

BACKGROUNDER

Early Seattle Connected by Streetcars

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, streetcars boosted development in Seattle business districts, providing direct rail connection to growing neighborhoods including Fremont, University District, Madison Park, West Seattle, Rainier Valley and Greenlake. These communities flourished due in large part to their proximity to these streetcar lines. Like many cities along the West Coast, Seattle's streetcars were eventually removed during the post-war advent of mass-produced, affordable automobiles. As cities evolved across the country, transit lines – including bus service, subways and streetcars – began to slowly make their way back into urban environments.

Strong Demand Across U.S. Drives Powerful Resurgence in City Living, Amenities and New Transit

Driven by a combined lifestyle demand from downsizing Baby Boomers and urban-dwelling Echo Boomers, downtown cores and urban spaces across the United States are flourishing like never before. As such, transit connections and infrastructure needs to meet the urban demand that is also booming.

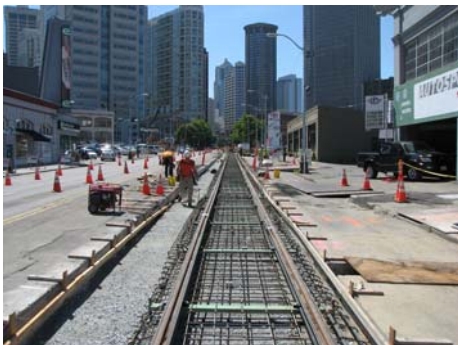


Seattle's first horse-drawn streetcar began service in 1884. Photo courtesy MOHAI and historylink.org.

One of the most popular methods cities such as Portland, Atlanta, Tampa Bay and San Diego have utilized to efficiently and effectively meet this demand is the creation of modern streetcar systems. Not only have these cities found streetcars to increase transit ridership and ease automobile pressures, but each system has spurred significant economic development along and around the new rail lines. Since the City Council approval of the South Lake Union line of the Seattle Streetcar, over 6,000 housing units and 1.5 million square feet of commercial real estate development has been built or permitted within four blocks of the new line.

Building Seattle's Modern Streetcar Network

Anticipating the mounting transportation needs for one of Seattle's fastest growing neighborhoods, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels proposed the Seattle Streetcar South Lake Union line in 2003. The Seattle City Council approved the project by a majority vote on June 27, 2005. Fueled and strongly supported by a multi-neighborhood, diverse coalition of civic and business leaders called "Build the Streetcar", the streetcar project embarked on a creative financing strategy that utilized federal funds secured by Senator Patty Murray, state funds secured by state Senator Ed Murray, a Local Improvement District (supported by surrounding property owners) and sponsorship opportunities. This new approach opened the door for construction and operations of a new transit system without use of the city's general fund.



Transporting riders from the fresh, exciting South Lake Union neighborhood to Seattle's vibrant downtown core, the city's newest streetcar has eleven stops along the two-direction, 2.6-mile line. As the first entrant in a modern streetcar system, the South Lake Union line will connect 330,000 riders annually to the places they live, work, and socialize in South Lake Union, Denny Triangle and the downtown retail core. The system will also add a new element to the region's transportation network. The streetcar conveniently connects to Seattle's other public transit systems including METRO buses, Sound Transit buses, trains and light rail and the Monorail.

From project approval to completion in just two years, the Seattle Streetcar will begin operations in South Lake Union in December 2007. Champions from the Build the Streetcar coalition are now working together with the Streetcar Alliance to advocate for a larger, citywide Seattle Streetcar network. In September 2007, the Mayor allocated funds in his 2008 budget to advance engineering of a streetcar network.