 1900s, the Depression, World War II and into the company's last years of 1961-65. Most of the photos are from the Metro library's collection, while others are from collections held by Walker and other railway fans.

The goal of Walker's book? "I'm trying to answer a lot of questions for people who don't know about the history of rail in Los Angeles or about Metro's predecessor agencies. They have no idea what was here once."

A native of Lynwood, the 71-year-old Walker grew up riding the Red Cars, often journeying into downtown LA on the trolleys. The romance of the railways remained with him into adulthood when, in 1956, he helped found what is now the Orange Empire Railway Museum in Perris, Calif.

Edited 40-plus books

As the one-time owner of Interurban Publications, Walker edited more than 40 books about trains and trolleys. In 1977, he wrote "The Yellow Cars of Los Angeles" about the city's other major trolley system, the Los Angeles Railway. He's currently working with Arcadia Publishing on another book about the Yellow Cars.

Recognized as an authority on rail in Los Angeles, Walker believes World War II kept the rail lines in service longer than they might otherwise have lasted. Gas and rubber rationing and the shift of wartime production from automobiles to military vehicles forced people to continue to use transit.

Walker doesn't subscribe to the "theory" that the automobile manufacturers and oil companies forced LA's rail lines out of business. It was the system's obsolescence, the public's post-war infatuation with the automobile and a lack of the taxpayer subsidies that sustain public transit systems today, he says.

"The rail companies couldn't make money off of them anymore and they wanted out from under," he says, adding, "It wasn't just the rail lines that were suffering, it was all public transportation."