

HEADLIGHTS



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LRV 3615 in the latest MBTA livery heads outbound on Commonwealth
Avenue. It has been repainted in the controversial paint scheme being
proposed by Breda for its new low floor cars now under construction.



FRANK S. MIKLOS

RAIL TRANSIT News

REPORTED BY E. L. TENNYSON
AND FRANK S. MIKLOS
(BOSTON)

BALTIMORE

Construction is well along on the Maryland Mass Transit Administration's 7-mile, \$107 million, expansion of its 22-mile Central Light Rail Line. Rock ballast, concrete ties, welded steel rail, signal masts, catenary poles, and crossing gate pedestals are very much in evidence in the B-W-I Airport area of Ann Arundel county, through the remote parking lots and into the new International Terminal. The single track north of Andover Road broadens into double track through the airport area.

The long steel girder bridge across the Jones Falls Freeway (I-83) into Amtrak Penn Station is in place from the University of Baltimore right into the train shed of the Amtrak station, near the "roller coaster" on the initial line. Service should begin in 1997 if the 18 new cars now on order from ABB Traction are ready.

True interurban appearances are in evidence on the single track north from Timonium in Baltimore County to Texas, Maryland toward Cockeysville at the opposite end of the system from the Airport. At Warren

Road, double track turns west along Warren Road, across Beaver Dam Road to Gilroy Road where the tracks turn north along side the road to a station. Single track then resumes, turning east, side-of-the road for a quarter mile, then north over a small hill to the double tracked Hunt Valley station at the Hunt Valley Mall parking area, on Shawann Road.

The old Baltimore & Annapolis Railroad track between Patapsco Avenue and Nursery Road across the Patapsco River is being double tracked to permit a nine minute headway, the closest that can be operated across the single track trestle between Camden Yards station and Westport.

Current plans call for two routes to be operated, each on 18-minute headways, seven days per week. The Airport route will probably continue north to Hunt Valley to maximize Airport access and the Cromwell (Glen Burnie) route now in service will run to Amtrak's Penn Station to give downtown Baltimore better transit access to Amtrak and MARC commuter trains.

The Hunt Valley (Cockeysville) route will be 27 miles long, just two miles

less than from Hagerstown to Frederick of past transit history, and about the same as from South Hills Junction to Little Washington, or from Pittsburgh to Tylerdale. The 72-minute run will be a bit faster than the Washington interurban, but not quite as fast as the old Baltimore & Annapolis which had no street running.

The Washington, D.C. suburban newspapers ran a travel article in the fall 1996 promoting the Central Light Rail Line as a tourist venture to see Baltimore and its suburbs in a different and interesting way, for \$3 all day. It is a good ride.

BOSTON

The outer end of the Huntington Avenue streetcar line seems destined for the same fate as the Watertown line if MBTA officials have their way. A spokesman for the transit agency recently indicated that there are no plans to restore the portion of the line between Heath Street and Forest Hills because South Huntington Avenue and other streets used by the rail service are too narrow. Operating problems on such streets could be eliminated through the enforcement of traffic regulations, but the rights of motorists usually take priority over the convenience of transit riders. Concern for motorists driving on wet rails was part of the justification for abandoning the Watertown streetcar line.

There are still many residents along the Huntington Avenue corridor who remember the one seat streetcar ride into downtown Boston via the Green Line subway. They have vowed to fight for the restoration of that rail service.

Among the questions to be resolved is the Federal Transportation Administration's position on the funding that was given to the MBTA for the installation of a Huntington Avenue streetcar loop at the new Forest Hills rapid transit terminal. Platforms and switches for the light rail service were built, but never used. Also unresolved is the question of whether an environmental impact review will be required if the rail service is permanently abandoned. Such reviews are rarely required for rail service discontinuance, even when the buses were not earmarked as replacements for rail vehicles at the time they were funded.

Trolleybus Plan Moves Forward. After reviewing several alternatives for transit in the Washington Street corridor, the MBTA reaffirmed support for a trolleybus line on that thoroughfare between Dudley Square and downtown Boston. The decision is a disappointment to residents of the area who had campaigned for a light rail line to replace the rapid transit service that was discontinued several years ago. The MBTA cited construction costs as the primary factor in

RAIL TRANSIT News



FRANK S. MIKLOS

▲ Rail service on the Huntington Avenue Line beyond Heath Street may soon be just a memory. Picture window PCC 3314 leads a two car train on that portion of the line where ridership was heavy enough to require streetcars operating in pairs during most hours. Despite complaints of the streets being "too narrow" for continued rail service, more than half the line traverses roadways with wide clearances such as those shown in this view of South Huntington Avenue taken a few months before service was "temporarily" suspended.

the choice of mode: the trolleybus line carries a price tag of \$40 million, compared with \$100 million for the light rail line.

After the trolleybus plans were announced, the residents of the area appealed to their state representatives to press for the light rail alternative. The legislature then appropriated an additional \$65 million for the the project, but this failed to sway the MBTA. The transit agency remains committed to the trolleybus plan, which will require a transfer to the rapid transit system.

The light rail plan proposed by the residents would have provided a one seat ride directly

into the Green Line subway. Sections of tunnel east of Boylston Street which were abandoned in the 1960s would be used for this connection. By contrast, the MBTA's light rail alternative would follow the same routing as the trolleybus proposal. It would operate entirely on the surface, with no track connections to the subway.

Plans for the trolleybus service have changed since the proposal was first presented. The original design called for the vehicles to operate on a paved right-of-way in a median reservation down the center of Washington Street. This reserved right-of-way would have facilitated any future installation of tracks for light rail vehicles. The City of Boston's Department of Transportation urged that a trolleybus line be designed for easy conversion to light rail service. The latest proposal calls for a narrow median, landscaped with trees and shrubbery, with trolleybuses operating in the roadway with other traffic. The design with the paved median was rejected because it would involve the loss of too many parking spaces along the route. Residents remain determined to fight for a light rail service, so the situation may not be resolved for some time to come.

DALLAS

Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) began operations

this summer with 19,000 weekday passengers on two routes (Red and Blue) into Oak Cliff south of the city on 14 miles of line, terminating downtown on Bryan Street off Pacific Street. This Christmas, the subway under I-75, the North Dallas Central Freeway, is to open to Southern Methodist University and Mockingbird Lane, about six miles, adding an expected 16,000 more passengers. The 40-car fleet of 65 mph cars may be quite busy, with two-car peak trains on a five minute headway. The Blue Line toward Oak Cliff uses a segment of the former Texas Electric Railway right-of-way. Commuter rail service to Irving will also begin when the subway opens, connecting with light rail at Union Station, now respectably refurbished.

HARTFORD

Congress has funded Hartford's proposed Griffin Light Rail Line with \$1 million to design the first nine miles north of the city, through Bloomfield, Connecticut.

PORTLAND, OREGON

The Federal Transit Administration concluded a Full Funding Agreement with Tri-Met for \$138 million additional to help complete the 18-mile West Side Line due to open in 1998 with an expected 27,000 weekday passengers by 2005. Rails are down on the surface portion of the line and new low-floor cars have arrived at the new car shop for testing. ☺

FOCUS ON ARGENTINA, PART 2

Success Story. The Tren de la Costa serves one of the most affluent districts of greater Buenos Aires. Two of the line's Spanish-built LRVs, below, pass one another at the beautiful San Isidro Station.

Gold Seal. The distinctive Tren de la Costa emblem (bottom) appears on all rolling stock, station signs and employee uniforms.



Light Rail DEVELOPMENTS

TEXT & PHOTOS BY BRUCE J. RUSSELL

THE LIGHT RAIL REVIVAL which has swept across North America and Europe has finally arrived in Argentina. Buenos Aires has one new line and there are plans for several more. Some are slated for Buenos Aires, while others are planned for a number of provincial cities including Rosario, Mendoza, Cordoba,

Tucuman and the resort of May del Plata on the Atlantic seacoast.

Argentina has every reason to embrace light rail, but lack of capital resulting from an unstable economy has prevented others from being built. More than enough prerequisites can be met: abandoned or little used railway

alignments, a large population living in densely inhabited urban and suburban areas, and a reluctance to invest in traditional "heavy rail" subway lines. Furthermore, Argentina has close cultural, economic and historical links with Italy, Spain and Britain, countries where light rail is very much in favor. Hence, it may only be a matter of time before there will be many examples of this form of transit running in the land of the exotic tango. Let's take a closer look at what's been done so far.



THE TREN DE LA COSTA, OR COASTAL TRAIN

In the 1960s lack of business forced the Mitre Division of the Argentine National Railways to close the outermost 9.8 miles of its electric suburban route along the Río de la Plata from Bartholome Mitre to terminus at Delta. Population along this section of the commuter line was small and its old English-built MUs were running almost empty. By then the coastal corridor had become an enclave for wealthy Buenos Aires who preferred driving automobiles over riding mass transit. Furthermore, running parallel to the line was another double-track electrified suburban railway terminating a walk away from Delta at Tigre Station. This route had a much higher volume of riders than the coastal route and easily provided Mitre with an alternate source of revenue.

The abandoned Mitre line languished for three decades. Its unused right-of-way became overgrown and its empty stations were vandalized. Adjacent property owners claimed squatters' rights and planted gardens and trees on the embankment.

A ROUTE IS REBORN

Population along the Río de la Plata began to grow in the early 1990s. New houses were built and many wealthy estates were subdivided into smaller plots. In addition, many summer homes were winterized.

Before long the area became a trendy place to live. Ritzy shops and fancy restaurants began migrating there. With more portenos, or "people of the port" as the people of Buenos Aires call themselves, residing in the narrow strip bordering the river, congestion on the local roads worsened and traffic jams became commonplace. The last straw was a new shopping mall in Tigre that attracted swarms of "day trippers" into the region.

The Ferrocarriles Argentinos proposed reopening the line to Delta. All this would require, they thought, was clearing the abandoned right-of-way, installing ballast and laying track. Unfortunately, the Ferrocarriles Argentinos lacked funds even for such a relatively modest project. To make matters worse, many of the property owners next to the alignment claimed title to

portions of the route and announced that they would fight attempts by the railroad to reclaim it. Consequently the Ferrocarriles Argentinos washed its hands of the matter.

LIGHT RAIL IS PROPOSED BY A PRIVATE COMPANY

Despite the reluctance of the railway to reopen the route, there were others who saw genuine possibilities. Sociedad Comercial del Plata SA proposed reviving the line as a light rail operation, for several reasons. One was lower cost, another was simplicity and the third was the willingness of a Spanish company to furnish rolling stock and some electrical apparatus. Major Argentinean banks also wanted a piece of the action. Most of the closed stations were still intact and could be refurbished, while others could be built in the same style to include shops and cinemas. Comercial del Plata's new amusement park planned for the terminus at Delta would also help to attract ridership.

Comercial del Plata successfully brokered a 30-year lease with the government to acquire the 240-acre property. In return they agreed to provide clean, frequent and modern mass transit along the corridor. The decision to adopt light rail meant that while the 3rd-rail electric trains terminating at Bartholome Mitre couldn't proceed to Delta, the tracks would have to be arranged for easy transfers.

Loss of the one-seat ride was regrettable for passengers coming from Plaza Retire in downtown Buenos Aires. On the other hand, much of Tren de la Costa's potential patronage was expected to be strictly local in origin, with people riding the light rail line for only short distances. Anyway, it was decided that Buenos Aires needed something new to boost its dated infrastructure. A sparkling light rail line to an exciting amusement park would fit the bill.

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

Preliminary work involved clearing tons of rubbish from the derelict right-of-way. Photographs displayed at the Maipú Station show exactly what it looked like in 1970 and few would have guessed a railway of any sort ever ran there. Squatters were told they had no legal rights

and had to vacate the route. All complied, but in some cases only reluctantly.

New crushed stone ballast was installed followed by two sets of welded rail. Standard gauge was adopted instead of the wider 5' 6" gauge used by Mitre. However, English-style left-hand running was chosen. While road traffic in Argentina switched to the "right-hand rule" after World War II, railways kept the leftward orientation. Apparently it was felt that to make a changeover would be too confusing for people. Interestingly, wooden ties were used for the Tren de la Costa. Many felt that concrete ties would be too noisy and cause many of the important and influential people along the line to raise objections.

Power is provided by weight-tensioned catenary energized at 1500 volts direct current. There are two substations.

On the Move. A closeup side view of a Tren de la Costa LRV trainset shows the articulated coupling.



Signals conform to contemporary light rail practice. An operations center located at the maintenance depot controls the movement of all trains on the double track line. The drivers communicate with the command post by radio. In many respects the route is similar to Valencia, Spain's new route although there is no street running. Since many Argentines have ethnic roots in Spain, they may have been influenced by Valencia's design standards.

The name Tren de la Costa, or "Coastal Train", was selected after much deliberation. The line follows the coast of the Río de la Plata and in several places the rails are in full view of the water. Likewise for marketing purposes an easily identifiable insignia was adopted for display throughout the system.

Of the 11 stations on the line, most

were built by the British around the turn of the century. Commercial del Plata converted the stations to business and retail use so that it can earn rental income from them. These Victorian-styled buildings have been rehabilitated with historical accuracy, complete with iron grillwork, colorful window shutters and gabled roofs.

Some of the land next to the stations was sold to developers. Tickets are no longer sold inside most of the station buildings, but are purchased from machines mounted on the platforms. Light jazz and other melodies are piped onto each station platform.

The two largest stations are the terminals at Maipú and Delta. A covered walkway over Avenida Maipú connects Maipú and its shopping arcade to the Mitre half of the station, which is called

Bartholome Mitre, or B. Mitre. The terminal at Delta is connected by a covered walkway to Parque de la Costa, the large, Disney-like amusement park which opens on May 5, 1997.

ROLLING STOCK IMPORTED FROM SPAIN

There are nine articulated light rail vehicles (LRVs) assigned to the Tren de la Costa. Eight of the deep green cars maintain the normal 10-minute headway, with the ninth held as a spare. Each air-conditioned LRV can carry 188 riders, including standees. They have 80 seats arranged in a 2 + 2 configuration, a public address system, and lifts for wheelchair access. Each car is equipped with four motors and power is obtained through a Faveley-type pantograph.

(Continued on page 11)

