

A former Red Car conductor rides the new Expo Line: 'It brings back memories'

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1 of 4

Red Car No. 1299 headed eastbound on Exposition.

Alan Weeks/Metro Library and Archive



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Before the Expo Line extension, there was the Pacific Electric Railway — a massive, privately owned transit system in Los Angeles that operated from 1901 to 1961 — and the new line runs along the old line's right-of-way.



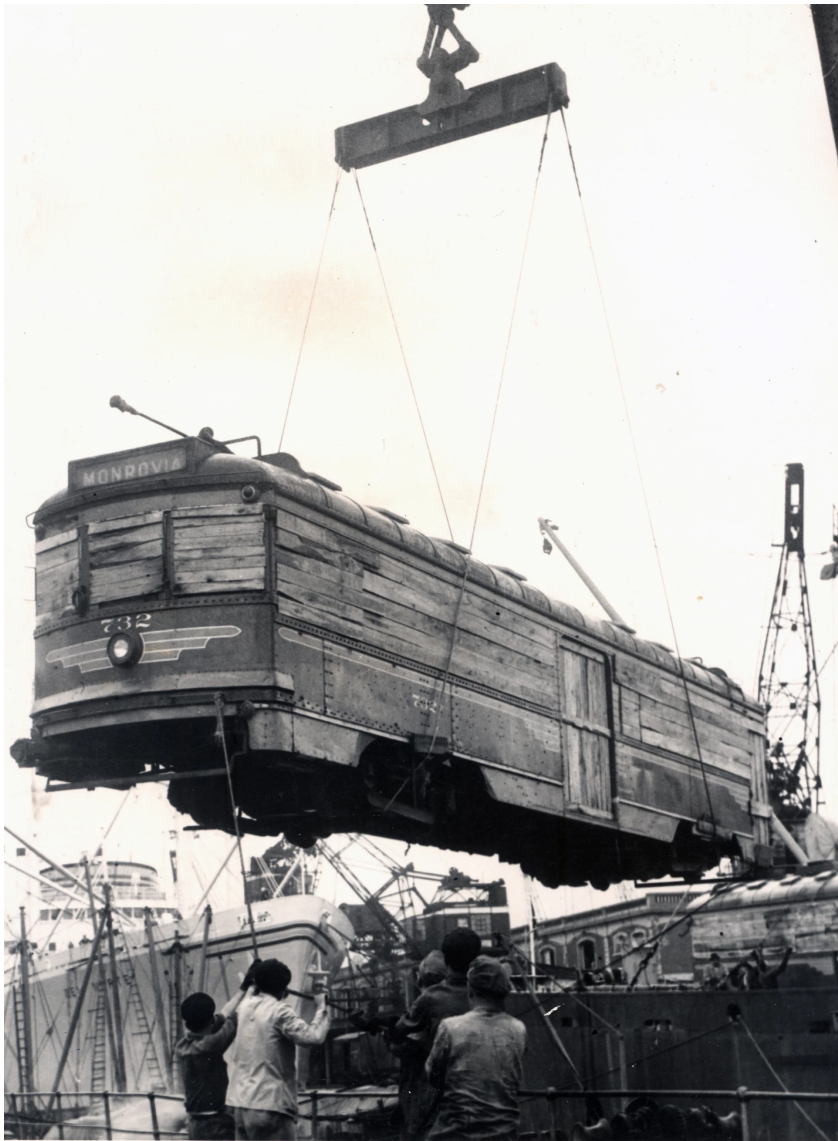
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A Red Car on the Santa Monica Air Line makes its way down the street circa 1940.

One conductor on the Pacific Electric trains, also known as the Red Car system, was 72-year-old Virlon Smoot.

When Smoot worked on the trains in the '60s and '70s they only carried cargo, not passengers, but he remembers riding on the old streetcars with his grandmother to go to downtown Los Angeles from Alhambra. He recently had the chance to ride the Expo Line.





Metro Library And Archive Via Flickr

“It brings back memories, in that I know roughly where I’m at, and I can remember going to the middle of Santa Monica Boulevard to the old Continental Bakery,” Smoot told KPCC.

Looking at present-day Los Angeles, Smoot says seeing trains running on the old right-of-way again is a very gratifying feeling.

“I think this is the most fantastic thing that’s ever happened to the city of Los Angeles and the outlying areas — is this L.A. Metro and Metrolink rebuilding Los Angeles with their passenger service,” Smoot said. “I think it’s fantastic.”

The Pacific Electric transit system was one of the largest electric railway systems in the 1920s. Passenger operations ended on the Red Cars in 1953 as freeways and buses took



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Pacific Electric Railway Company streetcar crossing the Los Angeles River on the Glendale Line on April 17, 1952.

Hundreds of the streetcars were eventually sold as scrap metal, and some were even sent to Argentina for use on Buenos Aires' streetcar system, [according to the L.A. Times](#).

The rebirth of the Expo Line to Santa Monica begins at noon on Friday, with free rides for the first two days.



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