Medford-Jacksonville streetcar system

Spencer S. Bullis organized the Southern Oregon Traction Company (SOTC) on July 15, 1913, to operate streetcars in the city of Medford. Three years later, the SOTC incorporated the Rogue River Valley Railway's (RRVR) line (founded in 1891) between Medford and Jacksonville. Though even the expanded SOTC did not achieve the same status as the larger streetcar systems in the Willamette Valley, it was an important regional transit option until 1920.

The SOTC's first trolley, a single-truck Birney, arrived on March 16, 1914. Tracks ran east on Main Street from the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP) mainline to Eastwood Drive. After a crossing of the SP tracks was completed, the line was extended west through downtown to a terminus at Oakdale Avenue. A line was also built eastward to Siskiyou Heights, but it was removed when that development proved slow, and its rails were used to extend the Main Street tracks to a connection with the RVRR at Eighth and Elm Streets. A planned line to Ashland was never built.

In 1915, Bullis obtained control of the RVRR, which ran six miles between Medford and Jacksonville. It was electrified and merged with the two-and-a-half-mile SOTC system in January 1916. Both systems used standard-gauge track (4' 8 1/2" wide).

The Rogue River Valley Railway, which began operations on February 12, 1891, started as a steam short line. For most of its life, both before and after Bullis, the RRVR was operated by William S. Barnum. Barnum had pioneered modern passenger service with the RVRR by introducing an eight-passenger Fairbanks auto car in 1905. He had followed this in 1909 with a twenty-eight-seat Black Crow, gasoline-engine-powered, combination freight and passenger car of his own design. The SOTC improved passenger comfort further by adding another lightweight streetcar and a double-truck car bought used from the Cleveland, Ohio, system.

In 1918, bankruptcy returned control of the company to Barnum. He abandoned passenger service in 1920, and so ended the streetcar era in southern Oregon.

Written by Richard Thompson

Further Reading:

Hilton, George W. and John F. Due. *The Electric Interurban Railways in America.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960.

Webber, Bert and Margie Webber. *Railroading in Southern Oregon and the founding of Medford.* Fairfield, Wash.: Ye Galleon Press, 1985.

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