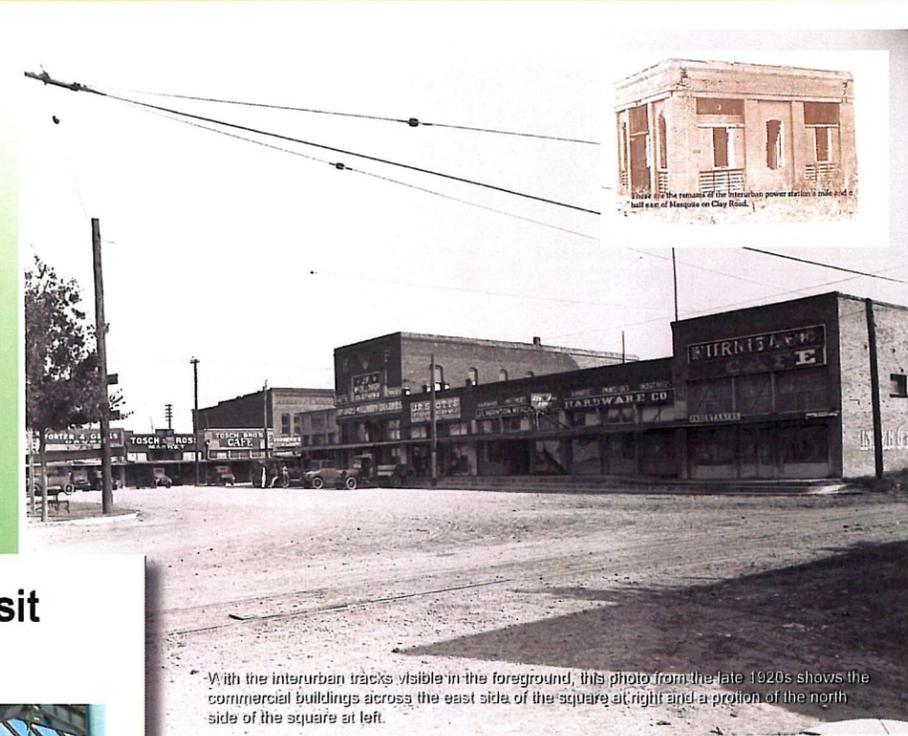


History of Mass Transit in Mesquite: What's Old is New

"Mesquite...City planners are working to answer the questions brought about by rapid growth in bedroom communities outside of Dallas proper. Modern methods of zoning are being instituted in order to maintain Mesquite's 'distinctive personality.' The Mayor himself has appointed committees to survey the needs of the citizens for transportation, for recreation facilities for youth activities, for an improved business district and for conservation."

Sound familiar? These issues are ours today. The above paragraph, though, taken from Mesquite's history book, *A Stake in the Prairie*, was written about the town in 1936 – the Mayor looking to gather transportation needs information was Bedford Galloway. Only four years earlier, in March 1932, the Texas Interurban Railway, our method of mass transportation linking Dallas through Mesquite to Terrell, had discontinued its service. It was in financial ruins, thanks to the rise of popularity of the automobile. If citizens were given the choice of riding that Interurban-type rail system now, getting many of us from our homes to our jobs and back again without creating more traffic jams, more pollution or contributing to the rising cost of fuel, what do you think the interest would be?



With the interurban tracks visible in the foreground, this photo from the late 1920s shows the commercial buildings across the east side of the square at right and a portion of the north side of the square at left.

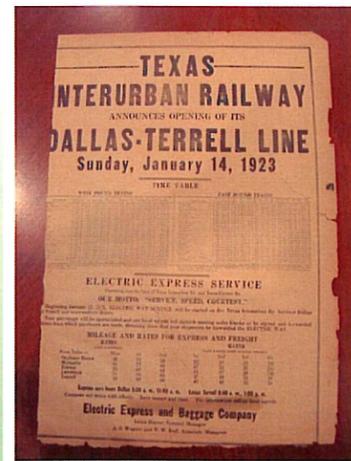
THE TEXAS INTERURBAN RAILWAY: Mesquite's First Mass Transit

In the early 1920s, Mesquite was just enjoying the invention of radio and movies as entertainment. Still basically isolated from the Dallas metropolx, travel was time-consuming (many still drove mule-driven carts while those fortunate enough to have automobiles found driving over the rough-and-tumble pathways a little daunting). The Texas electric railways had been in operation since the early part of the century, so the idea of bringing such a system through Mesquite was a popular one.

In March 1921, the Secretary of State issued a charter to Texas Interurban Railway so that construction could start on the east-west line. Men, mules and miles of railway tracks began the task of grading the roadways, laying the tracks and constructing depots. The Texas Mesquiter (now known as the Mesquite News), printed an article proclaiming January 14, 1923, as a "Red Letter Day in Mesquite," as that was the day the first Mesquite citizen, W.E. Robertson, stepped onto the yellow and green rail car.

Interurban trains were approximately 45-feet long, held about 55 people and traveled up to 60 miles per hour. Riders were treated to comfort since the railcar seats were high-backed, covered in plush green upholstery and were about 37 inches wide. The ride from Mesquite into Dallas and, conversely, into Terrell, was a scenic one as the 31 miles of track, which was 70-pound rail, ran through fields, trees and across creeks, according to *A Stake in the Prairie*. The tracks ran a route, which became the right-of-way of Military Parkway/Davis Street.

While ridership was steady and railways continued to be constructed, the Texas Interurban Railway ceased operation March 19, 1932, a mere nine years after its popular beginning. Effects of increasing automobile ownership and of the Great Depression had led to the bankruptcy of the system. Mesquite citizens had to then rely on a replacement bus service, which was operated by the Dixie-Sunshine Trailways company. In 1948, that company was absorbed by Continental Trailways. Central Mesquite was totally by-passed when the bus line moved its terminal from downtown Mesquite to U.S. Highway 80 in the early 1970s. Not long afterward, Continental, too, went out of business.



When Dallas transportation planners began discussions about mass transit in the early 1980s, light-rail rapid transit once again became the hot topic of "people moving." Mesquite voters did not approve a sales tax increase for inclusion in what has become "Dallas Area Rapid Transit," or DART. Some of her citizens, however, see the potential in connecting to the regional transit system. This potential is why we are gathered here today.

Sources: *A Stake in the Prairie*, 1984, Mesquite Historical Committee; DART media/news releases; Cochran, Mike, "The Denton-Dallas Interurban," mikecochran.net/InterurbanMC.html.

