



Departures

History & Society

Transportation - End Of The Line

October 24, 2011



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While the vast streetcar system in Los Angeles was wildly successful since early in the 20th century, it was doomed to extinction in the era of automobiles and bus routes. The streetcar system was sold to National City Lines in 1945, a company whose investors included car-centric companies such as Firestone Tires, Standard Oil of California, and General Motors. Instead of enhancing the city's transportation network, the company, which then changed its name to Los Angeles Transit Lines, began to introduce buses to the city's streets. By the early 1950s, many trolleys (including the "Yellow Cars") were converted to buses, despite the public's opposition.

This change is now referred to as the Great American Streetcar Scandal. General Motors was blamed for acquiring and demolishing trolleys not only in Los Angeles, but around the country. In 1949, they were indicted for scheming to control the streetcar system, but was acquitted of the charges, fined only \$5,000. The scandal remains a part of urban lore, inspiring the central plot of the 1988 movie *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*

National City Lines' involvement with the trolleys was undoubtedly a contributing factor in the system's downfall, but there are other factors as well. The Great Depression made it difficult for the railway to keep up with maintenance and labor costs, and the construction of new highways funded by federal dollars created jobs and expanded the transportation system beyond the trolley's reach.

White flight from Highland Park was another reason. The growing suburbs were not accessible by streetcar, and as Los Angeles' newest suburbanites purchased their first automobiles, traffic made the trolleys more difficult to run in the core city.

In 1963, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority purchased the remaining streetcar lines and replaced them all with diesel buses. The end of the 20th century, however, saw the reemergence of the Los Angeles Metro system, with the introduction of the Blue Line light rail system in 1990. The Gold Line began service in Highland Park and its surrounding neighborhoods in 2003.

The Los Angeles Railway (LARy), informally known as the Yellow Cars, ran in Los Angeles from 1898 to 1944. The Los Angeles Transit Lines operated the streetcar system from 1944 until it closed in 1963. | Image courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library

During Henry Huntington's control of the streetcar system, Angelenos became frustrated with the overcrowding of trains. In the 1920s, the popularity of automobiles contributed to the rise of the suburbs and a decrease in streetcar ridership. | Image courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library

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Throughout the Great Depression, streetcar ridership remained low. During WWII, due to the number of new jobs created, number of riders travelling to and from work increased. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

The congested roads, with trolleys, automobiles, and motorcycles competing for space, became a scene for accidents, as seen in this photo, 1946. | Image courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library

LATL car 1523 in an accident involving two cars and a motorcycle, 1946 in front of the Arroyo Seco Branch library. | Image courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library

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When Huntington Died in 1927, his estate took control over the railway. The company then sold the trolley system to National City Lines in 1944, renaming it the Los Angeles Transit Lines. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

At its height the trolley system in Los Angeles operated over 1250 cars. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

The Yellow Cars provided access to Highland Park (seen here by the Southwest Museum), Boyle Heights, Hancock Park, and Exposition Park, among others. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

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Yellow Car (LATL) on York Blvd. at Figueroa St., 1954. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

York Blvd. at Hamlet St., 1955. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

York Blvd. at Avenue 50, 1954. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

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York Blvd. at Avenue 50 a block further east, 1954. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

Beginning in 1954, many of the streetcar lines of the LATL were replaced by busses. | Image from flickr user Metro Transportation Library and Archives used under a creative commons license.

Streetcar tracks in front of the Arroyo Seco Branch library were removed in 1958. | Image courtesy of the Los Angeles Public Library

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The San Gabriels: The Remarkable History of L.A.'s Threatened National Monument

An exploration of the rich history and culture of the San Gabriel Mountains and its eponymous river.

Unaccompanied and Pregnant, Challenges of Finding Health Services

One-third of the unaccompanied minors flooding the southwest border are girls, many escaping sexual violence in Central America, and arriving in the U.S. pregnant or with young children and are left to navigate a precarious health care system.

Celebrating AB1066 – ‘It’s About Time’ Farmworkers Get Overtime Pay

It took decades, but now California farmworkers will get the pay they deserve. The California Senate passed AB 1066 earlier this month, a bill introduced by Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez that will create new rules for overtime pay for farmworkers.



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