



Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library photo collection

TRANSPORTATION WEEK

# Old photos show the evolution of transportation in LA

*From horse-drawn wagons to subway cars*

BY **HADLEY MEARES** | SEP 19, 2017, 2:45PM PDT

Welcome to Curbed's first **Transportation Week!**

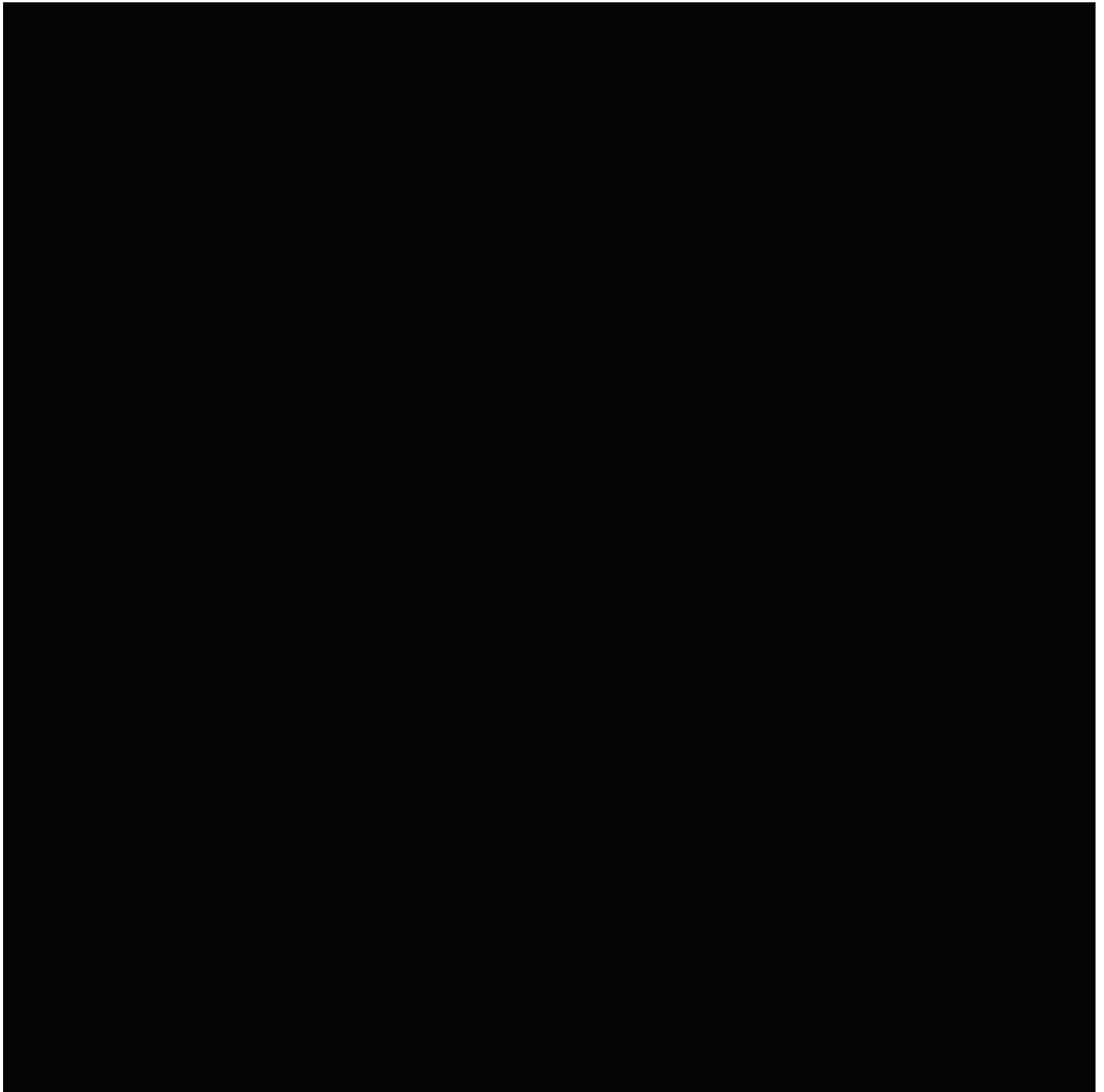
From how to improve public transportation in cities, ranking the best car-free neighborhoods across the country, and a friendly competition among NYC, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to determine which has the best public transit, this week is all about how we get around in our favorite cities. All aboard!

Angelenos spend a substantial amount of their lives traveling (or attempting to travel) from one place to another. Over the past three centuries of LA's modern existence, we've

used various modes of transportation to get us where we are going with various levels of success.

Join us as we take a tour of some of the key phases of LA's transportation history. Trust us, it will be more fun than being stuck in rush hour on the 405.

## **Wagons and stagecoaches: 'The dust was terrible'**

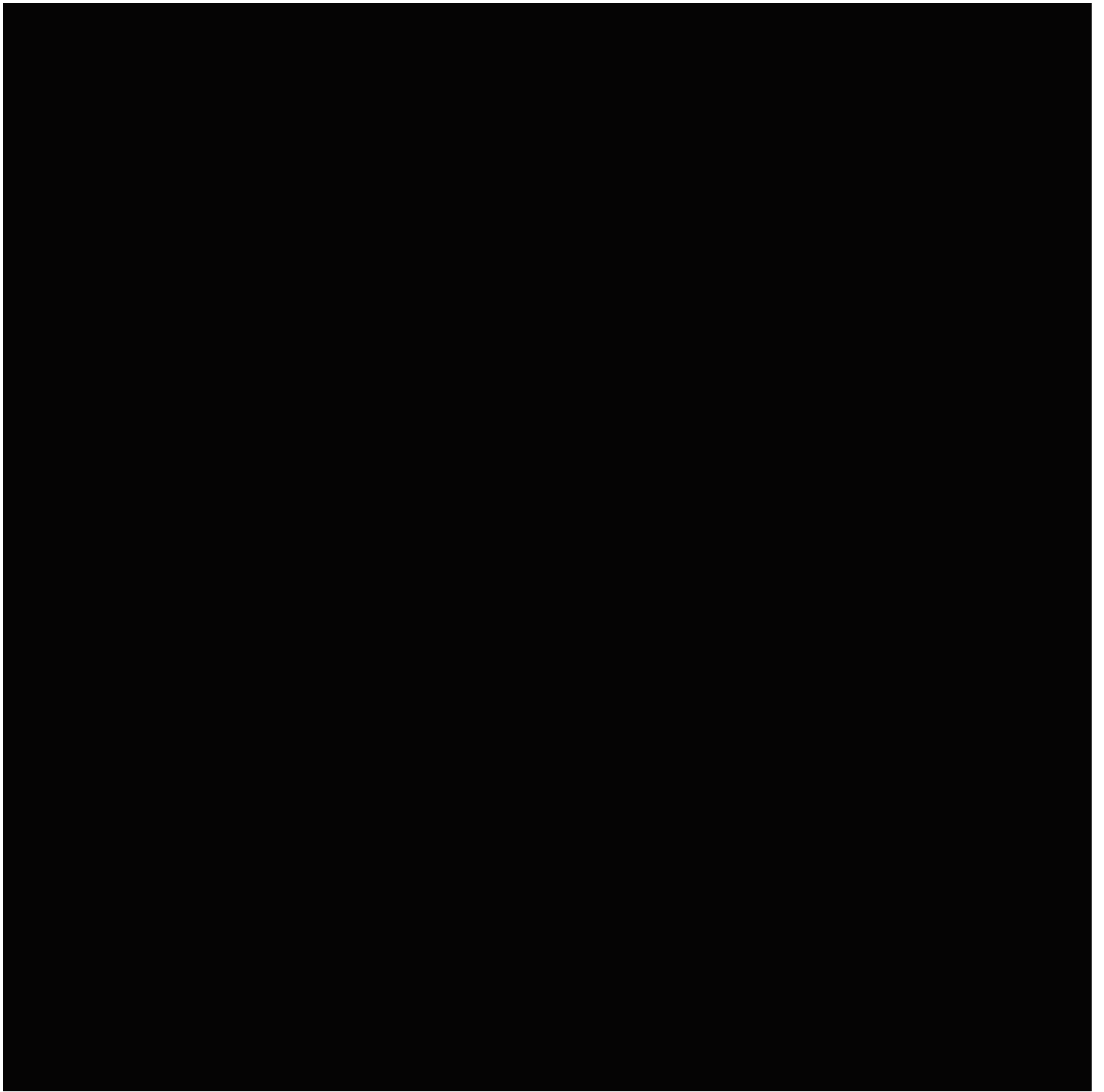


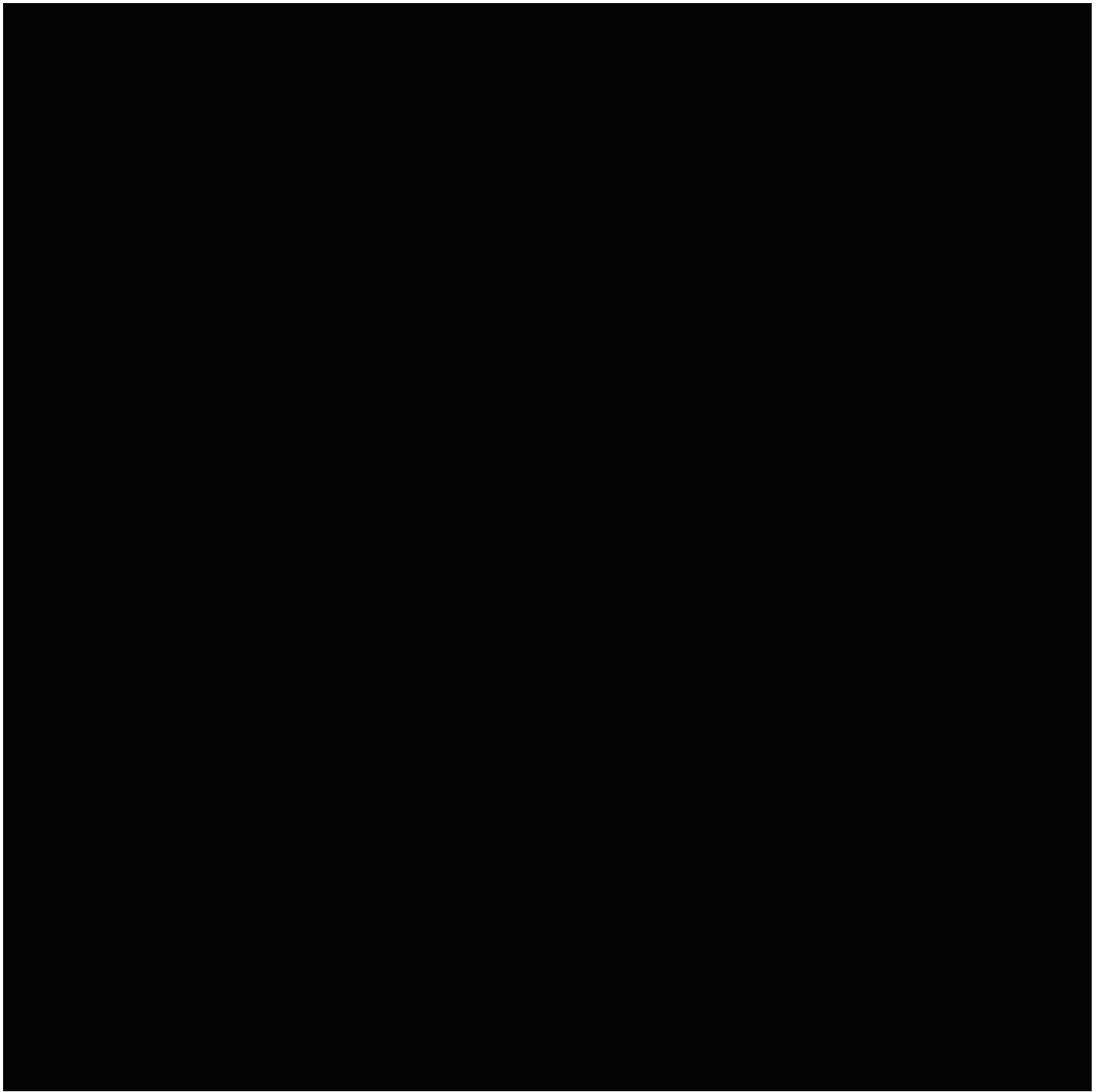
Before the extension of the Southern Pacific's transcontinental railway to Los Angeles in 1876, immigrating to Southern California was a dangerous, deadly trip. If you were lucky, you traveled by boat. But most early pioneers came by horse or wagon train. They followed bumpy, primitive, cholera-ridden trails including the [Old Spanish Trail](#), the [California Trail](#), and the legendary [Oregon Trail](#).

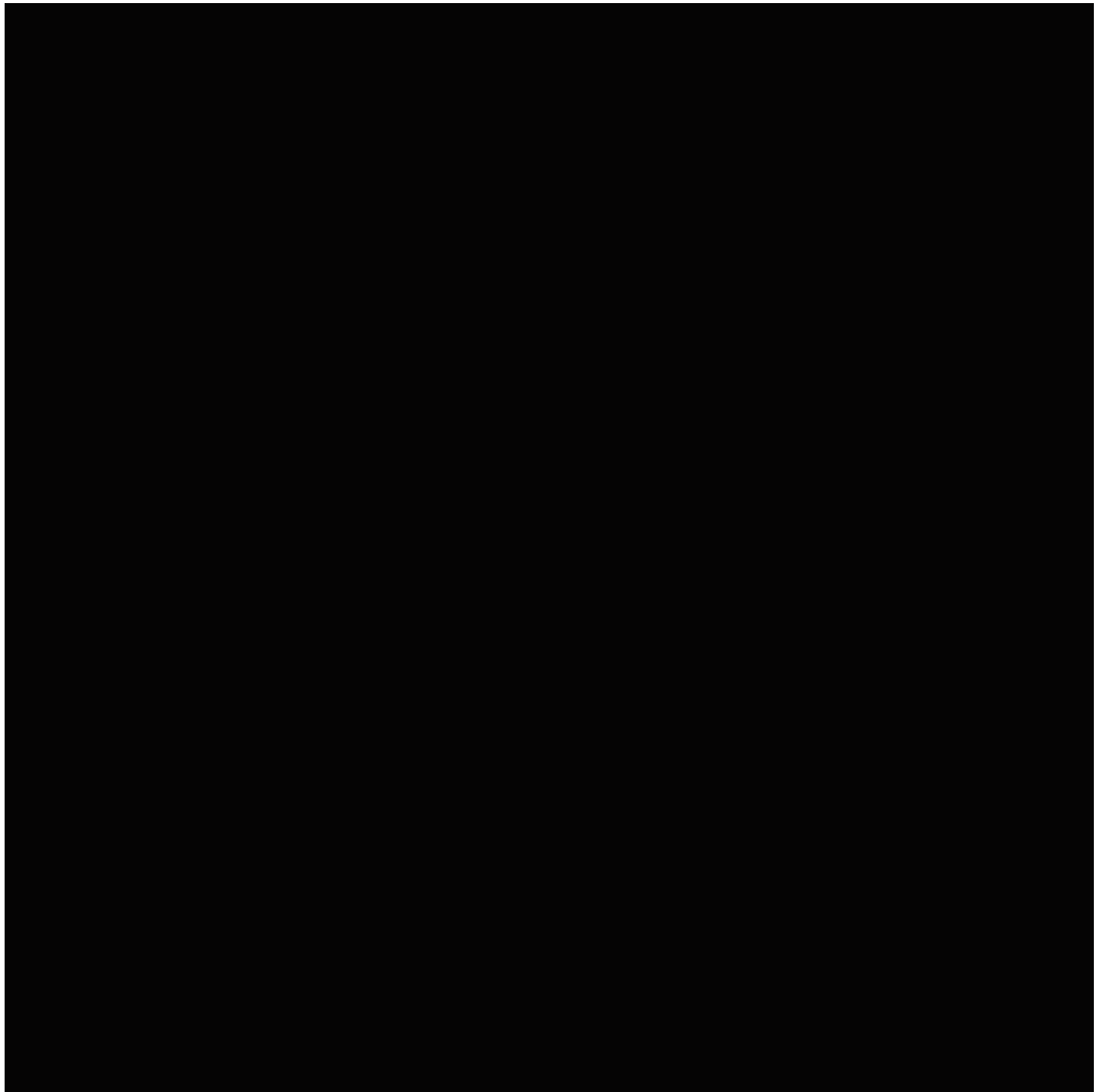
In the 1850s, [stagecoach travel](#), exemplified by the famous [Butterfield Overland Mail](#), became a popular new method for transporting passengers across the West. But stagecoach travel came with its own set of problems. "The motion made the passengers seasick," traveler Katie Leng [remembered](#). "And the dust was terrible."

With the arrival of trains in the West, transcontinental migration became immeasurably easier and safer. The [Southern Pacific](#) followed its first transcontinental route with an eastern route in 1881, and the [Santa Fe](#) followed in 1885. Interestingly, most of these trains followed trails established by Native Americans, Mexicans, and Spanish centuries before.

## Horse power







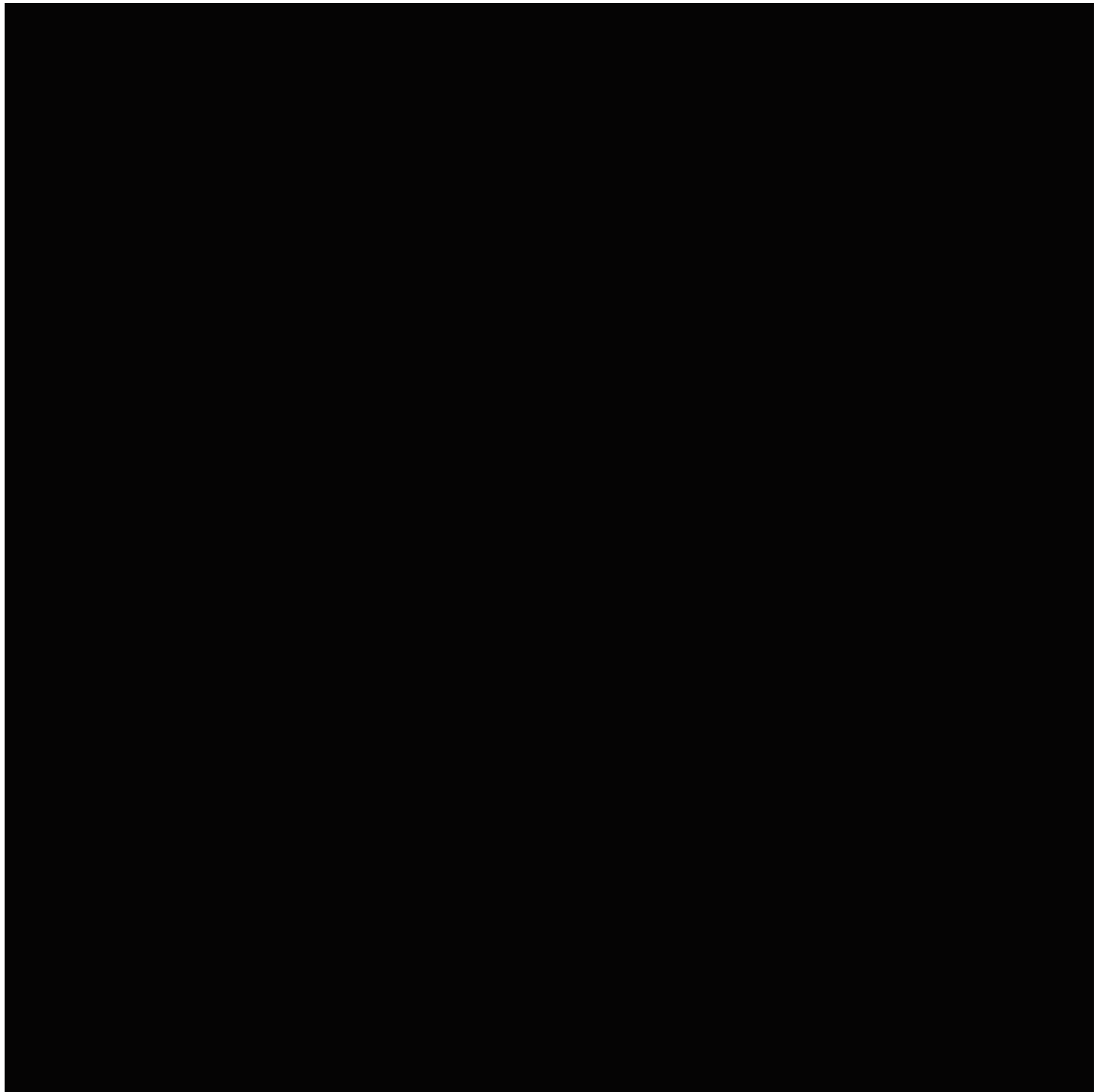
**Top:** Blacksmiths on Spring Street. **Bottom:** Horse-drawn carriages on the sand in Long Beach in 1892.

---

Once early settlers arrived in Los Angeles, they found a pueblo of dusty dirt roads, many laid out by the Spanish decades before. Transportation was powered by a variety of animals, including horses, mules, ox, donkeys, and even goats. With settlers spread out across ranchos and farms, every family and business of means needed a carriage or cart to haul themselves and their goods around town. According to historian Nathan Masters:

For a time, nearly every vehicle on an L.A. roadway—the streetcars and omnibuses of the city's first public transit lines, the hacks and cabs of its for-hire services, the carts and wagons of its farmers and freight haulers, the buggies and carriages of wealthier Angelenos—moved only because of the horses attached to them. This dependence on equine power profoundly affected land-use patterns. In 1900, 8,065 horses called Los Angeles home, one for every 12.7 people. Inside the city, stables, saddlers, and blacksmiths occupied prime real estate along L.A. streets. Outside the city, farmers planted countless acres with the oat and alfalfa that fueled these animal engines.

## **The marvelous streetcar**

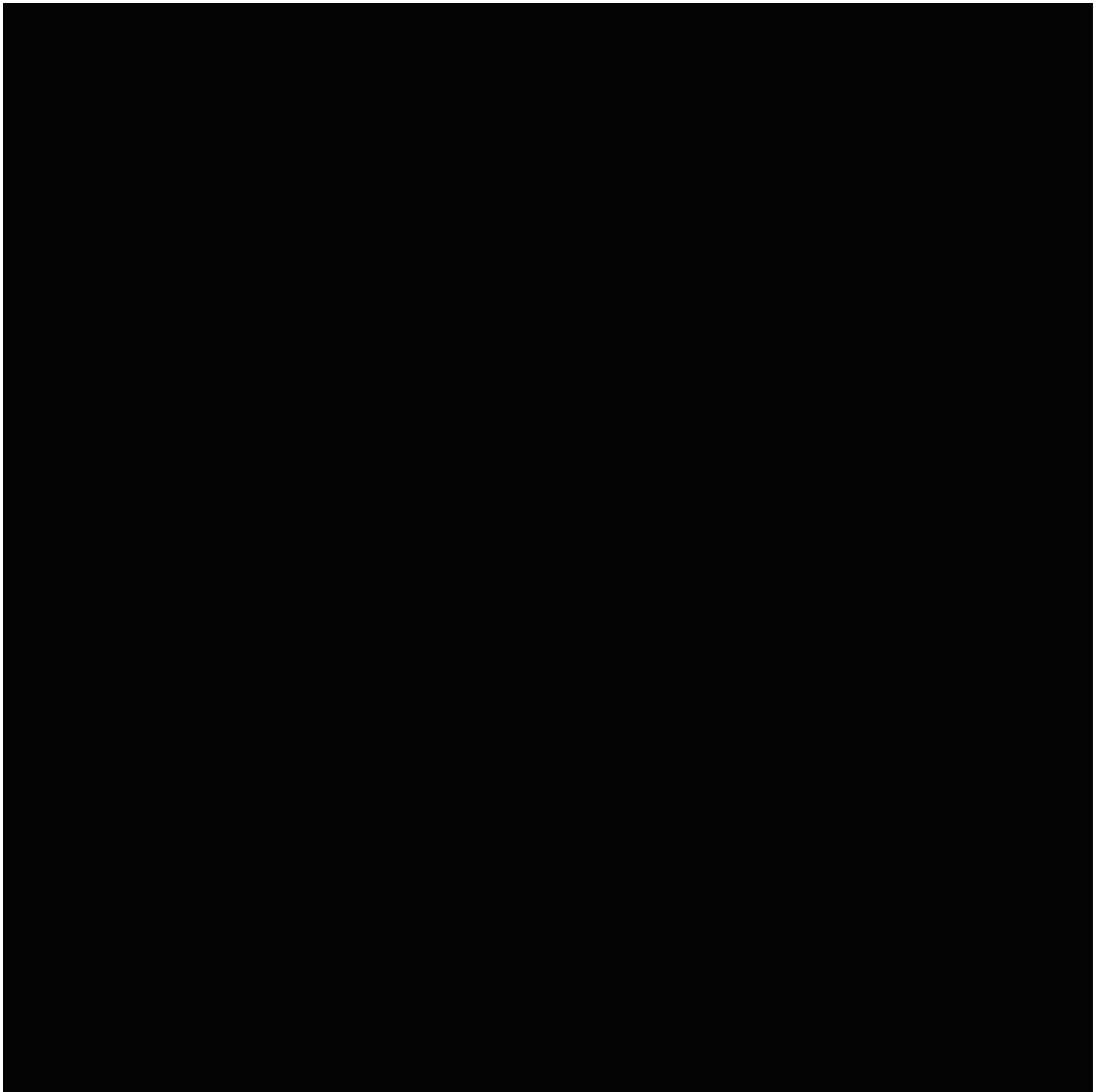


Pacific Electric Railway car No. 13 and workers photographed in 1893.

---

The advent of the streetcar would transform Los Angeles. The first electric streetcar appeared on a stretch of Pico Street 1887. These efficient people movers were a huge boon to developers, since they enabled people to live farther and farther away from Downtown Los Angeles.





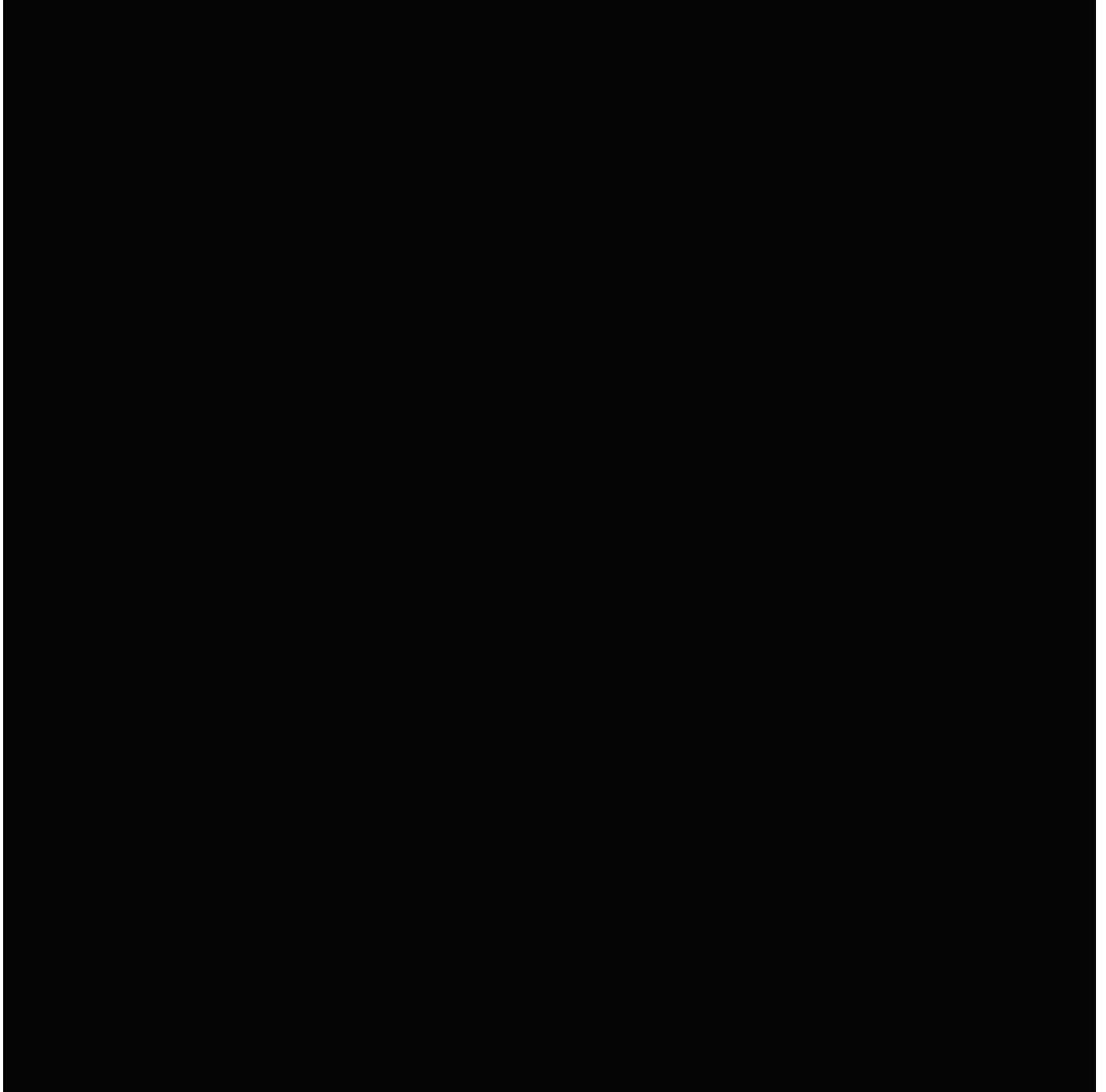
Looking south of Broadway from Fifth Street in 1905.

---

[A map from 1906 shows](#) the entire city and its growing suburbs connected by a sophisticated number of electric streetcars and railways.

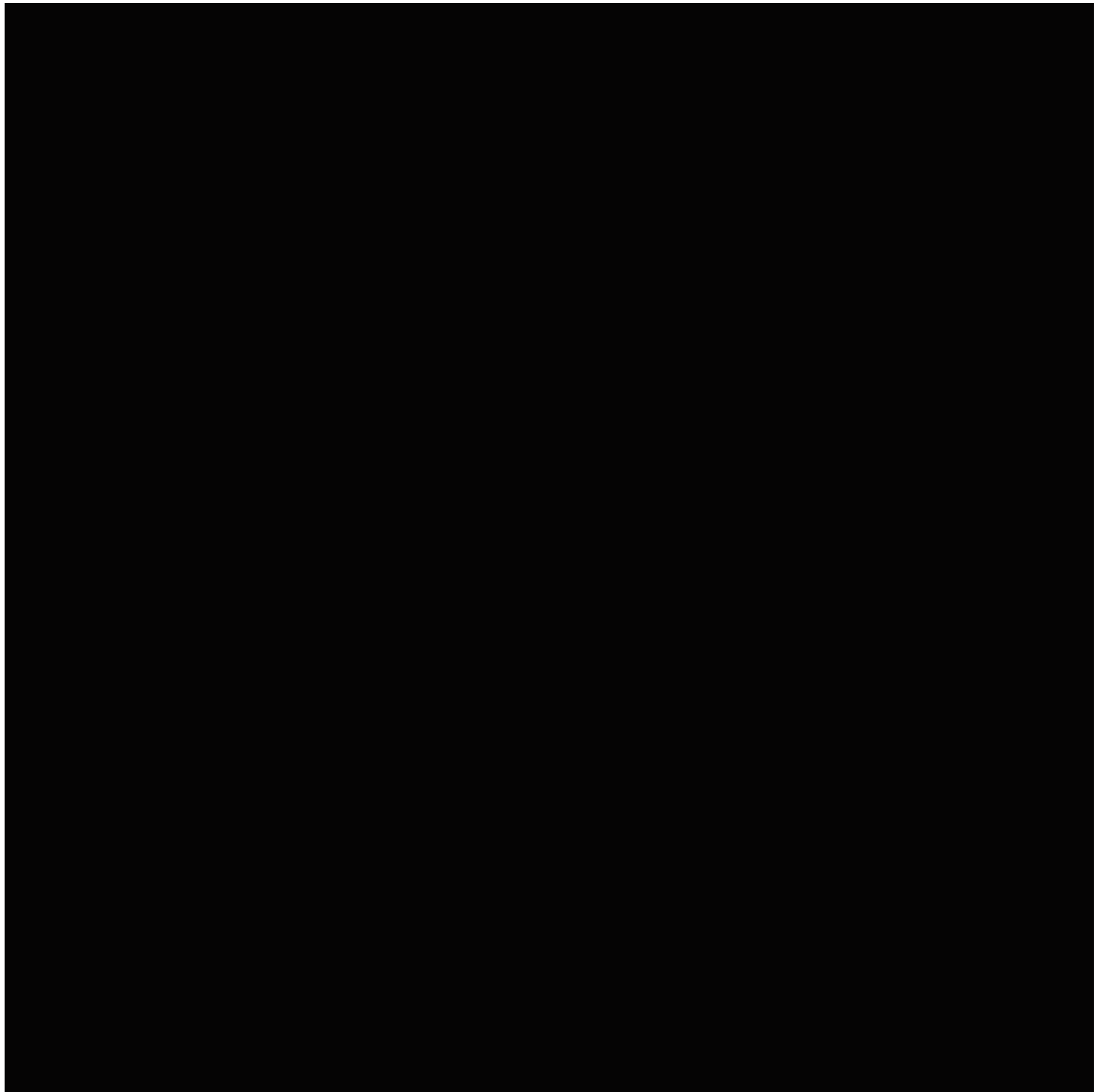
“By 1911, Southern Pacific consolidated the entire electric interurban streetcar network of Los Angeles and operated it as the Pacific Electric Railway Company, whose cars were known as ‘Red Cars,’” a historian for the website [usp100la](#) writes. “Around the same

time, the Los Angeles Railway operated a local system of streetcars in central Los Angeles, known as the Yellow Cars.”



Boarding the Pacific Electric in Hollywood.

---



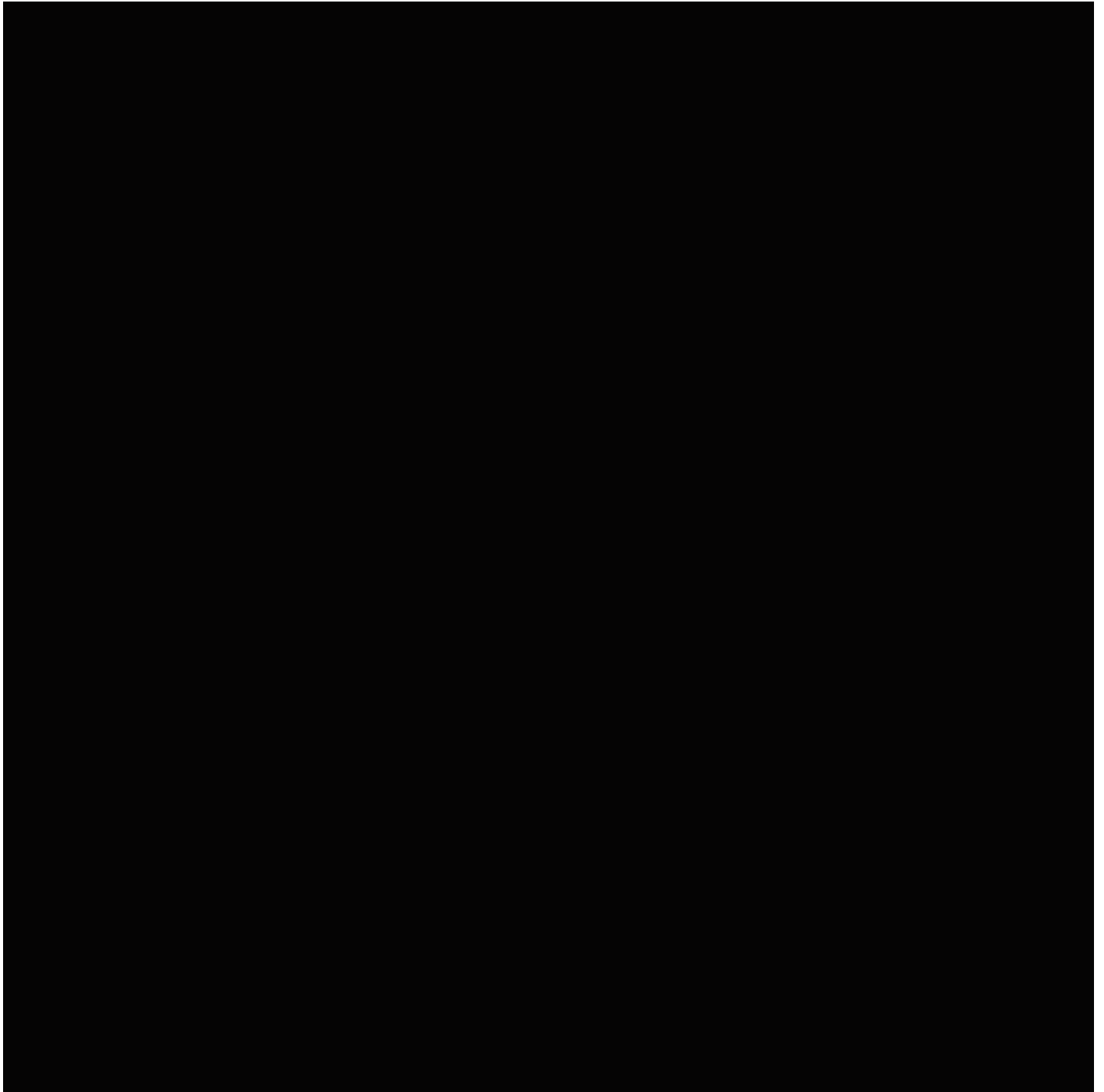
Main Street after Japanese surrender of World War II.

---

“For a half-century thereafter, the streetcar was the model and the marvel of the nation's urban mass transit,” *Los Angeles Times* historian [Cecilia Rasmussen writes](#). “For the price of a nickel, a dime or two bits, the trolley whizzed over more than 1,100 miles of tracks connecting the Balboa Peninsula in Newport Beach to the San Fernando Valley, and from San Bernardino to Redondo Beach. Tourists rode from downtown to the heights of Mt. Lowe in the San Gabriel Mountains.”

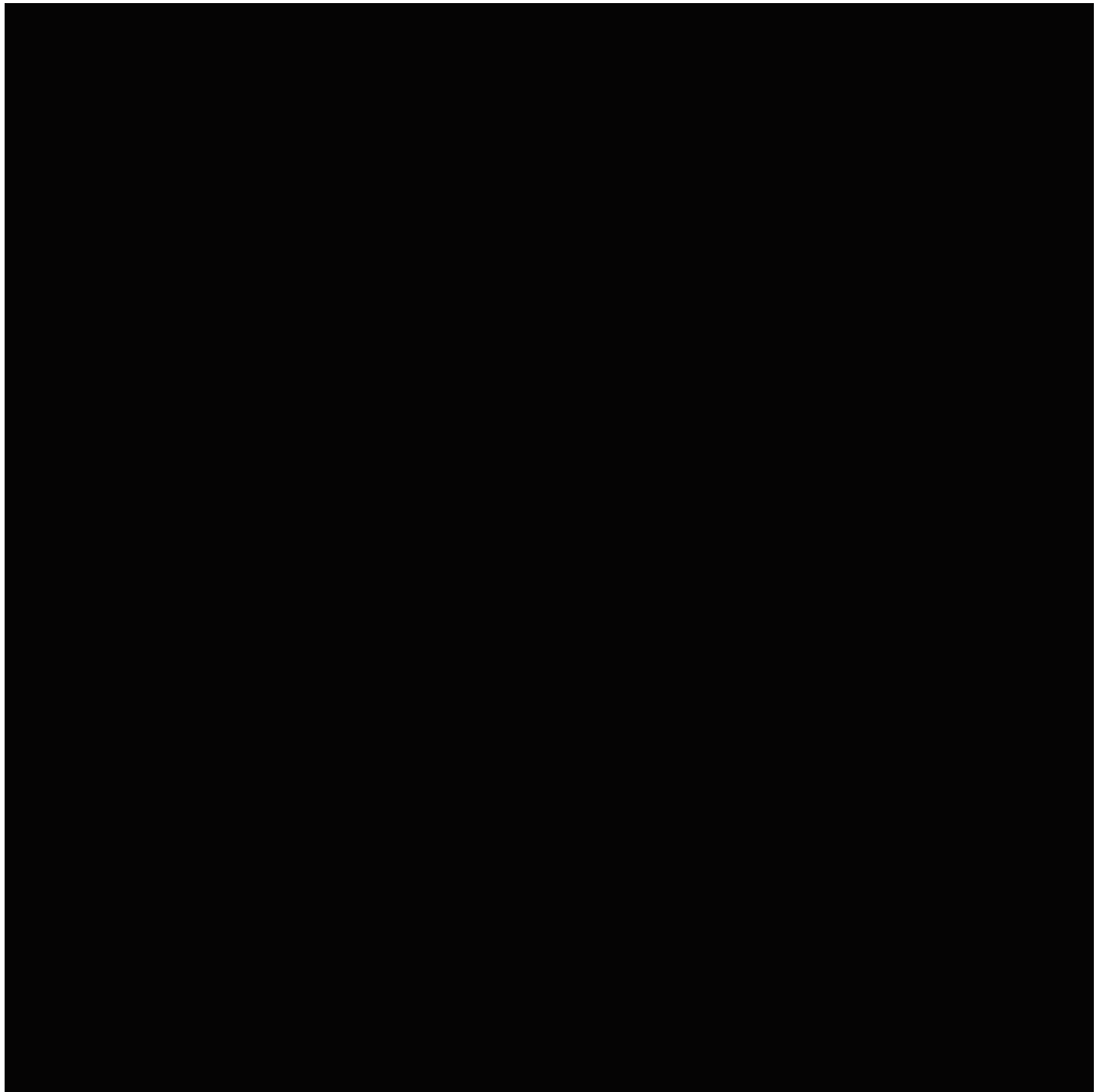
By the 1920s, Los Angeles had the best public streetcar system in the country.

## **The car changes everything**



A horse and buggy and two cars at Hollywood and Highland; the photo is undated.

---

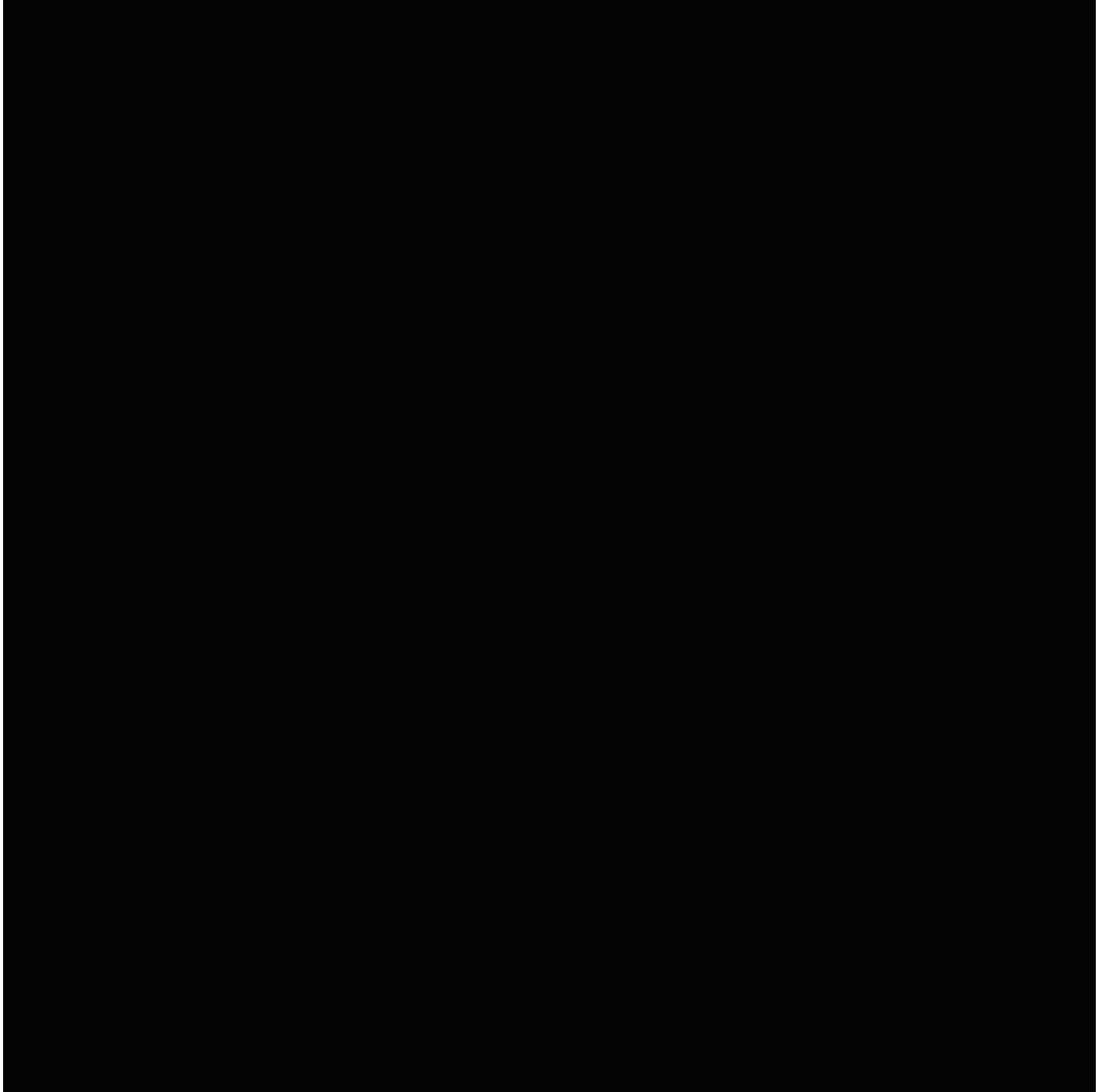


Hollywood at night in 1941.

---

In 1897, “a group of men in Los Angeles built what was likely Southern California’s first home-grown horseless carriage, in a shop on West Fifth Street,” journalist Mark Landis writes. “The four-cylinder, gasoline-powered carriage built by J. Philip Erie and S.D. Sturgis was tested on the city streets of Los Angeles in preparation for a trial run to San Bernardino.”

Due to mechanical problems, the car never made it to San Bernardino. But nothing could stop the coming of the automobile age.

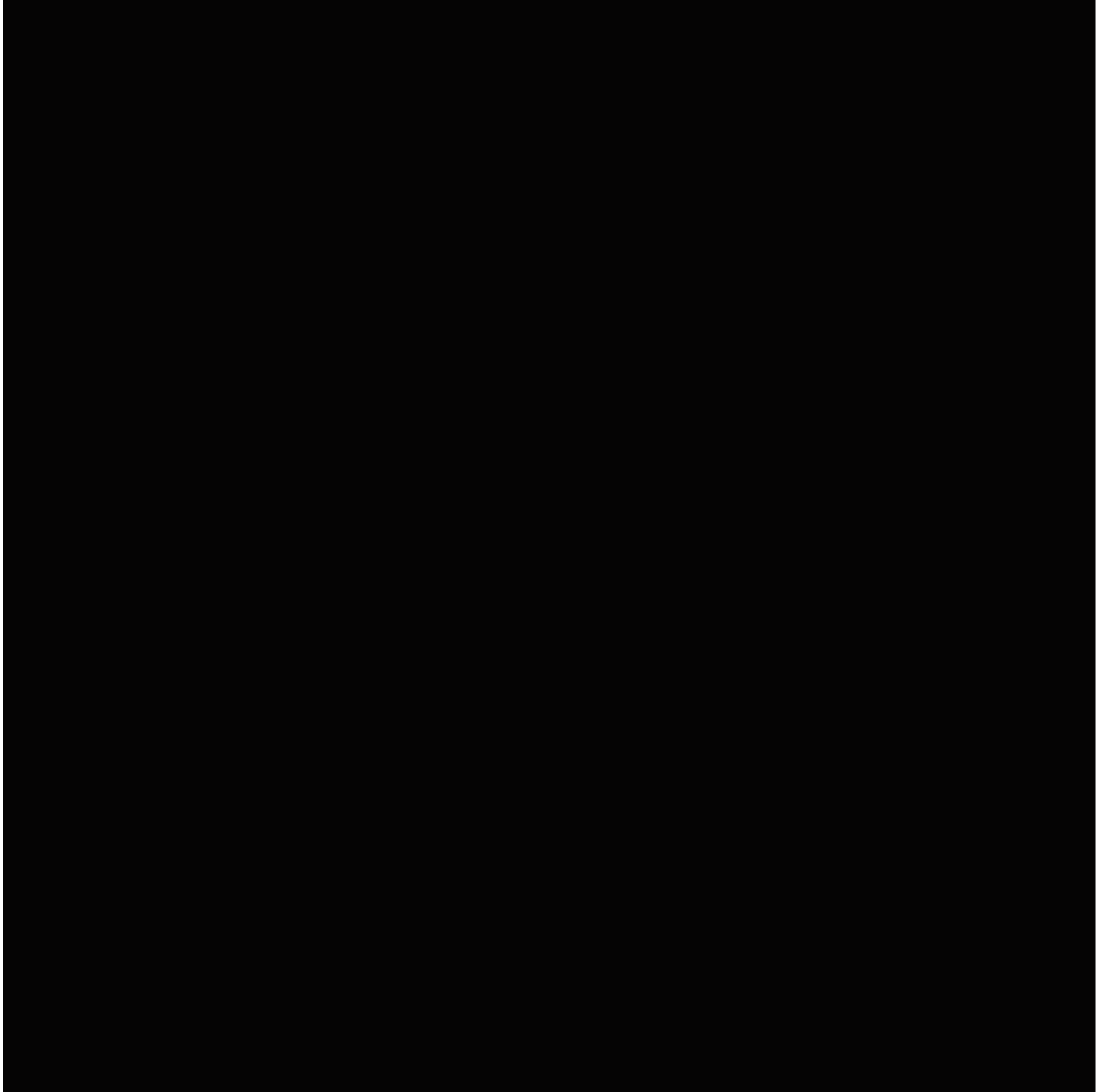


A busy intersection on Broadway, with cars and pedestrians, circa 1920s.

---

During the first two decades of the 20th century, private ownership of cars in Los Angeles grew steadily. The arrival of the horseless carriage prompted the improvement and pavement of local roads, and again facilitated the increasing sprawl that would come

to define Los Angeles. The city's roads became crowded with automobiles, street cars, horse-drawn carts, and bikes.



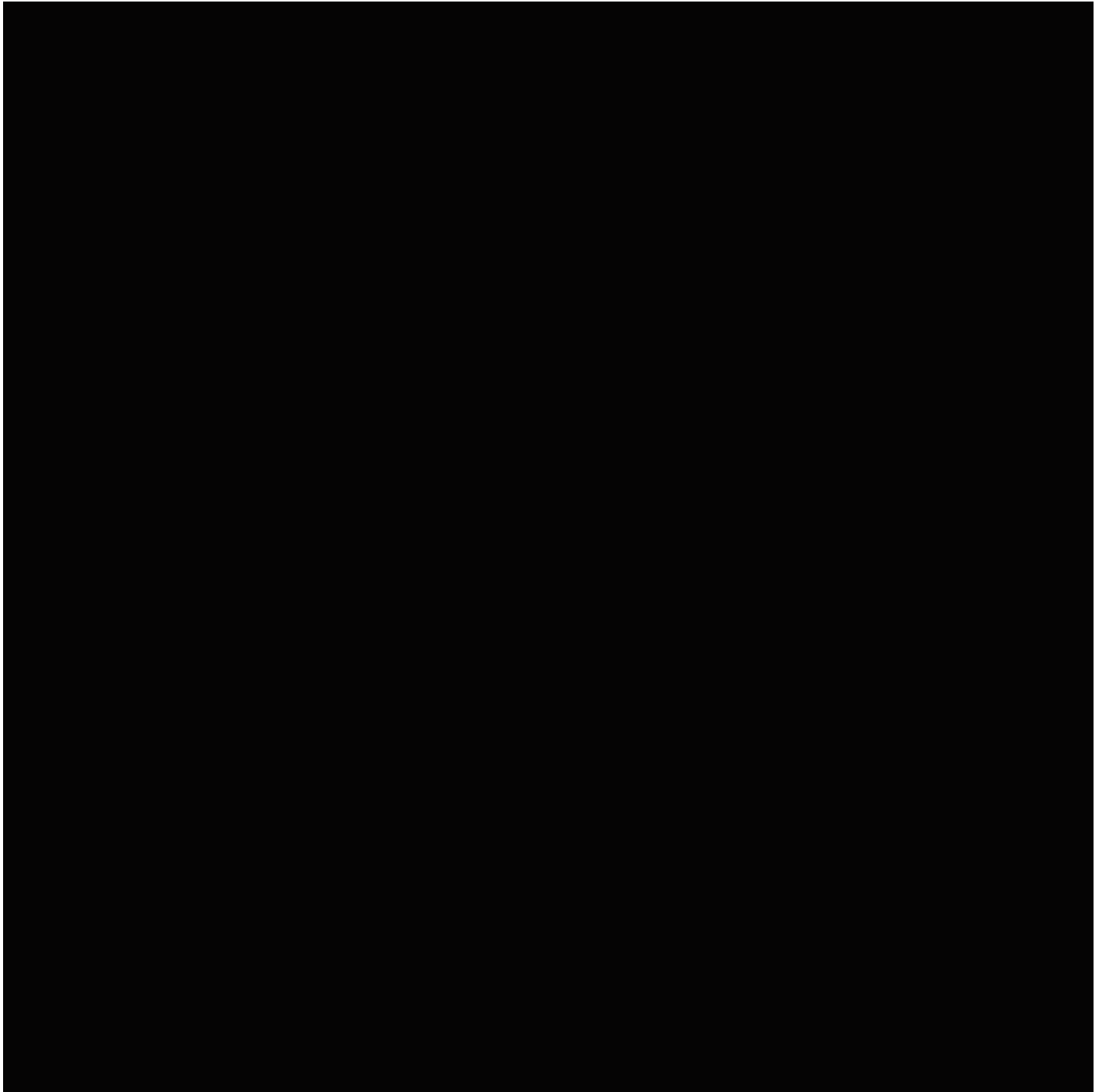
Traveling Roosevelt Highway (now roughly PCH)

---

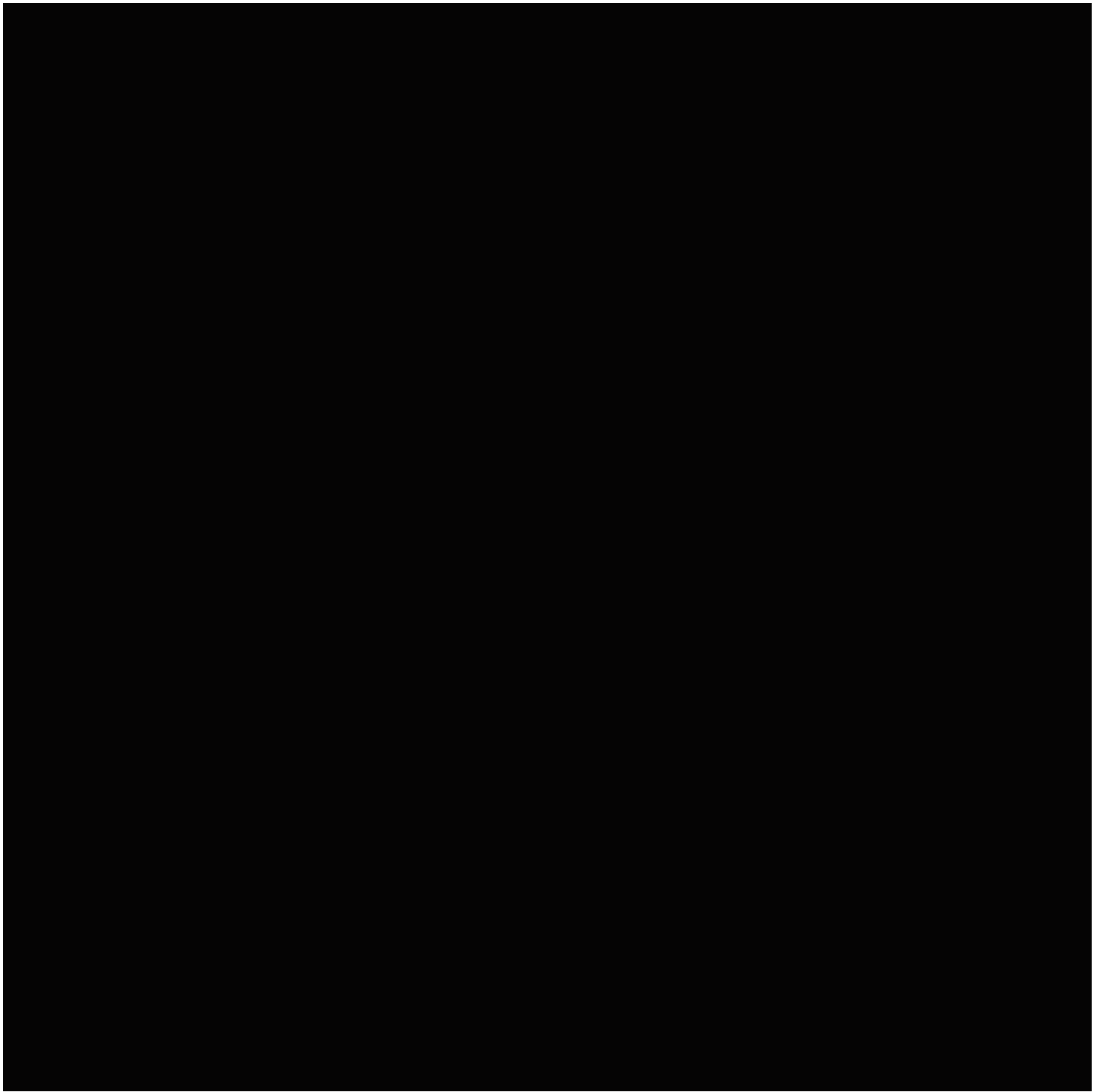
According to journalist Matt Novak, it was in the 1920s that car ownership in Los Angeles truly exploded. “L.A.’s population of about 600,000 at the start of the 1920s more than doubled during the decade,” he writes. “The city’s cars would see an even

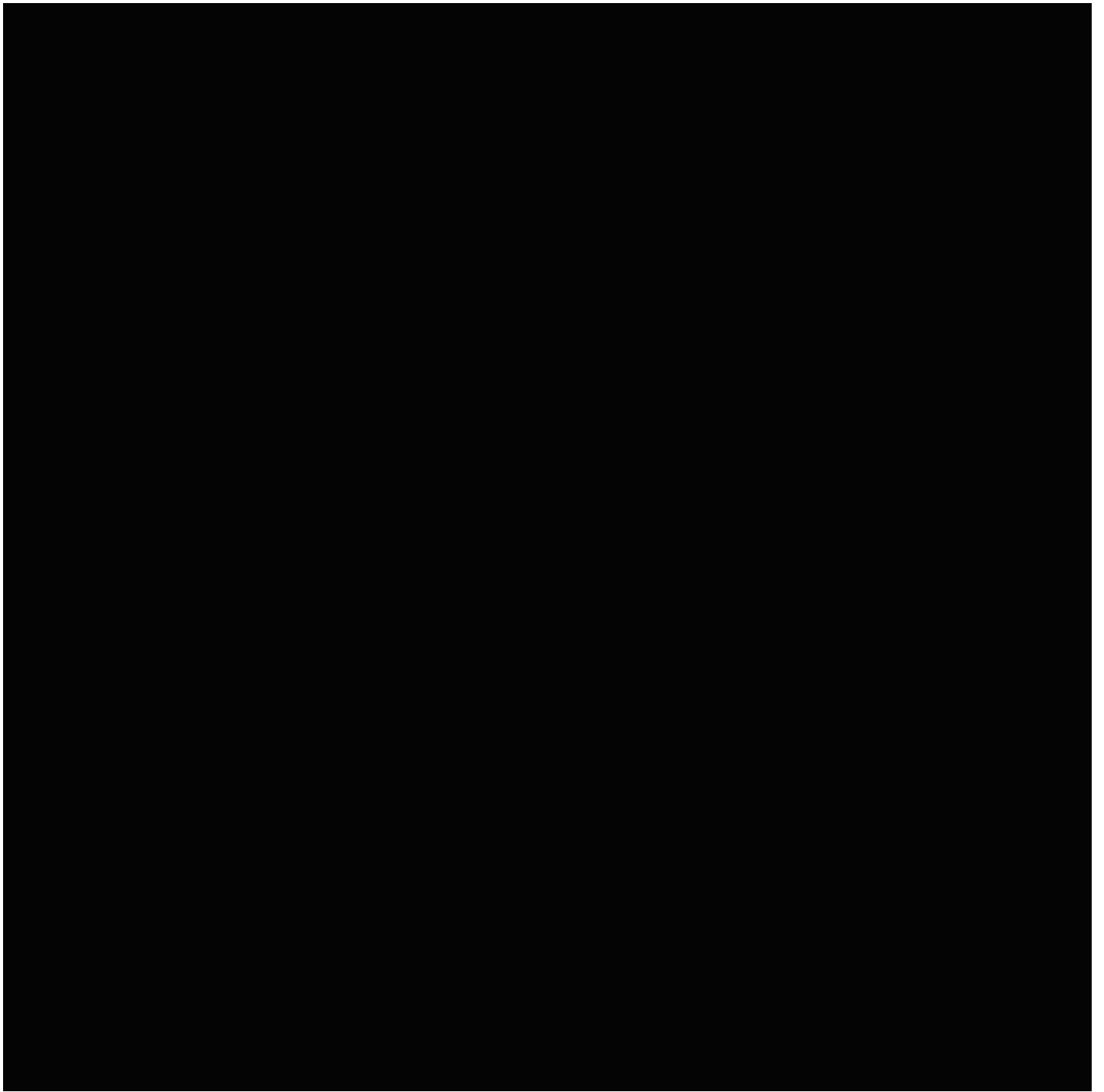
greater increase, from 161,846 cars registered in L.A. County in 1920 to 806,264 registered in 1930. In 1920 Los Angeles had about 170 gas stations. By 1930 there were over 1,500.”

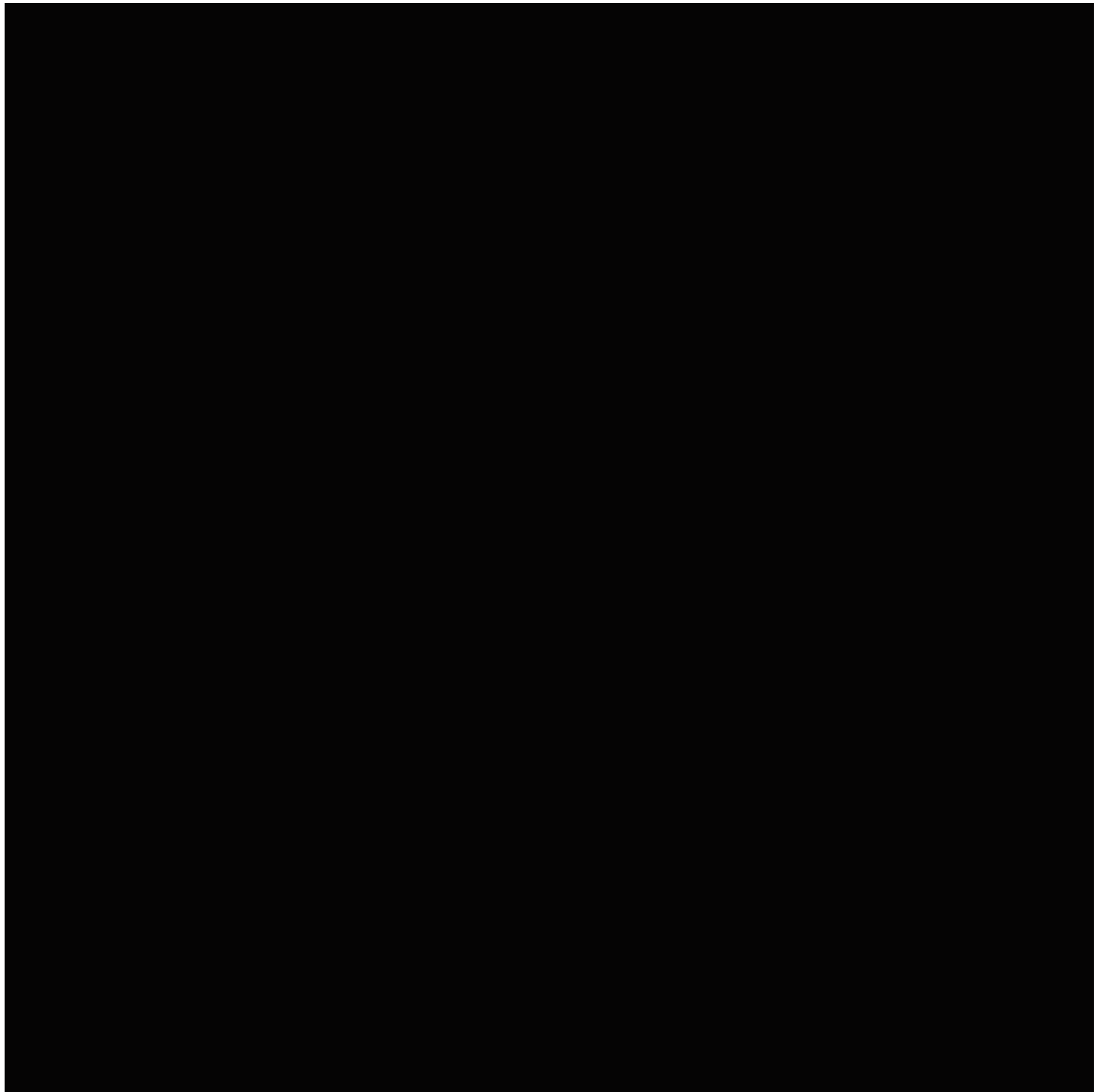
## **The old Hollywood subway**











**Top left:** Grand Opening of the Subway Terminal Building. **Top right:** Belmont Tunnel opening in 1926. **Bottom left:** Inside the Subway Terminal Building. **Bottom right:** The tracks underground the Subway Terminal Building.

---

With the arrival of the automobile age, central Los Angeles—particularly Downtown—grew increasingly gridlocked. To combat traffic, Pacific Electric built LA’s first subway.

Known at the time as the "Hollywood Subway" or the Pacific Electric Subway, the mile-long concrete and steel tunnel began in a Downtown terminus below the massive new Subway Terminal Building, designed by the firm of Shultze and Weaver, at 417 South Hill