

McKinney Avenue Transit Authority "M-Line" Newsletter: December 2015

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In the Loop

Ridership spikes with opening of extension

Since the extension of the M-Line in June, there has been a significant spike in ridership. In fact, from June 6 through the end of October, the M-Line provided 316,916 passenger trips – a whopping 38 percent increase over the same period in 2014.

The extension on the southern, downtown end of the line forms a continuous “loop,” making the trolleys a more integral part of the downtown and the Dallas Arts District.

The vision is for the M-Line to eventually connect with the Dallas Streetcar – the first segment of which opened April 13. The two may even run along the same tracks. Accordingly, the extension was designed to accommodate not only MATA’s existing heritage fleet, but modern streetcars, as well. Those plans are not in place yet, but the Dallas Streetcar initiative will take shape over the coming years.

The new M-Line extension forms a connection with all four lines of DART Rail at St. Paul Station – right in the city center. That’s in addition to the connection at CityPlace/Uptown Station on the other end of the line.

The new section that runs along Olive Street also provides improved, direct access to the popular Klyde Warren Park.

In addition to adding new connections that are drawing new riders, the loop effectively increases the M-Line’s rolling stock. Some of the agency’s acquisitions are 1930s- ‘40s-era vehicles that cannot operate in two directions; they now can travel around the loop downtown and use the M-Line’s dramatic turntable at the other end of the line.

The M-Line started out as mostly a tourist attraction and a novelty – but the recent surge in ridership is testament that it has become a vital part of Dallas’ transportation infrastructure.



The Dragon's Tale

Car 186, "The Green Dragon," is back in business

After a major overhaul that replaced the floor, the windows, the roof, electrical hardware and more, Car 186 – "The Green Dragon" – is back in service.

It was on the old Highland Park line that Car 186 got its name. The students at SMU would catch the streetcar at the end of the line on Hillcrest in front of the university. Car 186, with its distinctive green-and-white color scheme, was so frequently assigned to this run that it became a favorite of the students, who christened it with a new moniker. The name stuck.

The Green Dragon started its service life in 1913 as part of a 10-car order built by the St. Louis Car Company for Dallas Railway. During a 43-year run, Car 186 operated on virtually all of the company's lines, from Oak Cliff to Uptown – at that time known as "Short North Dallas."

The end came for the Green Dragon with the demise of streetcar service in Dallas in 1956. It wound up on a farm near the present-day intersection of Forest Lane and Audelia Road, where it was used as a hay barn. (Fact: A streetcar will hold 175 square bales of hay.)

Old 186 was thus “out to pasture” for 23 years. Local streetcar buff (and MATA cofounder) Ed Landrum became aware of the Green Dragon’s existence, and in 1979, he did just that. Landrum spent a year restoring 186, and for the next eight years, it was displayed at the Texas Sports Hall to illustrate how people used to get to ball games.

At more than 70 years old, the Green Dragon made a full circle when it once again took to the rails of Dallas as part of the MATA fleet. Today, it plies the same stretch of track that it did in its heyday. And it now looks and runs as good as new. Look for it on the M-Line!



Keep on Rolling

Making the M-Line hum is a labor of love

The sight of vintage trolleys going down McKinney Avenue may hearken to a time that was simple – but keeping the vehicles maintained is anything but.

Periodic troubleshooting and repairs are frequent on vehicles as old as the M-Line trolleys. And to remain operational, the cars must receive a nearly complete overhaul every five to 10 years. This often can involve extensive labor, as with the recent work done on Car 186 (see article).

A combination of employees and volunteers – many of them highly skilled craftsmen – have their hands full every day, and they must bring a diagnostic mindset to bear on a wide variety of mechanical and electrical challenges. And a creative mindset, too: They must craft many of the parts themselves, as the trolleys are, in many cases, a century old. A further challenge is that all details must hew very closely to the historic original. This will be particularly challenging when Rosie, the M-Line’s “museum piece,” comes up for its major overhaul next year. The motormen are important allies of the maintenance staff, and they receive 40 hours of training to ensure that they are able to detect mechanical issues before they become problems.

And all this only applies to the cars themselves. There are also electrical wires, tracks, a turntable and the “car barn” itself to keep in good working condition. It’s a labor of love that makes Uptown and downtown Dallas more attractive places to live, work and play.



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