

Backgrounder

North Vancouver's Street Car System & Streetcar #153's Story

On August 19th, 1906 electricity arrived in North Vancouver, illuminating 24 intersections with arc lamp street lights. Soon after, North Vancouver became a "Streetcar Suburb" where residential growth followed the path of the new streetcar lines, making it possible for people to access affordable housing and ride public transit to work.

In early September, the B.C. Electric Railway (BCER) streetcar system launched its first streetcar line on the North Shore. No. 1 Line ran up Lonsdale Avenue, extending north from the ferry wharf to 12th Street (later to Windsor Road). By December 1912, two more lines were in operation. No. 2 Line ran east to Grand Boulevard and up to Lynn Valley and No. 3 Line ran west along Keith Road to Fell Avenue, via trestle across Mackay Creek and through Pemberton Heights to Capilano Road. All lines terminated at the ferry dock at the foot of Lonsdale Avenue. Streetcar #153 joined the fleet in 1912 and carried passengers up and down the Lonsdale Line.

Over the next 35 years, North Vancouver residents rode their streetcars and utilized the ferries and interurban rail systems to travel through Vancouver, Richmond and the Fraser Valley. After World War II, like many places in North America, local streetcars were replaced by buses and the last streetcar run in North Vancouver was made on April 27, 1947. Several decades later, there was interest in reviving a streetcar system in North Vancouver. Engineering studies were done in 1991 and 2002, but the costs and logistics of re-introducing streetcar service were prohibitive.

History and Refurbishment of Streetcar #153

- 1912-1946 – Car 153 ran on the Lonsdale Line.
- 1946-1970s – Sold as scrap; the car body became a motel cabin in Ruskin, then a restaurant near Chilliwack and later a chicken coop near Ryder Lake.
- 1970s-80s – Moved from the Fraser Valley to the then-vacant Dominion Bridge Company plant, Burnaby.
- August 1986-1988 – Moved to North Vancouver's Mahon Park where it was stored under Fenn Burdett Stadium.
- 1988-1992—Exterior reconstruction by volunteers.
- 2019—Reconstruction continued by a team from West Coast Railway Association, Squamish.

Car 153 – Facts and Figures

- Type of Car: a double-ended, two-man, four-axle, semi-convertible streetcar with a raised clerestory roof, and stained wood interior with rattan seats.

- Manufacture: Built in 1908 in New Jersey by the John Stephenson Co. with 'trucks' (wheel assemblies) manufactured by the J.G. Brill Co., Philadelphia.
- Dimensions: Length 39 ft. 1 in.; Height 10 ft. 7 in.; Width 8 ft. 9 in.
- Weight: 48,950 pounds
- Years of Service: BCER Car 153 began service in Vancouver and was later moved to North Vancouver where it operated between August 1, 1912 and September 24, 1946.
- Body colours: The Car was originally painted green. In 1925, it was re-painted red.
- Double-ender: driveable from both ends. At the top of Lonsdale (at Windsor Road), the seats were flipped to face south, the motorman took his controls and brake handle to the 'front' and the conductor with his fare box, moved to the 'rear'. The Car then returned to N.V.'s ferry dock

Acknowledgements

Car 153's restoration journey took many years with numerous people and organizations involved. Special thanks and appreciation go to:

- **B.C. Transit** and **Brian Kelly**, transit historian, for finding and rescuing Car 153.
- **City of North Vancouver** which purchased the Car, provided restoration funds, acquired replacement parts, stored the Car for 33 years, and designated a permanent home for it in the new Museum of North Vancouver.
- **B.C. Heritage Trust** which helped fund the Car's restoration in the 1990s.
- **Province of British Columbia** which provided funding to complete its reconstruction and move the Car into the Museum in 2019.
- **Bill Baker** (1925-2011), first Director of the North Vancouver Museum & Archives (NVMA) (1971-1991), who championed the Car's return to North Vancouver in 1986.
- Volunteer **Bob Booth** (1919-2015), a retired architect, who acted as the project manager for the Car's restoration from 1988 to 1992.
- Volunteer's **Carl Andersen**, a retired shipwright from Burrard Dry Dock, who re-built the Car from Bob Booth's plans and **Stephen Ley** who completed the final construction work.
- **Robin Inglis**, former NVMA Director (1991-2007), and **Gary Payne**, former City Councillor and NVMA Commission Chair, proponents for the Car's reconstruction in the 1990s.
- Streetcar historian, **Henry Ewert**, author of the 2001 book "The Perfect Little Street Car System, North Vancouver, 1906-1947."
- **Gary Penway**, former Director of Community Development for the City of North Vancouver, a champion for North Vancouver's history and built heritage.

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