



## **WATERFRONT RED CAR LINE HISTORY**

In 1995, a blue ribbon task force appointed by the Board of Harbor Commissioners proposed a rail line to link the “string of pearls” attractions along the San Pedro waterfront. In 1998, the Pacific Corridor Citizens Advisory Committee recommended a passenger rail connection between the Cruise Ship Terminal and 22<sup>nd</sup> Street – in anticipation of future development at the site – with intermediate stops at 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Ports O’ Call Village. The Port of Los Angeles then developed the concept as a community improvement project and unique economic development opportunity. Today, the Port of Los Angeles Waterfront Red Car Line is a reality.

The lively San Pedro waterfront and charming Downtown San Pedro benefit from a host of wonderful attractions, including the Warner Grand Theater, Los Angeles Maritime Museum, shops, art galleries and a front row seat to a vibrant, working port.

The Waterfront Red Car Line taps into a great nostalgia for Los Angeles’ famous Pacific Electric Red Cars. The new Red Car line enhances San Pedro’s image while encouraging local tourism and commercial investment – a proven successful formula in other California cities, such as San Francisco and San Jose.

One of many waterfront improvement projects undertaken by the Port of Los Angeles, the Waterfront Red Car Line is sure to draw and captivate a new audience all set to discover San Pedro’s distinct charm and take in a page of Los Angeles’ rich history.

## BUILDING THE RED CARS

Ask any one of the 18 Port of Los Angeles employees who are part of the Port of Los Angeles Waterfront Red Car Line Team how he felt about restoring a historic streetcar – or better yet, building one from scratch – and you'll get the same answer every time: "It has been one of my greatest challenges."

The Red Car Team is an assortment of carpenters, electricians, painters and welders of all ages, backgrounds and experience. This diverse crew has a few things in common, though, such as teamwork, dedication and most of all, vision.

Skilled craftsmen from the Port of Los Angeles' Construction & Maintenance Division built the two beautiful replica cars, 500 and 501, from the ground up, after they refurbished an original 1911 Pacific Electric Red Car, Car 1058. Car 501 was unveiled in April, with Car 500 scheduled to debut in August. Both arrived at Berth 155A one year ago as steel skeletons.

Project Manager Bob Henry took on the Herculean task of the entire project oversight. Under the guidance of Michael Scurlock, Waterfront Red Car Line Construction Supervisor, carpenters Ron Hayes, Timothy Buxton, Kent Schumann, Jesse Cruz and Raymond Chen designed and fabricated the natural wood on both the interiors and exteriors of the cars. Michael DeLang and Joseph Bulqueirn installed electrical equipment and completed the electrical wiring. Albert Baca, Bud Renner, Joseph Trujeque and Charles Parsons fabricated and installed metal parts on the cars. Gary McAngus, Joe Soto, Shimon Shaibi, Thomas Biernat and Gene Volynsky applied several coats of paint and varnish to the cars. Each of these talented individuals contributed to reproducing an elegant, historic representation of days gone by.

Henry assembled a team of maritime workers – completely unfamiliar with streetcar reproduction – who proved to be abundantly resourceful. The group chose to carefully pattern replica cars after an early 1900s Pacific Electric 500-class design. Replica cars feature welded steel frames carrying wooden superstructures that accurately depict the appearance of original 500-class suburban cars. The original design, coupled with updated requirements, is ideal for a historic streetcar operating in a modern environment.

Car 1058, the vintage Red Car, is another story. It resulted in the transformation of a damaged Pacific Electric 950-class car, a standard wooden car originally named Car 963 (circa 1907) that was restored by the late Richard Fellows in 1963. Fellows' intention at the time was to be able to run the car on the street, which he accomplished after adding four rubber tires, a gasoline engine and brake system to the refurbished car. When the Port took ownership of Car 1058 in 1999, it functioned more like a bus than an electric streetcar.

Today the Port has three breathtaking Red Cars. Even those who remember riding the old Red Cars over 40 years ago are not easily able to tell the difference. Cars 500 and

501 can each seat nearly 50 passengers and easily accommodate wheelchairs. Cars 500 and 501 boast traditional "Californian" open-air windows equipped with a convenient hidden curtain that can shield riders from a sudden rain shower. Inside, Red Car patrons will experience the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, complete with authentic product advertisements. Period "smoking section" signs hang intact, although no smoking will be allowed on the cars.

Nearly a half-century has passed and the Red Cars are still as charming as they are classic, from their carved mahogany to signature crimson exterior and brass-plated trim. The solid wood seating and elaborate gold scrollwork attests to the craftsmanship of the time period. The Port's construction team not only emulated this mode of production, they mastered it.

The Red Cars are a product of the Port of Los Angeles and the Harbor area as a whole. Several local vendors also played a role in the construction of the Red Cars, as the team opted to purchase its construction materials close to home whenever possible. San Pedro merchants Wezbruk Metals worked with the team to select numerous pipes and fittings and West Marine provided an assortment of parts. Llewellyn Supply in Wilmington helped add the finishing touches by supplying countless cans of paint. Gandy Glass and California Glass Bending in Wilmington made sure that the cars' windows shimmered. With genuine leather strap grips from San Pedro Shoe Repair and curtains from Henry's Custom Upholstery, the car interiors were dressed up a bit. Wilmington's MV Sign Company provided the exterior gold lettering, adding an authentic touch.

The old adage rings true: if you want something done right, do it yourself. These 18 Port employees produced a stylish, quality attraction that many people will enjoy for years to come.

# PACIFIC ELECTRIC HISTORY



Picture Los Angeles today, and most people summon up images of cars and freeways. But if you talk to people of a certain age who grew up in Los Angeles and mention the words "Red Cars," you will hear about a time before the freeways, when a network of rail lines and electric streetcars connected Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino and Riverside counties. They reached their peak in popularity in the 1920s, then slowly declined as automobile ownership became more common. By the time the last Red Car was retired from service in 1961, only rail hobbyists expressed much regret. But in the years since, fond memories have made the Red Cars more than just a forgotten bit of Los Angeles history; they were once the premier means of travel in Southern California.

The first streetcar system in Los Angeles, down Main and Spring streets in downtown, dates back to 1874. Subsequent horse-drawn streetcar systems were developed in other growing communities like Pasadena, Ontario, Santa Monica and San Bernardino. A portion of the Los Angeles system along Pico Street was electrified in 1887 and expanded in 1890. In 1894, the Los Angeles Consolidated Electric Railway was formed.

One of the company's first projects was the University Line, which included the University of Southern California. Until this time, all the systems had operated within cities. By the following year, the first intercity line opened, an electric rail line that linked Pasadena and Los Angeles. In 1898, financial difficulties forced the company to change ownership. A group of investors, including Collis Huntington, President of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and his nephew, Henry Huntington, took over control of the Los Angeles Consolidated Electric Railway. This period also marked the birth of "Red Cars." Prior to the Huntingtons' takeover, the trolley cars had been olive colored, trimmed in yellow.

Henry Huntington, seeing an opportunity to move in on the small public transportation market in southern California, began buying land in growing areas not yet reached by existing public transportation. In 1901, he established the Pacific Electric Railway to handle these holdings. Pacific Electric took over the Los Angeles-Pasadena interurban line and built a new line to Long Beach in 1902. In 1914, one could travel by rail from downtown Los Angeles to San Bernardino, Santa Ana, San Pedro or the San Fernando Valley on the Red Cars. Pacific Electric offered low cost trips to a variety of Southern California destinations. By the 1920s, the popularity of automobiles increased, with automobile ownership tripling in just 10 years. Coupled with the rising popularity of buses, with their lower capital and operating costs, and better maneuverability and speed, service to some communities was discontinued as tracks were paved over, and the Red Cars had to yield high their speed right-of-ways to traffic crossings. Lack of public support defeated plans for a subway or elevated rail system and bus lines began to replace the Red Cars in many areas.

World War II brought a brief resurgence in popularity to rail travel and the refurbishment of some lines, but by 1950 it was clear that the automobile had become the preferred method travel in Los Angeles. In 1953, Pacific Electric handed over control of the bus lines and the Red Car lines to Metropolitan Coach Lines. In 1958, the newly created Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority took over Southern Californian bus and rail passenger service. The explosive growth and sprawl of Los Angeles in the postwar years, lack of public money to keep up existing lines, huge increase in automobiles – and freeways built to accommodate them – all conspired to kill the Red Cars. By 1959, only the Los Angeles to Long Beach Line remained and on April 8, 1961 it, too, ceased operation.

More resources:

Electric Railway Historical Association of Southern California  
<http://www.erha.org/index.html>

Orange Empire Railway Museum <http://www.oerm.org/>

General Motors and the Demise of Street Cars by Cliff Slater,  
<http://www.lava.net/cslater/TQOrigin.pdf>

What Did We Give Up With the Big Red Cars? by  
George W. Hilton, <http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~pgordon/transit6.html>

The Red Cars of Los Angeles <http://www.usc.edu/libraries/archives/la/historic/redcars/>

Dave Volkmer's collection of Rail Car Photos and Postcards  
<http://www.davesrailpix.com/pe/pev1.htm>