

FAQs

Multiple sources cited including Omaha Streetcar, and Preservation Railway

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a streetcar?

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It doesn't seem like a lot of people use McKinney Avenue's Trolley system.

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Why use technology from the 1800's? Why not go with something futuristic?

Frequently Answered Questions

What is a streetcar?

Streetcars are vehicles which run on rail, travel with traffic and are powered by electricity. Many are just single car systems where each car operates independently of other streetcars in the overall system. Occasionally you will find systems with two or more streetcars linked together to accommodate more passengers. Streetcars are a local transit solution for a downtown district or an urban neighborhood, like Oak Cliff. As seen by any light rail station, or rails-to-trail project, development of a streetcar system acts as a catalyst for an areas redevelopment, and is a direct facilitator for creating a pedestrian friendly environment.

Why return the streetcar system to Oak Cliff?

Oak Cliff was developed as a "streetcar suburb" from its inception. For the first 70 years of its existence, streetcars were an integral part of the landscape. This is obvious when commuting around the Jefferson Boulevard and Davis Street area buildings and theaters which, to this day, have limited vehicle parking. For this reason, merchants are unable to acquire Certificates of Occupancies to allow revitalization of many of the historic spaces, with most falling into disrepair.

OCTA hopes to not only help in the redevelopment of the area, but to allow for a more pedestrian friendly city. Many large cities are following a similar trend of promoting people over cars, noting that building a community around pedestrians and bicycles increases the quality of life, which, in turn, ignites economic redevelopment. In other words, developers want to build, where many people gather. A streetcar allows for transit oriented developments, similar to Dallas' West Village and the Mockingbird Station, to grow and thrive. Also, streetcars run on electricity, which translates to no ozone emissions.

Why choose a rail-based system over a rubber-tired system?

A rail-based system provides numerous advantages that help outweigh its higher capital cost:

A sense of government commitment and permanence that reassures potential riders, neighbors, and businesses that service will continue.

People overwhelmingly prefer riding rail vehicles to buses, so rail solutions attract more passengers (ref. Edson L. Tennyson, "Impact on Transit Patronage of Cessation or Inauguration of Rail Service," Transportation Research Record 1221, Transportation Research Board, Washington, DC, 1989, pp. 59-70).

For the above reasons, rail systems typically inspire business development.

Heritage trolley systems provide a sense of historical authenticity that blends very well with an urban environment, especially older, redeveloping neighborhoods.

Trolleys, with proper maintenance, last essentially indefinitely (New Orleans operates cars built in the mid-1920s in daily, heavy service) while buses seldom have a life of more than 15 years.

What type of streetcar system would OCTA use? Heritage or Modern?

OCTA is pursuing a mix of both modern european styled SKODA cars, and historic aluminum streamline PCC cars. The latter cars were the last to be run in Oak Cliff, can and will be outfitted with air conditoning and ADA compliant equipment, and are currently in use on San Francisco's F-Line.

It doesn't seem like a lot of people use McKinney Avenue's Trolley system.

Last year alone, MATA carried 255,000 passengers, and is currently in the works to expand its line further. Highly successful mixed use projects, such as the West Village, often cite the trolley's presence for its development. When detractors observe not noticing a lot of traffic on MATA, they are often not viewing peak ridership times. Similarly, if a twelve-lane highway was only viewed at 8PM on a Monday, very few people would find justification for its existence.

Isn't Oak Cliff already seeing resurgence in development?

Yes, but a streetcar system will help maintain and foster a pedestrian and environmentally friendly community. Developers tend to embrace TOD styled developments, or reviving old buildings that are placed alongside a streetcar line, as opposed to pursuing major teardowns and road expansions that favor more suburban styled big box shopping center developments. Also, the latter styled developments tend to not be seen as major destination points. TOD's (Transit Oriented Developments) like West Village and Mockingbird Station, differ in the sense that they are community and tourist destinations.

I heard streetcars have to be subsidized...why can't they break even?

You're right, streetcar operations have to be subsidized, but then again so are all other modes of transportation. Every time you step on a bus, hop on a plane, board a train and even every time you get in your car, someone else is paying for you to do that. Of course key to it all is how streetcars are subsidized. Depending on the community they operate in, streetcar operations are supported by endowments, parking fees, TIF & Public Improvement districts, general funds, advertising and sponsorships to name several sources. There can be other sources and each community has their own solution based upon their situations. The payoff is in the massive economic investment in the area where the streetcar operates. Redevelopment has occurred in other cities that have reimplemented rail based transit. Closer to home in Dallas, the obvious success of projects like the Mockingbird Station, West Village, and Victory Park, are noted examples of how development occurs hand in hand with rail.

How long will streetcar construction disrupt my business?

Streetcar lines are built two blocks at a time. It takes two weeks to construct those two blocks. During construction, generally only part of the road is closed. Streetcar track construction is relatively fast since most utilities generally do not need to be relocated. As a result, the impact to your business should be minimal. However, once the streetcar line is operating and more people are passing by, your business should benefit.

How is a streetcar line constructed?

Unlike light rail, which require an entire reconstruction of the underground infrastructure to support the weight of the heavier light rail cars, streetcar rail is embedded into the street. Because of the lighter weight of streetcars, most modern streets can already support a streetcar. Construction of a streetcar line can be as basic as removing enough concrete in the road for the rails to seat, less disruption than repairing a simple underground water line. At last estimate, it takes one week to construct a city block worth of track.

Why use technology from the 1800's? Why not go with something futuristic?

You're right, streetcars have been in existence in some way, shape, or form since the 1800s; however, streetcars have also evolved over that time as well. So with a modern streetcar system, you have something that operates on the same principles as they did in the 1800s, but with modern technology. For instance, streetcars built today feature solid state electronics, and heating and air conditioning. Most systems have provisions to help access for persons with disabilities.

Streetcar stations can and do have wireless internet for tracking streetcars. The result is a proven concept that can incorporate new technologies and modern amenities. Concepts such as personal rapid transit (PRT), maglev, monorails, etc, are either pie-in-the-sky ideas, unproven, prohibitively expensive, or inadequate for required capacity.