

TRANSIT

Five facts (and a few ironies) about the abandoned Interurban system

As voters get set to cast ballots on a plan to pay for an expansion of the regional transit system, we look back to a time when the Vancouver area had an extensive suburban rail network, which was finally shut down in 1958.



New Westminster tram cars travel Hastings Street after the Dominion Day Parade on July 1, 1925. The photograph was taken from an apartment on the north side of the 100 Block of East Hastings.
WILLIAM WARD/VANCOUVER CITY ARCHIVES

1 Interurban trains, operated by the **British Columbia Electric Railway Company Ltd.**, ran for more than 65 years, from 1891 to 1958. The first Interurban trains began in 1891, between Vancouver and New Westminster. A rail line to Chilliwack started operating in 1910. The region began building commuter rail lines again from scratch in the 1980s.



British Columbia Electric Railway depot on Carrall Street, 1928

2 The Interurban system reached farther than the SkyTrain and Canada Line systems travel today. Interurban trains travelled as far east as Chilliwack and as far south as Steveston.

3 At its peak, the Interurban had five major lines: the Central Park Line (similar to today's Expo Line), the Burnaby Lake Line (similar to today's Millennium Line), the Lulu Island Line (similar to today's Canada Line) the Westminister-Eburne Line (connecting Marpole to New Westminister) and the Chilliwack Line (connecting New Westminister to Chilliwack). At its peak, the BCER operated 500 streetcars and 73 Interurban cars on almost 500 kilometres of track.

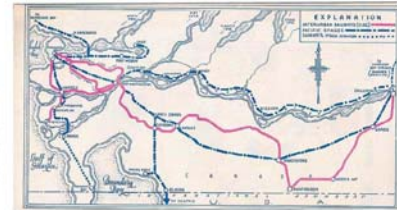


Passengers board the Lulu Island Interurban tram in Vancouver, circa 1908.

4 The Interurban rail cars could easily travel as fast as 80 km/h, and often did. The maximum speed of the SkyTrain is also 80 km/h. The BCER, in its peak year of 1945, carried 144.4 million passengers. By comparison, consider that in 2010, the Olympic year, the entire SkyTrain system carried 117.4 million passengers.

5 The Interurban helped spur regional growth and real estate development. The Westminister and Vancouver Tramway Company, one of the early builders of the Interurban, had four local businessmen as directors, all with extensive real estate holdings in the area. No coincidence that the Interurban line was built to travel through these holdings.

This map appears on the back of a Guide to Vancouver by the British Columbia Electric Railway Company Ltd., circa 1930.



Miguel Moya, Vancouver Sun
Sources: Pete McMartin, Vancouver Sun; buzzer.translink.ca