

MYmetro History of Division 7

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Division 7 History

West Hollywood

Division 7 in West Hollywood began as the Los Angeles Pacific Rail Company's Sherman Yard in 1896. It was built by Eli Clark and Moses H. Sherman, for whom Clark Drive, Shermanton (now West Hollywood), and Sherman Avenue (now Santa Monica Boulevard) were first named. They were early pioneers of interurban electric railways that laid track from downtown to the sea. Their Los Angeles to Santa Monica line opened on April 1, 1896 to an excited beach crowd in Santa Monica. They purchased the 5.56 acre West Hollywood site in January 1896, and an additional 13.81 acres of reclaimed land in 1906 after the adjacent swampy Sherman land was filled in with dirt from trackway excavations on Sunset Boulevard. They constructed a steam powerhouse, a power substation, a massive brick car barn, an iron foundry, a brass foundry, a carpentry shop and other shop buildings. The 131 x 222-foot brick car shop that was finished in 1907 and later demolished in 1955, had ten tracks for rail cars. During the early years of the steam powerhouse it was notorious for explosions, on one occasion a boiler was sent directly skyward, on another, the boiler landed on Clark street. Employees were glad to see the steam powerhouse replaced with power from an electric power substation at Vineyard, a few miles away. In addition to regular passenger service, Los Angeles Pacific Railway's Santa Monica line also hosted funeral car rail service with processions

serving the Hollywood Forever Cemetery.

The Los Angeles Pacific Railway Company, however, later encountered financial problems and was sold by its investors to rival Southern Pacific. Its lines and facilities were completely merged into the new Pacific Electric System in 1911, providing a solid foundation for Pacific Electric's further expansion. By this time, Henry Huntington had left Pacific Electric and went on to run Los Angeles Railway, the yellow and green streetcars that ran throughout the city of Los Angeles, until his passing in 1927. The Huntington family sold LA Railway to LA Transit Lines in 1945. Pacific Electric's famous Red Cars operated from the West Hollywood location and were controlled from the Subway Terminal building at 4th and Hill, the most posh office building of its time in downtown Los Angeles. The Red Cars on Santa Monica Boulevard linked Downtown, via Los Angeles's first subway tunnel, with the Westside via Beverly Hills. Pacific Electric's buses operating from this Division served Wilshire Boulevard, the only major thoroughfare that never saw rail service (until the construction of the Metro Red Line subway in the 1990's). Pacific Electric's 1,100 miles of track peaked around 1925, with 2,700 trains daily running throughout its system in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Use of Los Angeles' privately owned and operated public transportation system peaked during WWII, not so much because the worn out cars were loved but because of forced rationing and the war effort. WWII was a time of great change. The need for transit operators to accommodate the a growing war industry workforce and a shortage of manpower for the streetcar and bus systems led to the employment of women and the repeal of state laws that limited working hours for women, and also the employment of African Americans in front line transit positions. Study of employee news magazines reveals West Hollywood as among the first racially integrated operating divisions.

Shortly after WWII, large-scale economic and cultural changes led to the swift rise of highways, freeways and automobile ownership. Without public support and oversight, the privately run interurban rail and streetcar system was rapidly changed over to buses for flexible routing in a rapidly expanding metropolitan area. Ironically, it was rail that contributed the right conditions for the urban sprawl that was ultimately rail's undoing. On December 1, 1953, Pacific Electric sold its remaining passenger rail and bus operations to Metropolitan Coach Lines who continued to operate public transit from the West Hollywood Division. At this time, the Division had approximately 50 rail cars, 40 coaches and 250 operators. On September 25, 1954, passenger rail service was discontinued at the West Hollywood Division. The massive brick car house was torn down to accommodate the growing number of buses. In 1955 the West Hollywood Division had approximately 100 motor coaches and 300 operators. In June of 1956, the Division moved out of the old and crumbling Los Angeles Pacific and Pacific Electric buildings and into new Administrative offices built by Metropolitan Coach Lines on the same site, which included some leisure time facilities such as shuffle board for operators to use between shifts. The last trolley wires came down in 1958 when the freight service that still operated on Santa Monica Boulevard was converted to diesel locomotives.

Meanwhile, in 1951 the State created the first publicly governed transit agency for Los Angeles. It had a seven-member board appointed by the Governor and was charged with proposing a new mass transit system for Los Angeles. It functioned like a think tank and monorails fascinated them as the transit technology of the future. On March 3, 1958, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (LAMTA) finally became a transit operator when it acquired the services and assets of the Metropolitan Coach Lines (Pacific

Electric's successor), including the West Hollywood Division, and the Los Angeles Transit Lines system. On August 13, 1958 West Hollywood Division was officially assigned the present identification as Division 7. In 1959, offices were enlarged by LAMTA to accommodate additional bus lines and operators transferred in from the now disbanded former Los Angeles Motor Coach Division 4, also known as Vineyard Division. By this time, the Division had 200 motor coaches and 335 operators assigned. On June 18, 1960, it became necessary to enlarge the Division again. This renovation was completed in October of 1961. Dissatisfied by the lack of progress towards creating a new mass rapid transit system for Los Angeles, the State rewrote the LAMTA legislation and created the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD), who continued to propose new mass transit systems while operating nearly 3000 buses at its peak size from 16 different locations. By 1974 the remaining smaller rail support buildings at the former West Hollywood Division were demolished to make more room for the Division and what would become the Pacific Design Center and the West Hollywood Sheriff's Station.

In 1977, a newly constructed Division 7 facility opened on the site. During the late 1980's SCRTD entertained joint development proposals that would "double deck" the site with retail above and bus operations below. In 1988, SCRTD agreed in principal to consolidate its Metro Rail subway construction project with the light rail projects being built by the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC), and to eventually merge the two transportation agencies into a single entity. In 1993, the state created the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, an agency resulting from the merger of SCRTD as the main transit operator, and the LACTC as the main transportation planner, funding agency and construction authority for Los Angeles County.

The West Hollywood Division has had a long tradition of special services, from early 1900's funeral trains to seasonal Hollywood Bowl bus service from 1953 to the present. In June 2000, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority chose West Hollywood Division 7 to inaugurate its Rapid Bus Service with 75 peak hour CNG powered buses deployed on the 26-mile Line 720, serving Wilshire/Whittier. The demonstration project, which boosted ridership on the corridor by 40%, led to the acceptance of Rapid Bus as a regular service with 26 lines currently in operation or planning stages. La Cienega Boulevard is currently served by Rapid Bus, Santa Monica Boulevard is slated for a rapid bus line as soon as the City of Los Angeles completes its boulevard improvement project between Century City and the 405 freeway.

Today Metro West Hollywood Division 7 provides employment to nearly 600 hundred full and part-time operators, mechanics and support staff who drive, maintain, clean and manage a fleet of 260 buses, Metro's 4th largest bus division. It is estimated that by 2008, the remaining 30 diesel powered buses at the division will be replaced by alternative-fueled clean-air buses.

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