



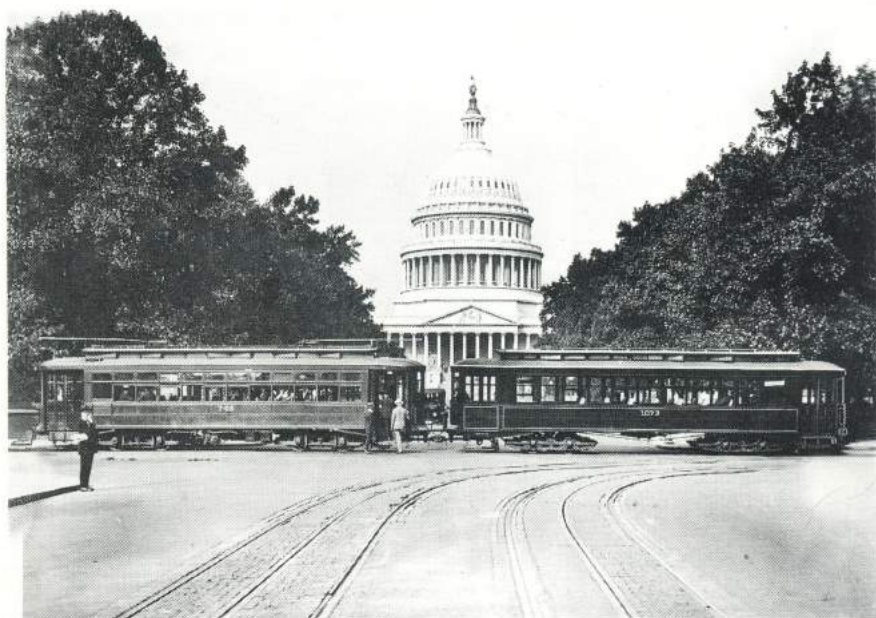
JOURNAL

Volume II

Autumn 1995

Number 2

STREET CARS IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL



WRECo motor car 748 and WRECo trailer 1073 pose for publicity shot in 1923 at First and East Capitol Streets. Notice "passengers" boarding on left side of the motor car in the middle of the intersection.

Washington Railway & Electric Co. photograph
Leonard Rice Collection
NCTM Collections

STREET CARS IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

Large, horse-drawn coaches, called **omnibuses**, provided the first common public transportation in cities. Operating with established routes and schedules, these cumbersome vehicles answered an immediate need for inexpensive transportation for the working class. However, most routes were along unpaved streets which became seas of mud whenever it rained. Even if the weather left the streets hard and dusty, limited horsepower and hilly terrain restricted their efficiency.

Applying lessons learned in coal mines, entrepreneurs in New York City developed the **horsecar** by raising the wheels onto rails in the streets to smooth the way and avoid the mud. In the Nation's Capital, the rapid population growth during the Civil War brought the horsecar to Washington. Beginning on July 29, 1862, horses pulled the cars along rails in Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol to the State Department. Having solved one problem, men of vision tried to conquer the horsepower issue.

Andrew Hallidie also looked to mining technology and adapted it in 1873 to create the **cable car** for the streets of San Francisco. By constructing a continuously-moving cable below the street between the rails, Hallidie enabled the cable car to grab onto it and move along at a steady nine miles per hour. The **gripman** released the moving cable and applied the brakes to stop.

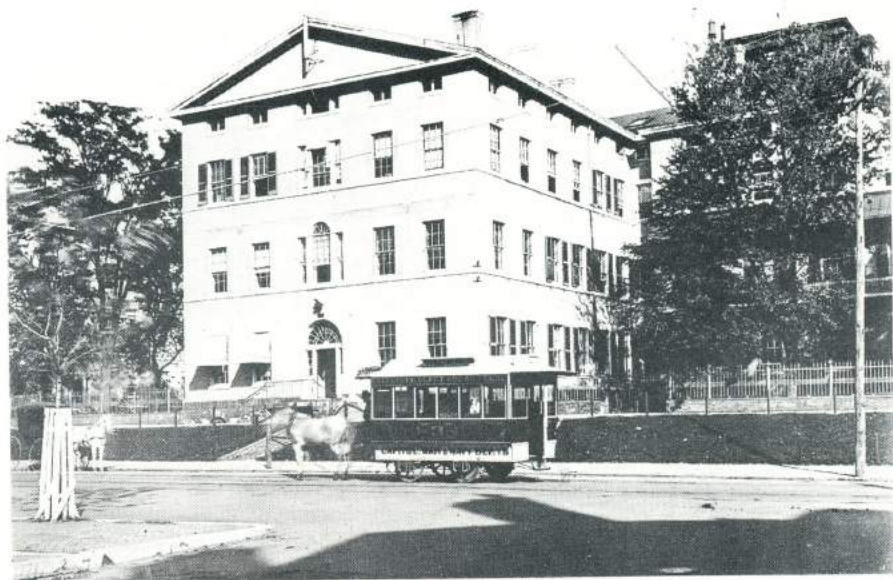
Hallidie's successful scheme transports San Franciscans and tourists to this day and lead to a boom in construction of cable car systems which lasted into the 1890s. Cable car operation in the Nation's Capital began and ended in this final decade of the nineteenth century.

Several enterprising men experimented with electric **traction** to replace horse and cable traction systems. Of these men, Frank Sprague developed and constructed in Richmond, Virginia the most successful design for both power collection and motor to axle connection. His use of spring tension to push a pole with a small wheel, or **trolley** atop it, against an overhead electric wire solved the problem of how to get the electricity to the streetcar. His connection of the electric motor directly to the axle located motors below the floor and enabled them to float with the axles.

NCTM Journal
published by the
National Capital
Historical Museum
of Transportation, Inc.
Post Office Box 4007
Silver Spring, Maryland
20914-0007 USA

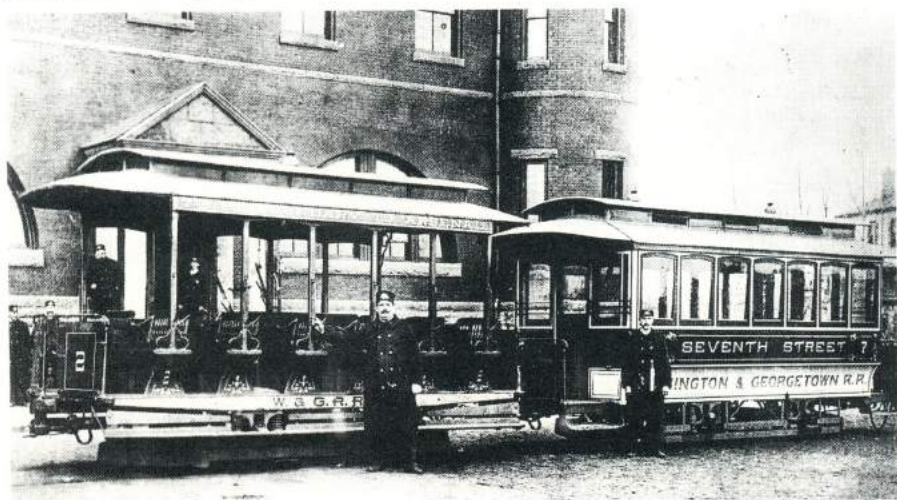
Kenneth H. Rucker
Curator and Editor

Peter C. Kohler
Associate Editor



Operating between the Capitol and the Navy Department, this Metropolitan horsecar pauses on Seventeenth Street south of Pennsylvania Avenue before the Navy Department circa 1875.

Handy Studios photograph
NCTM Collections



The gripman and conductor proudly pose with their train W&GRR 2 (open grip car) and W&GRR 7 (closed trailer) before the Seventh Street car house.

Leet Brothers photograph
NCTM Collections



E&SHRy closed motor car 5 and E&SHRy double-deck trailer 13 north of Boundary Street (Florida Avenue) circa 1889.

Handy Studios
NCTM Collections

The popular use of the word trolley to denote the whole streetcar tells it all. A new construction boom began and lasted into the 1920s. Finally, an inexpensive, fast means of urban transportation was available, and it could serve equally well in rural areas.

The development of the **electric street railway** dramatically altered the lives of Americans and grew into an industry of 44,800 miles of track; 295,000 employees; and 11.3 billion passengers by 1917. Factory workers moved to better housing some distance from their places of employment. Middle-class families created the suburbs. Farmers became less isolated from nearby towns. Commercial and entertainment centers prospered as the developing mass society moved to the tune of the singing trolley wire.

Around the Nation's Capital, electric traction enjoyed its first applications outside the "City of Washington" which Congress had determined would see no overhead wires. Thus in the 1890s while other cities were building streetcar lines, the *Washington and Georgetown Railroad* and the *Columbia Railway* installed cable traction. The suburban *Eckington and Soldiers' Home Railway*, *Brightwood Railway*, and *Rock Creek Railway* employed variations of Sprague's overhead system in the more rural "County of Washington." But at Boundary Street (Florida Avenue) each either stopped or experimented with an underground current delivery system. Following the spectacular fire which destroyed its cable power house in 1897, the *Capital Traction Company* (formed by merger of the *Rock Creek Railway*



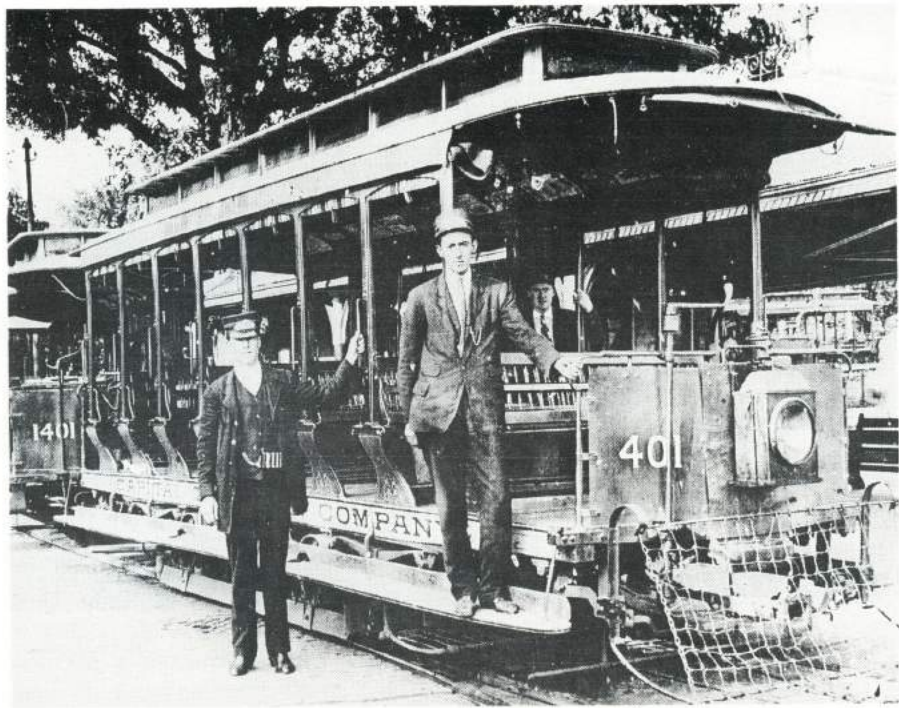
Metropolitan Railroad snow sweeper with a two-car train posed at Lincoln Park (Eastern) car house. Below the platform on which the men are standing is the rotating broom.

NCTM Collections

and the *Washington and Georgetown Railroad*) installed in its cable **conduit** power rails and insulators following the design brought to Washington from New York City by the *Metropolitan Railroad* in 1895. The success of this **underground electric conduit system** meant the end of horse and cable traction in the Nation's Capital.

The history of the *Capital Traction Company* mirrors the development of street railways in America. Beginning as a horsecar line, the *Washington and Georgetown Railroad*, the *Company* provided service from the Navy Yard to Georgetown via Pennsylvania Avenue.

Expansion followed with horsecar lines on Seventh and Fourteenth Streets. Converting these lines to cable operation in 1890, the *Washington and Georgetown Railroad* merged with the electrically-powered *Rock Creek Railway* line to Chevy Chase on September 21, 1895 to form the *Capital Traction Company*. The new company continued with both cable traction and electric traction until fire destroyed the cable powerhouse at Fourteenth and E Streets, NW on September 29, 1897. Acquiring hundreds of horses overnight, *Capital Traction* modified its cable trailers as horsecars to provide service the next morning.

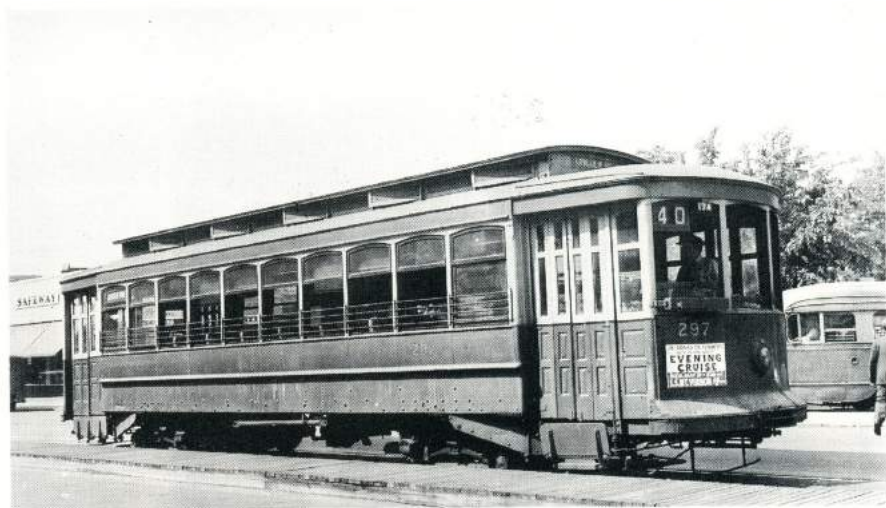


The **motorman** and **conductor** of CTCO motor car 401 and trailer 1401 pose at Rock Creek Loop along Calvert Street.

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Within only nine months, the *Company* electrified its system and purchased seventy closed motor cars (including CTCO 522) from the American Car Company of St. Louis. This rapid transformation continued the reliance on trains of small street cars and left until 1906 the gradual transition to larger double-truck cars from Cincinnati Car Company and the J.G. Brill Company with more from the Jewett Car Company in 1910-12. Declining passenger revenues after 1913 reversed during the governmental boom caused by World War I. Marking the last fleet

expansion until the merger with *Washington Railway and Electric*, sixty new cars (including CTCO 766) joined the fleet from the G.C. Kuhlman and J.G. Brill companies in 1918-19. Looking toward improving service, *Capital Traction* subscribed to the Electric Railway Presidents' Conference Committee for \$10,900 in 1930 and completed in 1931 the modernization of the sixty cars acquired in 1918-19. The *Company* considered an order for thirty-five new cars in 1931, but approval of merger with *Washington Railway and Electric* ended expansion plans.



Wooden safety islands could be removed for parades. Capital Transit 297 was built as one of Capital Traction's 700-series by the Jewett Car Company.

Leonard Rice photograph
Leonard Rice Collection
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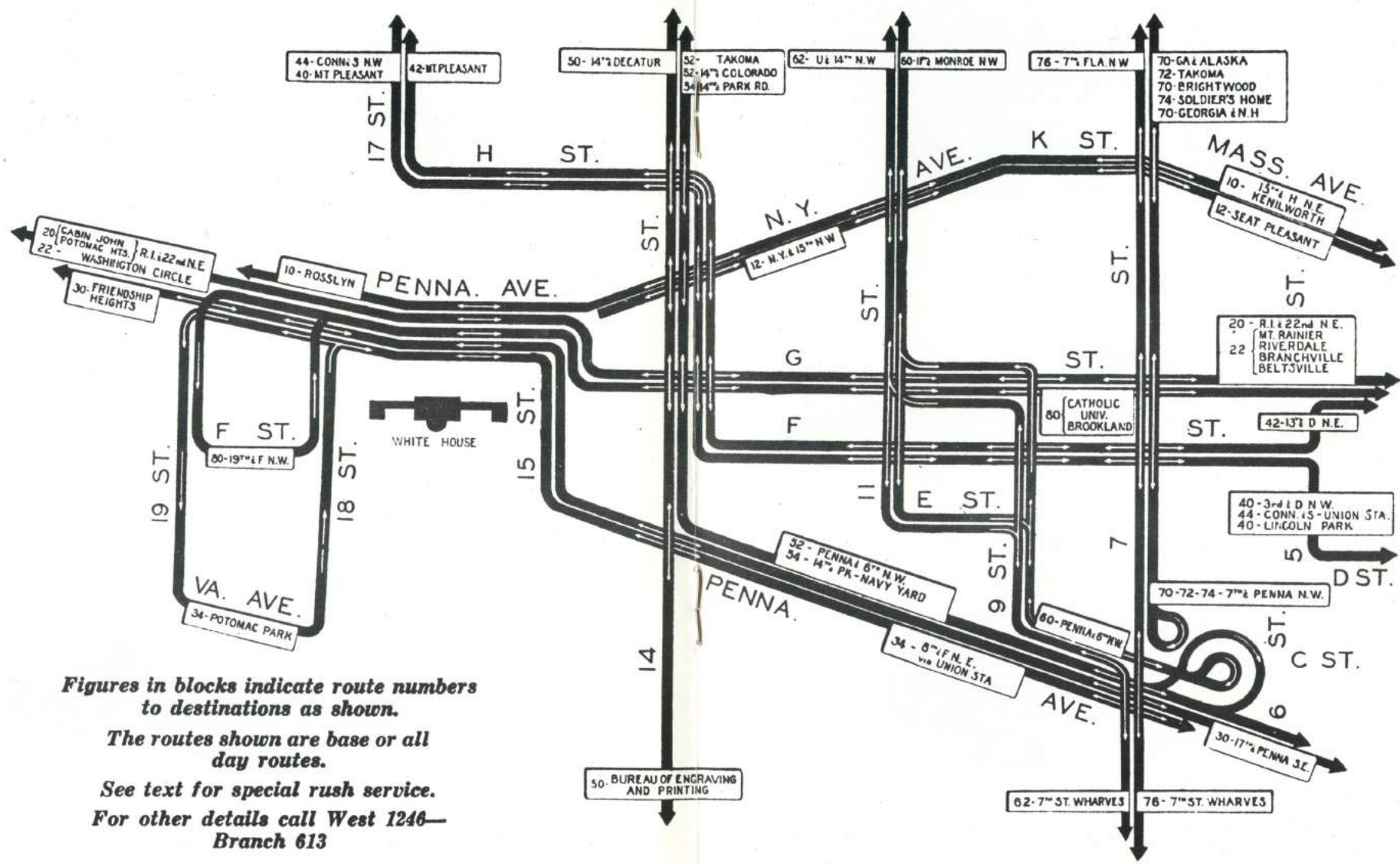


Capital Transit 766, originally Capital Traction 27, operates along the Maryland Line which connected Laurel, Beltsville, Berwyn, Riverdale, Hyattsville, Brentwood, and Mt. Rainier to the Nation's Capital.

Leonard Rice photograph
Leonard Rice Collection
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STREET CAR REROUTINGS — DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Effective November 22, 1936

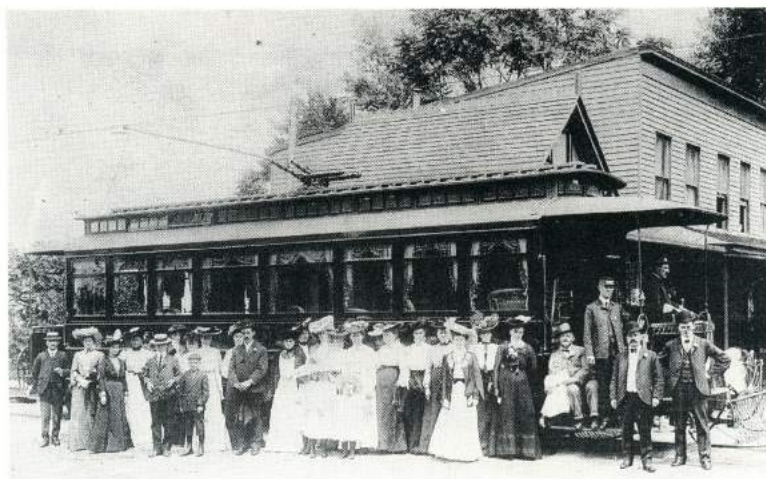


Figures in blocks indicate route numbers to destinations as shown.

The routes shown are base or all day routes.

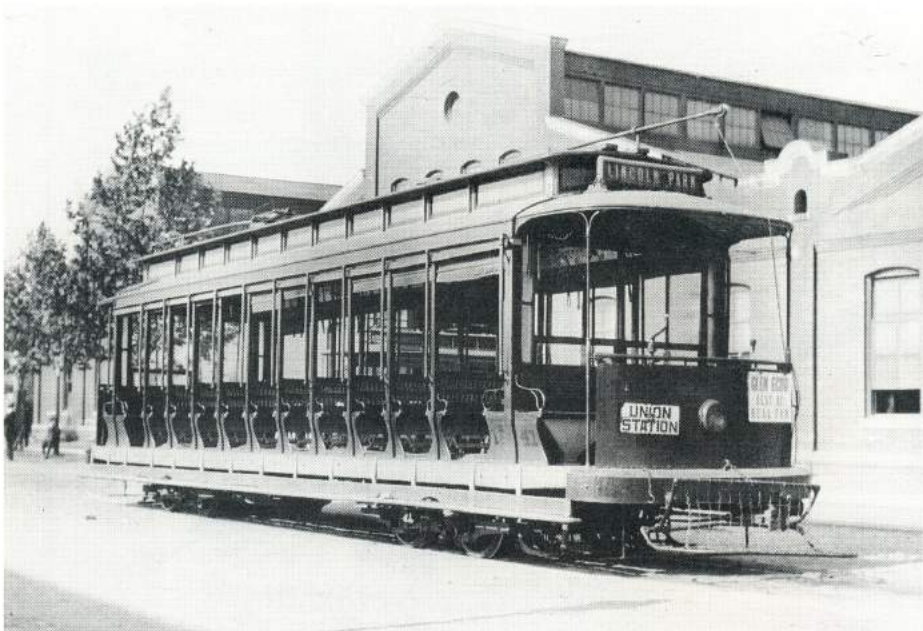
See text for special rush service.

For other details call West 1246—Branch 613



The mayor and city council pose before inspecting the new trolley line from Laurel, Maryland to Washington, DC. September 21, 1902

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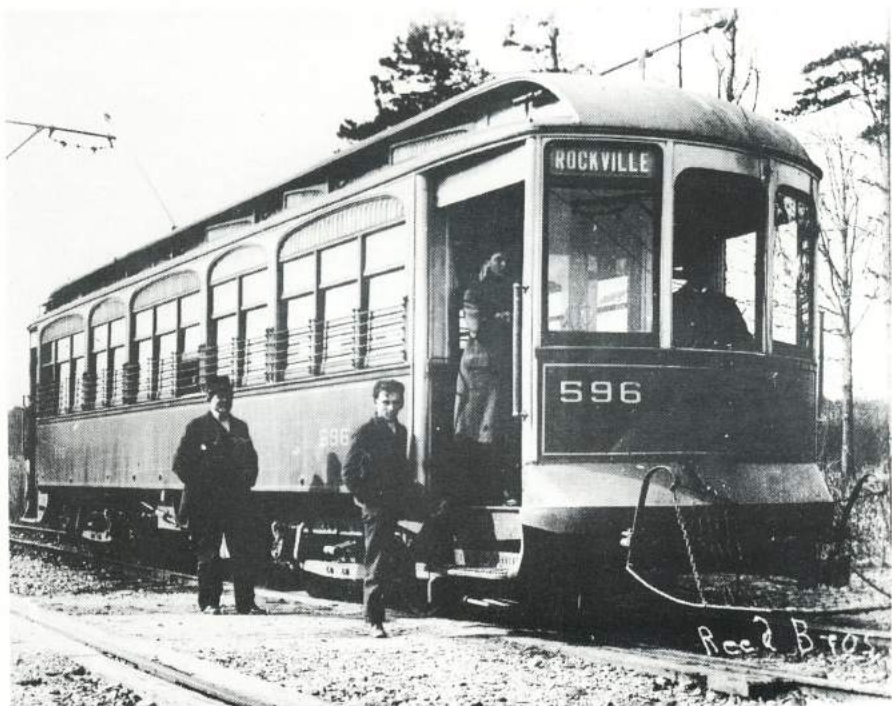


WRECo 1641 sits outside Lincoln Park (Eastern) car house. Capital Transit ended open car service in 1936.

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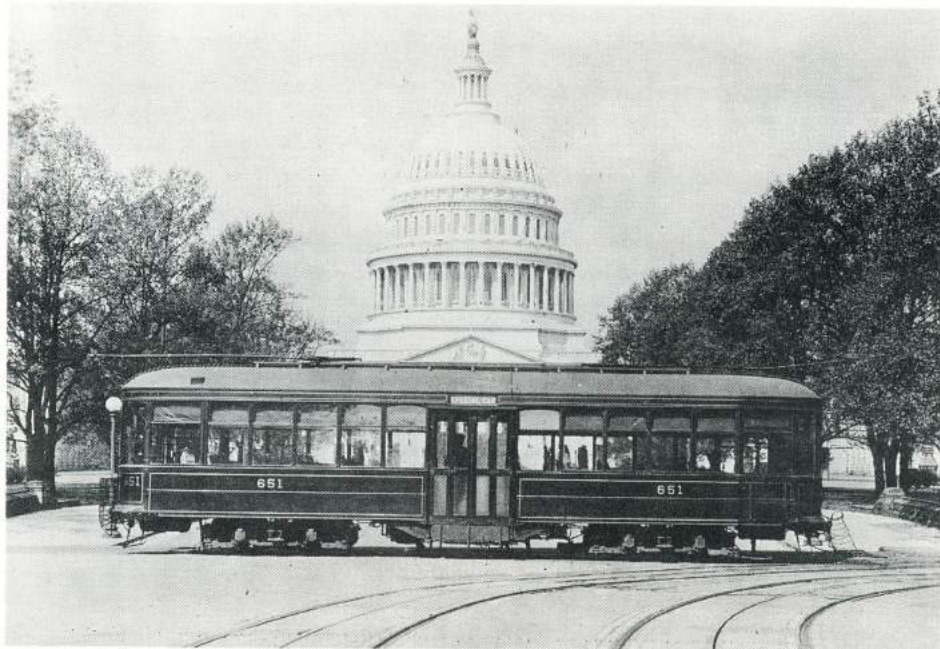
Many Washingtonians recall the destinations served by the street car lines of the *Washington Railway and Electric Company* which had absorbed many independent traction companies. Passengers once traveled to Laurel on the *Berwyn and Laurel Electric Railroad* which operated a shuttle service from the end of the *City and Suburban Railway of Washington* at Berwyn, Maryland. Patrons to Glen Echo chose between the open cars offered by the *Washington and Glen Echo Railroad Company* via the *Georgetown and Tenallytown Railway Company* or the *Washington and Great Falls Electric Railway* along the Potomac Palisades.

Travel to the Rockville Fair involved transferring from the *Georgetown and Tenallytown* to the *Washington and Rockville Railroad* at Wisconsin and Willard Avenues. Students attending the National Park Seminary, a fashionable girls' school in Forest Glen, rode the cars of the *Washington, Woodside and Forest Glen Electric Railway and Power Company* from the District Line connection with the *Brightwood Railway Company*. Washingtonians escaped summer heat on cars of the *Columbia Railway* to the Benning Race Track, Suburban Gardens Amusement Park and steam trains of the Chesapeake Beach Railway. Investors consolidated these



WRECo 596, one of fifteen cars acquired for Maryland Line and ROCKVILLE Line service, pauses during its run to Rockville.

Reed Brothers photograph
NCTM Collections



WRECo 651 is northbound on First Street, NE in 1912 shortly after its delivery from Southern Car Co. Note conductor inside center door.

Washington Railway & Electric Co. photograph
Leonard Rice Collection
NCTM Collections

many electric street railways with the fledgling Potomac Electric Power Company to form the *Washington Railway and Electric Company* in 1902.

Gradually replacing the street cars inherited from its consolidated companies, *Washington Railway and Electric Company* purchased a fleet of sixty-two **center-entrance cars**, a group of sixty-five **deck-roof cars** like those of *Capital Traction*, and another series of seventy-seven deck-roof cars. The *Company* augmented these major purchases with smaller orders for heavy suburban **center-door cars** and **railroad-roof, double-end "Rockville"** cars.

Like hundreds of amusement parks across the nation, Glen Echo

Park developed as a creature of a trolley company and a destination for thousands of revelers who fled the city on the *Washington Railway and Electric Company's* cars. For forty-four years the trolley company owned the Glen Echo Park Company which turned the former **Chautauqua** site into the primary amusement center of the National Capital area.

Capital Traction and *Washington Railway and Electric* merged in 1933 to form the *Capital Transit Company*. Utilizing a well-maintained, but dated fleet, the new organization provided nearly all the street railway service and the bulk of the motor bus service in the District of Columbia. The firm's new program included the introduction of

a **weekly pass** and wider **transfer** privileges, rationalization of duplicate facilities, and rerouting of service offered its patrons (see centerfold map). Management embarked on a modernization program which resulted in acquisitions totaling 1012 street

cars and buses between 1935 and 1941. The sizeable progress the *Company* made in placing new equipment like the **Presidents' Conference Committee (PCC)** car into service enabled the *Company* to survive the Depression and to meet



CTCo 1259, a PCC inbound from Cabin John, stops for a lone passenger at the Park entrance on May 16, 1941.

Leonard Rice photograph
Leonard Rice Collection
NCTM Collections



A PCC car crosses Pennsylvania Avenue on Fourteenth Street, NW on October 9, 1949. Note the removable, wooden street car safety zones and the tower of the Old Post Office.

Ira Pearlman Collection
NCTM Collections

challenges of World War II. Wartime patronage and manpower shortages combined to produce a handsome profit which set the stage for corporate changes following the War.

Spending this privately held profit for public benefit, *Capital Transit* invested in new equipment and construction of the Dupont Circle street car subway. Required divestiture of North American Company holdings ended the forty-seven year link between Washington's street railways and electric power

utility as *Capital Transit* was sold to Louis Wolfson's investment group. New management distributed large cash reserves to maintain a seven and half percent rate of return to stockholders. To continue the payments to stockholders, the *Company* coupled union demands for higher wages to its need for higher fares. The resulting strike in the summer of 1955 prompted Congress to pass Public Law 389 which lifted *Capital Transit's* franchise on August 14, 1956.



In anticipation of the end of street car service on Fourteenth Street, NW, the Columbia Heights Business Men's Association staged a ceremony in the Spring of 1961.

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The high-handed manner in which Congress revoked *Capital Transit's* franchise and the general plight of privately held transit companies made finding a buyer difficult. O. Roy Chalk, a New York financier, bought the franchise and continued service on August 15, 1956 as *D.C. Transit System*. Although Public Law 389 required an all-bus system and some in Congress wanted no *Capital Transit* rail equipment, Chalk management experimented with street car improvements and proposed

a trolley subway under Seventh Street and Georgia Avenue. Heavy investment in new air-conditioned buses enabled the *System* to convert all street car services by January 28, 1962.

Wesley Paulson
and
Ken Rucker



Among D.C. Transit System's improvements was the *Silver Sightseer*. Equipped with air conditioning, fluorescent lighting, high-back seats, and much chrome, DCTS 1512 demonstrated what could be done in 1957 to modernize a 1945 street car. An on-board hostess described the city sights.

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