

GO BY STREETCAR

The roots of Portland's Metropolitan Area Express, or MAX light rail system, installed and maintained by NECA/IBEW Local 48 electricians, date back to 1889. That was when the first electrified trolley rumbled across the "first" Steel Bridge (a railroad swing-span predating today's Steel Bridge). Electric streetcars were new to the Portland area, but they were no fad.

By 1912, more than a quarter-million passengers were riding Portland's 526 streetcars each day. They went to work in newly electrified factories, stores and office buildings and then commuted home, across the Willamette River, to dozens of "streetcar subdivisions" in Kenton, Beaumont and Alameda Park, Laurelhurst, and Eastmoreland, and later in the 1920s, to Council Crest, Burlingame and Willamette Heights.

Portlanders hopped streetcars and interurban rail and buses in Montevilla and Sellwood. They went shopping under the electric lights of the Meier & Frank, Lipman-Wolfe, Olds, Wortman and King department stores. They traveled in 1915 by electric "light" rail from Troutdale and Oregon City to have fun at Oaks Amusement Park or to gaze on Mount Hood from Council Crest Park.

Ridership peaked during the Depression and World War II. In 1950, Portland took a temporary hiatus. The last run of the old Willamette Heights streetcar started before sunrise on a cold Sunday morning in February 1950. Three sections of cars were needed to accommodate the crowd who wanted to experience the final run.

But it wasn't the end of an era. In 1986, Portland's MAX Light Rail made its inaugural run on a 15-mile alignment between the suburb of Gresham and downtown Portland. NECA members like Heil Electric and Tice Electric, among others, worked hand-in-glove with the electricians of Local 48 and Tri-Met to re-launch light rail and extend MAX service east and west of Portland.

Similarly, electric streetcars made a comeback with the inaugural run in 2001 – half a century after the last run of the Willamette Heights "owl car". By 2005, NECA-member Oregon Iron Works would even be manufacturing streetcars in Portland.



LAST RUN, 1950



2010



BROADWAY STREETCAR



METROPOLITAN AREA EXPRESS, 1986



METROPOLITAN AREA EXPRESS, 2013

