Eugene streetcar system

The first street railway in Eugene was a mule-powered system that began operating between the train depot and the University of Oregon on June 26, 1891. The Eugene Street Railway ran along Willamette Street and 11th Avenue for over a decade, but by 1903 Henry Holden's pioneer enterprise had failed financially and its rails had been removed.

On September 26, 1907, the Eugene and Eastern Railway Company restored streetcar service to Eugene with a new electrified system designed by Alvadore Welch. Two months later, the railway was renamed the Portland, Eugene and Eastern. In 1915, at about the time that the Southern Pacific Railroad bought the PE&E, the railway was again called the Eugene Street Railway.

Eugene's four streetcar lines, which eventually totaled eighteen miles, included Blair, College Crest, Fairmount, and Springfield. The longest was a 4.8-mile route linking Eugene and Springfield, which opened on October 22, 1910. In 1912, a two-mile extension along 8th, Blair, and River Road became the last addition to what was once described as the greatest small-city streetcar system in the United States. Plans for a line to Santa Clara never materialized.

At the city's trolley barn, located at East 13th and Beech streets, a crew of twenty-seven conductors, motormen, and shop workers kept nine streetcars running from six o'clock in the morning until midnight each day. Four single-end cars helped modernize the fleet in 1914. Even so, conversion to bus operation began with the Springfield Line in 1926. The last trolley in Eugene ran a year later on October 15, 1927.

Written by Richard Thompson

Further Reading:

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