

BRISBANE TRAMS

The Brisbane tramway network once served Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, Australia and operated between 1885 and 1969 on standard gauge track. The electric system was originally energised to 500 volts, and subsequently increased to 600 volts. All tramcars built in Brisbane up to 1938 had an open design. This proved so popular, especially on hot summer nights, that the trams were used as fundraisers and often chartered right up until the last service by social groups.

Most trams operated with a two person crew – a driver (or motorman) and a conductor, who moved about the tram collecting fares and issuing tickets. The exceptions to this arrangement were on the Gardens line (Lower Edward Street) where the short duration of the trip meant it was more effective for passengers to simply drop their fare into a fare box as they entered the tram; and the "one man cars" which operated in the early 1930's (see below).

The peak year for patronage was in 1944–45 when almost 160 million passengers were carried. The system route length reached its maximum extent of 109 kilometres (68 mi) in 1952. The total track length was 199 kilometres (124 mi), owing to many routes ending in single, rather than double, track. Single track segments of the track were protected by signalling which operated off the trolley wire. By 1959 more than 140 kilometres (87 mi) of track were laid in concrete, a method of track construction pioneered in Brisbane.

Of the Australian capital cities which closed their networks between the 1950's and 1970's (only Melbourne and Adelaide retained trams, although Adelaide only had one line in operation), Brisbane was the last capital city to shut down its trams. Despite the decision to shut down the network, the city's trams were held with great affection by locals. There have been ongoing proposals since the early 1990's to reinstate a functional tram network.

By 1885 an omnibus service reached almost every part of Brisbane. Omnibuses consisted of a strongly constructed wooden wagon with seating for males on the roof and a back-door entrance to the interior. In August 1885 the Metropolitan Tramway and Investment Company began official horse-drawn tramway services for the public. The tramcars were imported from the United States and made from cedar and mahogany that was highly polished. Fares were expensive, with the typical patron belonging to the middle class. As can be seen some of the earliest film footage of Brisbane the trams moved at little more than walking pace.

The first electric tramway ran along Stanley Street, in South Brisbane on 16 June 1897. Horse-drawn carriages were still being used in 1899. Up until the end of World War I, Brisbane's trams were the primary method used for travelling within the city. Even during the Great Depression in the 1930's Brisbane's trams ran at a profit. Between 1923 and 1934 tram services in Brisbane were greatly expanded. Brisbane's tramway system came under the control of the City of Brisbane in 1925. Through the 1940's and 1950's the tram system enjoyed strong political support within the Brisbane City Council, which continued to expand the tram network and upgrade its fleet with some of the most advanced trams in Australia. Until 1934, the trams carried mail to and from suburban post offices to the GPO in the city and they acted as mail boxes.

By 1948 Brisbane's trams failed to return a profit as they could not compete with the more efficient bus services. Urban development, often well away from public transport, the rise of suburban shopping centres and the relative decline in the cost of motorcars meant that as elsewhere, Brisbane's public street transport system increasingly had to compete with the private motor car and patronage slowly declined from a post war peak of 148 000 000 passenger journeys in 1946, to approximately 64 000 000 passenger journeys in 1968.

Trolleybuses were introduced in 1951. A trolley bus is an electric bus that draws its electricity from overhead wires (generally suspended from roadside posts) using spring-loaded trolley poles. Though powered like an electric tram or train with connecting poles these poles that can swivel so the bus does not need a track and can move left and right of the overhead cable. These were used primarily where the gradient was too steep for trams. On the Northside there was one City to Kelvin Grove trolley bus route. On the Southside there were three trolley bus routes that went out of the City via the Story Bridge. One went to Seven Hills, another to Carina along Stanley Road and one went to Holland Park via Cavendish Road. The trolley buses, being electric, rather than using a diesel engine were very quiet and were nicknamed "Whispering Death" due to the potential danger of unsuspecting pedestrians being hit by one given how quiet they were.

Trams did not terminate in the Brisbane central business district, but ran from suburbs on one side of the city to suburbs on the other. Today, many all-stops bus routes (shown in *italics*) roughly correspond with the former tram lines.

The last tramway to open was in March 1961. Clem Jones became Lord Mayor of Brisbane the same year. All new route construction was cancelled in the early 1960's. The Kalinga, Toowong, Rainworth and Bulimba Ferry routes closed in December 1962. Political support for the tram system waned during the 1960's, particularly so after the Paddington tram depot fire on 28 September 1962 where 67 trams were destroyed, which represented 20% of the entire fleet. Brisbane's Lord Mayor Alderman Clem Jones (1961–1974) was pro-freeway and private car at a time when petrol was cheap before the oil crisis of the 1970's.

Finally in common with most other cities throughout the English-speaking world, Brisbane converted its remaining tram lines between 1968 and 1969 to all bus operation. The last trolley buses ran on 13 March 1969 and the final trams ran on 13 April 1969. The tramway closure was notable for the speed with which it was carried out. Several hundred replacement buses were purchased from British vehicle manufacturer Leyland, at the time the largest single bus purchase in the world. Most older, wooden trams were stripped of metal parts and then burnt at the City Council's yard at Cribb Street Milton (adjacent to the tramway workshops). The bodies of later, all-metal cars were sold as sheds and playground equipment.

Most tram enthusiasts blame Clem Jones for the closure of the tram network in 1969 and, by some accounts, Clem claimed that later it was a mistake on his part, though the State Government played a part in the decision by not making new Victoria Bridge fit for trams. The old Victoria Bridge was the only tram crossing over the network.

The Brisbane Tramway Museum Society was formed in 1968 to preserve some of Brisbane's trams. At present the Museum has 24 Brisbane trams in its collection. Tramway operations commenced at the museum at Ferny Grove in 1980.

There have been several proposals from both the Brisbane City Council and state government to return a tram or light rail system to Brisbane since the 1990's. The most prominent of these include the ambitious 1997 Brisbane Light Rail Transit proposal. The plans escalated to a Queensland government tender for four company consortia to purchase new trams, construct and operate the system in 1999, the project was projected to cost A\$235 million but was subsequently vetoed in favour of expanding the existing bus network, including the South East Busway.

These various proposed options included a line from Roma Street station to Queensland University of Technology CBD campus along George Street, CBD to West End and University of Queensland via Victoria Bridge and Melbourne Street and CBD to Fortitude Valley via Wickham Terrace.

In 2007, following several failed road and tunnel projects and based on the recommendation's of the Brisbane City Council's 2006 CBD masterplan, premier Peter Beattie announced \$250 million of state government funding for an extensive light rail system to rival Melbourne's and significantly larger than those of Sydney or Adelaide. The plan, at the centre of the government's "Smart City" plan, is to link South Brisbane to New Farm and Bowen Hills with future extensions down the newly created South Eastern and Inner Northern Busway, bridges and pedestrian spines.

By June 2008 progress had stalled, without an official project announcement, the Brisbane City Council once again distancing itself from the plan due to cost of the investment (estimated at \$600 million for the New Farm link) and instead giving consideration of diverting the funds to enhancing the bus and CityCat ferry systems.

In 1961 Trams ran on the following routes:

Fortitude Valley – Belmont 06	
South Brisbane – St Pauls Terrace	
Ascot Doomben – Balmoral	
Ascot Oriel Park – Balmoral	(Toombul to Cultural Centre 300; Valley to Balmoral 230)
Clayfield – Salisbury 71	(Toombul to Cultural Centre 306/322; Valley to Salisbury 117/124/125)
Chermside – Enoggera 72	(Chermside to City 370; City to Brookside Shopping Centre 390)
Kalinga – Rainworth	(Toombul to City 321; Valley to Rainworth 475)
Stafford – Bardon 74	(Route 375)
Grange – Toowong	(Stafford to City via Grange 379; Teneriffe Ferry to Toowong 470)
Bulimba Ferry – Ashgrove	(City to West Ashgrove 379/380/381)
New Farm Park – West End 77	(New Farm to City 196; City to West End 199)
New Farm Wharf – Dutton Park 78	(Teneriffe Ferry to City 199; City to Fairfield via Dutton Park 196)
Fortitude Valley – Mount Gravatt 79	(Valley to Garden City via Mount Gravatt Central 174/175)

Tram routes which closed prior to 1961 were:

Spring Hill	Noted for its exceptionally steep track in Edward Street and operated by hand braked single truck trams. Closed 1947.
Botanic Gardens	This line branched off Queen Street and ran down Edward Street to the Brisbane River. Notable for its driver only operation, where passengers paid their fares into a box upon entering the tram. Closed 1947. Initially replaced with diesel buses, it was converted to trolley bus operation in 1951 along with the Spring Hill line. (Spring Hill Loop – weekdays only)
Red Hill	This line branched off Waterworks Road Red Hill and ran along Enoggera Terrace. After closure this line was retained as a link to Paddington tram depot.
Chatsworth Road, Greenslopes	This short line branched off Logan Road. for some years before closure it was only used for peak hour services. Last used in 1957.
Cavendish Road, Coorparoo	This line branched off Old Cleveland Road at Coorparoo. Closed 1955. Converted to trolley-bus. (Valley to Garden City via Cavendish Rd 184/185).

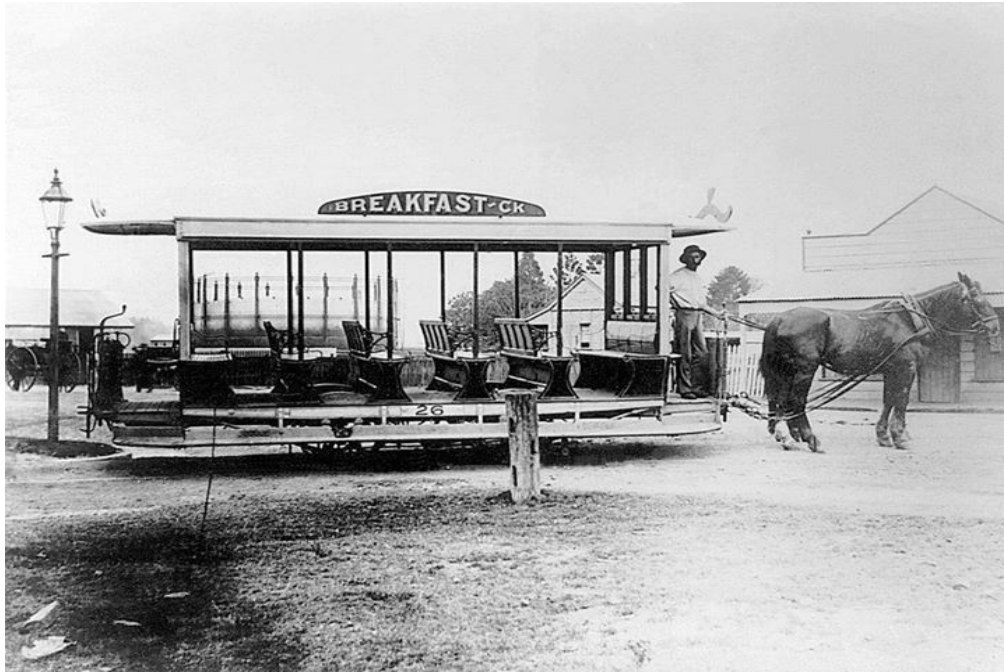
Trolley bus routes:

City to Prospect Terrace
City to Seven Hills
City to Carina (via Stanley Road)
City to Holland Park (via Cavendish Road)

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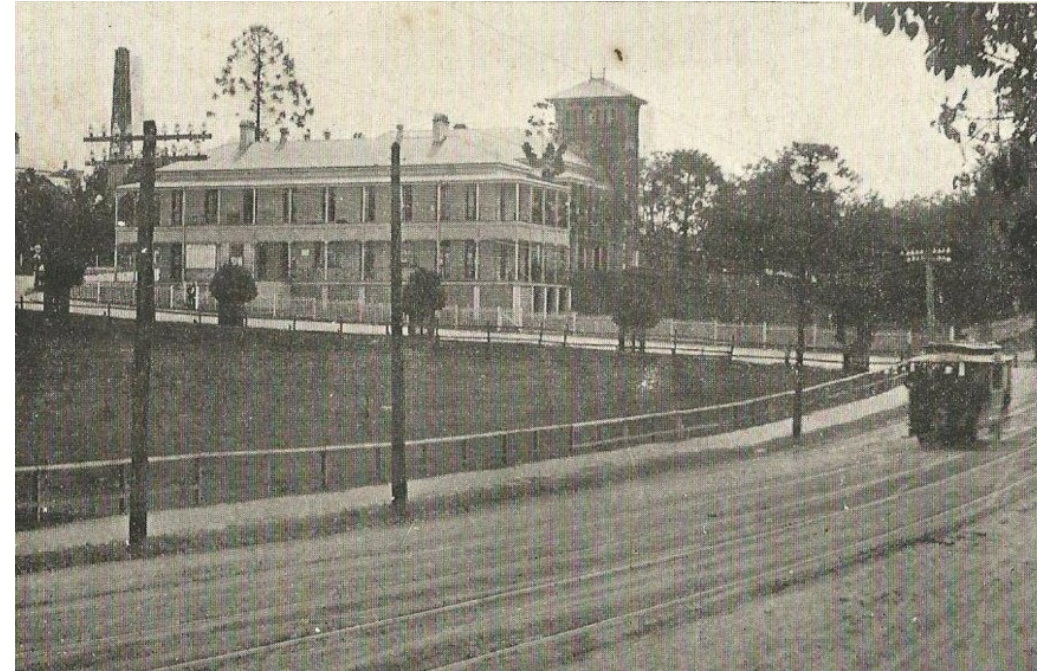
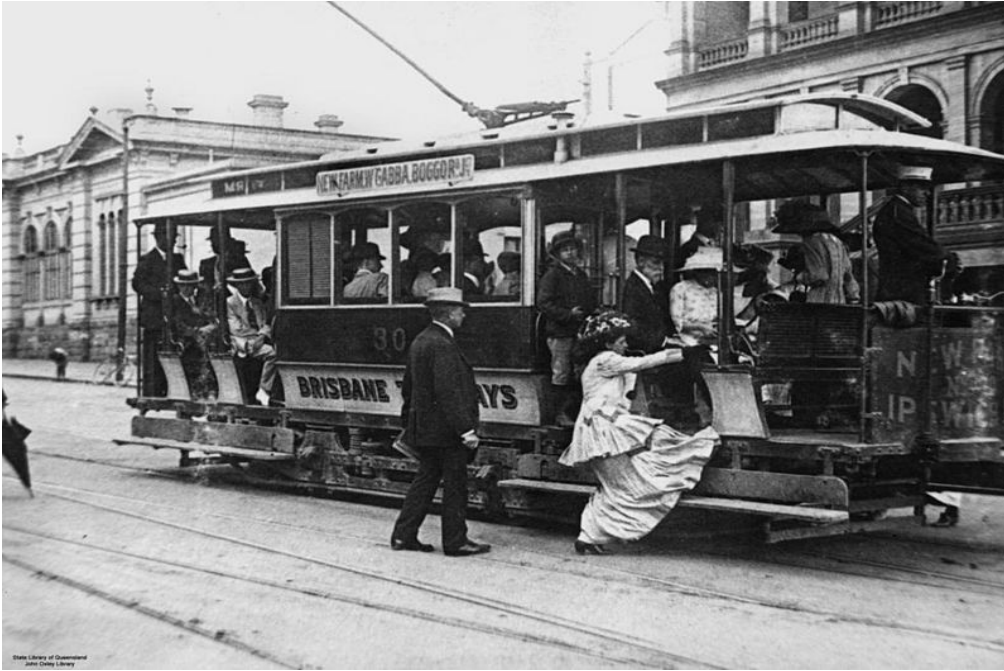
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Above: The earliest trams that appeared on Brisbane Streets were horse-drawn. The left one looks like later trams and the right one more resembles a wagon train.
Below: Some of the earliest electrical trams.



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Above Left: People hopping on an early tram. **Above Right:** An early electrical tram heads past the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

Below: Trams going Queen Street and crossing Victoria Bridge around 1900. The early film these screenshots come from shows them moving little faster than walking pace.



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Above: Trams outside the Treasury Building on Queen Street..

Below: A tram outside New Farm Park. Services were co-ordinated with the New Farm ferry.



Above: A tram passes the Gabba Fiveways with the Gabba tram signal station behind it.

Below: Inside a typical tram full of passengers.



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Above: A tram on Vulture Street near the West End State School.

Below: A tram passes All Hallows School on Ann Street in the Valley. A interesting curiosity is the Holden sign in the background.



Above: A tram travels outbound along Kingsford Smith Drive.

Below: A tram makes its way up Gladstone Street in Highgate Hill. Fairfield is in the background.





Above and Below: Trams seen here on Queen Street near the intersection with Edward St (above) and Albert St intersection (below).



Above: A tram turns into Roma Street near Roma St train station. The SGIO (now Suncorp) building is being constructed behind it. **Below:** A tram on Victoria Bridge.



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Above: A tram on Adelaide Street.

Below: A tram about to pass the Transcontinental Hotel along George Street.



Above: A tram heads up Wharf Street. Notice the riverside heritage buildings at the bottom.

Below: The view from a tram on Queen Street. A lousy place to get stuck with a flat tyre.



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Above: A tram turns from Stanley Street into Ipswich Road at the Gabba.

Below: A tram and trolley bus pass each other along Stanley Street at East Brisbane.



Above: A tram heads along Grey Street at South Brisbane.

Below: A tram turns off Stanley Street at South Brisbane.



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Above: A tram in front of the Woolloongabba Hotel.

Below: A tram on Dornoch Terrace in West End.



Above: A tram on Ipswich Road at Annerley.

Below: A tram on O'Keefe St at Buranda.



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Above: A tram along Logan Road at Stones Corner going under the Buranda train overpass.

Below: A tram at Dutton Park terminus.



Above: A tram going along Riding Road in Balmoral.

Below: A tram on Annerley Road passes a trolley bus turning off Cornwall Street at Dutton Park.

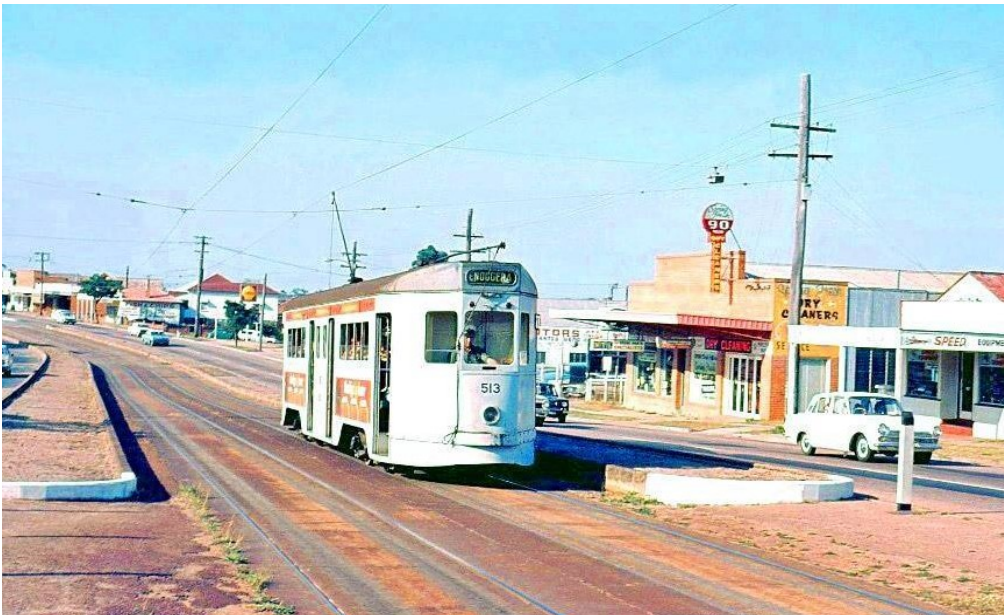


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Above: A tram on Kingsford Smith Drive near Breakfast Creek.

Below: A tram on Gympie Road at Chermside.



Above: A tram on Sandgate Road, Clayfield.

Below: A historical treat for tramgoers with a replica horse-drawn tram at Chermside. An interesting curiosity is the Golden Fleece petrol station behind it.



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Above: A drop centre tram passes the Royal Brisbane Hospital.

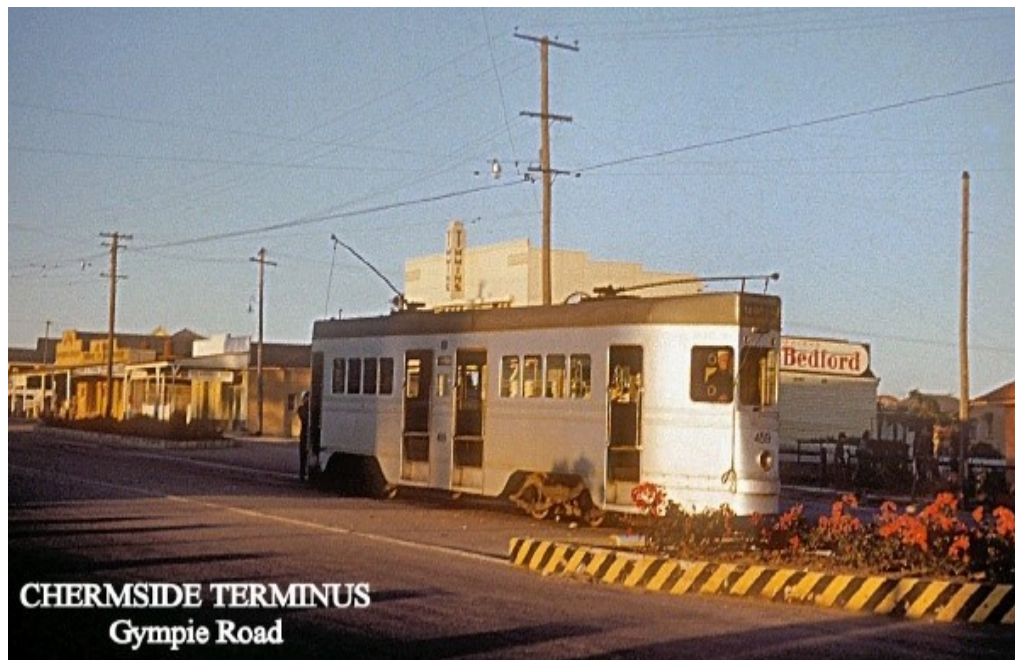
Below: A tram at the Grange.



Above: A tram near the Ashgrove terminus.



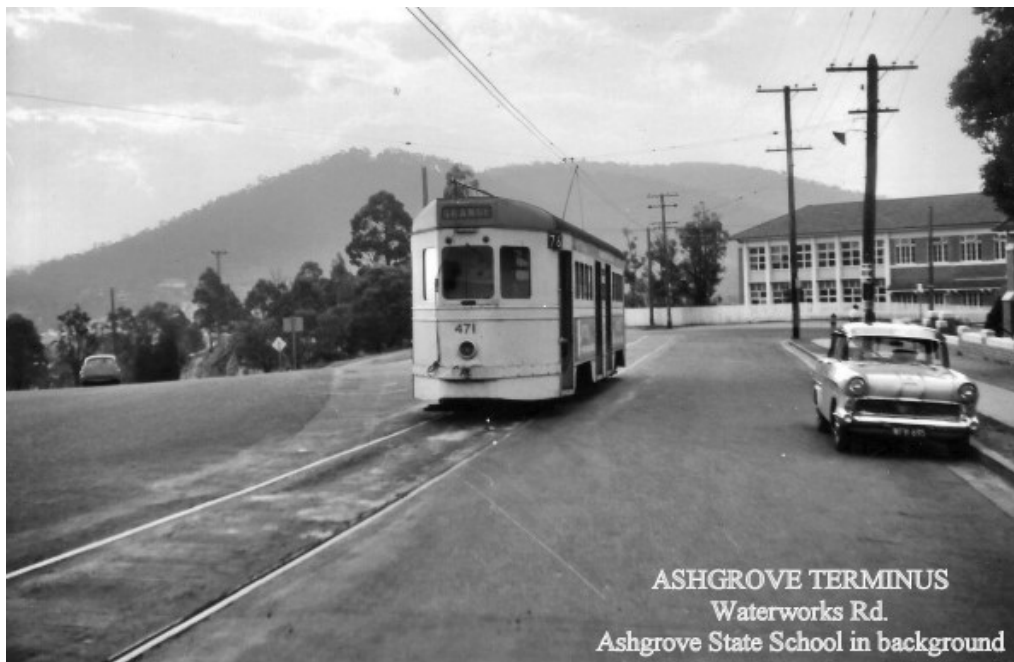
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Above: A tram on Annerley Road at Dutton Park. I love all the old shop signs on the left.





The City Hall clock tower still dominated the city skyline backdrop to FM car 433 climbing Highgate Hill on its way to Dutton Park in 1967.

HRC



Above and Below: The aftermath of the Paddington tram depot fire on September 28, 1962 where 67 trams were destroyed, which represented 20% of the entire fleet.



Above: The Courier Mail announces the end of the tram network which occurred on 13 April 1969.
Below: Streamers fill a tram on the last day of its operation.





Above: Streamers on the front of a tram on the last day of its operation in 1969. **Left:** A small portion of tram track remains on the southern abutment of the old Victoria bridge left as a memorial. **Below:** Overhead wires being cut down after the closure of the tram network.



The only significant portion of track that remains to this day is on Old Cleveland Road at Carina shown **above** when trams were still running and **below** as it looks today.



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The Tramway Museum at Ferny Grove has preserved a number of trams and is open on Sundays giving people a feel of what it was like to ride the trams before the tram network closed down in 1969.



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Below: The new G-Link light rail was opened in 2014 on the Gold Coast in preparation for the 2018 Commonwealth Games with the aim of eventually extending the line between Helensvale rail station and the Gold Coast Airport. It has been a great success fueling hopes of a return of trams/light rail in Brisbane.





Left: A proposal for a preferred light rail network put forth by the Tramway Museum.

Above: Some simulated views of light rail through Brisbane City (City Hall, Riverside Centre, Valley and South Brisbane).

Below: The failed BrisTram proposal by the Borbidge government (left) and the extent of the old tram network as seen in a Channel 7 Flashback segment on the trams (right).



BRISBANE LIGHT RAIL—FUTURE POSSIBILITIES?

I was born in the year that Brisbane's tram network closed in 1969. Having travelled on trams in Europe as well as Melbourne and recently the Gold Coast's new light rail, I can empathise with older generations who remember Brisbane's trams with great affection and long to see their return in Brisbane. The last serious effort to bring back a tram network to Brisbane was during the Borbidge government in the 1990's. Below left is the preferred light rail network proposed by the Tramway Museum at Ferny Grove.

The South East Queensland Integrated Regional Transport Plan 1997 recommended a 75 km, 65-station network of busways rather than light rail to be constructed in Brisbane in order to provide a rapid public transport system to areas of Brisbane not served by the existing heavy rail network. It recommended 5 busways to service the south-east, north, east, west and south-west suburban corridors. Only the first 3 busways were built with the west and south-west corridors missing out. Funding allocated for the light rail from West End to Teneriffe was reallocated to the busways.

One good thing that has been confirmed to me by someone who worked in the Council's planning department is that the busways were designed in a way that they could also accommodate light rail should the government ever decide to do so. As light rail has much greater capacity than buses they would excel on the busways. Even with buses, the government has decided in its Connecting SEQ 2031 plan to have more services that run just along the busways and have many services that run from the City just run from the nearest busway station to the area that the route mainly services.

This means a little bit of inconvenience having to change buses but studies have shown that the overall waiting time for the total journey is significantly reduced. Passengers will get used to it just as commuters do on the London Underground. Light rail would be perfect for the high-frequency, high-capacity services that would need to be run on the busways.

As a tourist attraction I would certainly love to see a light rail service between West End and New Farm. The government would probably balk at the cost (which would include a tram workshop) and the traffic complications to do so but it would be great to have a tram line in Brisbane and there is momentum for it following the success of the Gold Coast Light Rail.

It would also present an opportunity to create a pedestrian mall in the main West End shopping precinct on Boundary Road which would be a great attraction. Starting from there it would go along Melbourne St and over Victoria Bridge (assuming it is strong enough to cope with trams) and then turn into Adelaide Street (a difficult couple of turns which would be alleviated by a proposed Adelaide St bridge).

The original tram lines are still buried under bitumen on Adelaide St which could be closed to just buses and trams. Where it gets tricky is getting through the Valley to New Farm because of the Brunswick St Mall (though there have been suggestions of one-way traffic through it by day). I favour widening the Ivory St tunnel for New Farm bound trams. Along Brunswick Street down to Sydney St would need to be closed to parking so there is a lane each for cars and the trams. Past Sydney St to New Farm Park there could be parking again and the other lane shared between cars and trams.

