

San Diego's Class 1 Streetcars

Historic Landmark #339

Our History, Our Heritage, and Our Future

1910 - 1912: The Panama-California Exposition and the Creation of the Class 1 Streetcars

In 1910 the long awaited opening of the Panama Canal was fast approaching. San Diego's leaders decided to use this event to advertise San Diego as the port of choice for ships traveling through the canal by holding the Panama-California Exposition. It was set to take place in 1915 and would be held on a parcel of land just north of downtown, soon to be named Balboa Park.

Early San Diego developer and streetcar system owner, John D. Spreckels, directed his engineers at the San Diego Electric Railway Company to design a special new "state of the art" streetcar to carry patrons to and from the exposition at Balboa Park. The mastercar builders at the San Diego Electric Railway Co. designed a unique new streetcar just for San Diego's mild climate. These large and beautiful Arts & Crafts style streetcars became known as San Diego's Class 1 streetcars. Spreckels approved the designs and an order for 24 of these brand new streetcars was sent to the renowned St. Louis Car Company for construction.

1912 - 1939: Class 1 Streetcars in operation throughout San Diego

The Class 1 streetcars provided fun and dependable transportation to countless thousands of patrons from 1912 to 1939. They operated throughout all of San Diego's historic districts and neighborhoods, as well as to many outlying areas. The Class 1 streetcars successfully supplied the transportation needs for the large crowds that attended the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, and went on to serve through WWI, the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression.

1939: The Great Depression Leads to Retirement of the Class 1 Streetcars

The beginning of the end of the Class 1 streetcars was spawned during the Great Depression. Across the country cities were desperate to find ways to cut costs, and transportation was no exception. The "President's Conference Committee" came up with a new inexpensive, utilitarian, economy vehicle known as a "PCC" car. Almost 5,000 PCC cars were made, and they were used in over 60 cities around the world.

In the late 1930's, San Diego began retiring the Class 1 streetcars and utilizing the more

economical PCC cars. For a short seven-month period, streetcar bodies were sold off for use as private homes. By the 1990s, all but 3 of the original 24 Class 1 streetcars had been destroyed.

1996 – 2010: Saving the Streetcars

In 1996, members of the San Diego Electric Railway Association were aware of the existence of the three remaining San Diego wooden streetcars, and worked to find a way to save them. Their efforts led to a chance meeting with a San Diego citizen who took it upon himself to rescue them, and who has since maintained and preserved them for our future. This citizen recognized the importance of these streetcars, and spearheaded the nomination of the Class 1 streetcars for historic designation. In 1997 they were officially awarded historic status and are now included in the register of San Diego's historic resources as San Diego Historic Landmark #339.

2010: The Centennial Celebration of the 1915 Panama California Exposition and the Restoration of the Class 1 Streetcars

Once again, the Panama-California Exposition can play a part in propelling San Diego into a new era. The upcoming Centennial celebration of the Exposition is the ideal time to promote the installation of what will become a National Historic streetcar line by utilizing the original cars that ran 100 years ago. The line must be in operation before the 2015 Centennial to mitigate potential congestion and restore the original transportation system to Balboa Park.

The historic streetcar line running to Balboa Park will lay the foundation for future federal funding to build a citywide historic streetcar system, which will help guide the growth of our city through the 21st century.

Phase I: A single line of tracks from C St. & Park Blvd. (connecting to current track from 12th & Imperial) up to Balboa Park and the Zoo, with stops at:

- A) San Diego High School: there is a large underutilized area on the west side of Park Blvd., which would be suitable for a large "Park & Ride" parking lot.
- B) Inspiration Point: with shuttles, Pedi-cabs running along Presidents way into Balboa Park.
- C) A Pedestrian stop directly across from the Balboa Park fountain: This is an original stop for the streetcar line and service can be provided by Pedi cabs and trams.
- D) The San Diego Zoo parking lot.

Operating the three restored Class 1s on this route would meet the last criterion for national historic designation and additional phases can be built with federal funds. As

Phase I is completed, the Class 1 streetcars would be nominated for inclusion on the State and National Registers.

2015: The Future

Phase II: North Park is ready with an approved route that was inspired by the Class 1 streetcars. The 2004 feasibility study was accomplished by Jay Turner and Richard Kurylo.

Phase III: Expansion of the line into areas such as: Centre City, Little Italy, Uptown (Hillcrest), University Heights, Normal Heights, Golden Hill & Southeast San Diego, Bario Logan.

Phase IV: The streetcars could continue on their original routes and connect to the airport, beaches, and up to La Jolla.

Each historic district needs to develop an approved route, and a plan to mitigate the impacts of the installation of the system. This way each district can guide its own growth in such a way that the objectives of the district are met.

Additional cars can be produced by Gomaco, a company that specializes in restoration and reproduction of heritage streetcars. Decentralized parking structures can be built in each of our historic business districts, like the one already in North Park, and the streetcar line will connect them all with Balboa Park and to the Downtown Loop.

Other Historic Streetcar Systems and the Benefits They Provide

Over 30 streetcar projects are active in the United States today, providing rich cultural and financial benefits. As seen in San Francisco, New Orleans, Memphis, Portland, Charlotte, and many more, the streetcars bring a “wow!” factor that stimulates the economy, and generates revenue. In Charlotte, the city invested \$40 million in the redevelopment of a streetcar line. It was estimated that the streetcar lure brought in \$400 million in new business projects surrounding the line. According to the Memphis Center City Commission, the streetcar project stimulated growth along the line that amounted to over \$2 billion. Imagine what they could do for San Diego.

Also, with electric streetcars that were designed to run throughout the streets of San Diego, there is a great opportunity to utilize green energy to power transportation.

The historic streetcars can bring our citizens together through our history and heritage, connecting our hearts and homes.

For more information please visit our website:
www.sandiegohistoricstreetcars.org.