

The Bulletin



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NINETEENTH CENTURY RAPID TRANSIT

In 1863, the world's first subway opened in London. When New Yorkers heard about this big event, they also demanded rapid transit that was more adequate than ferries, horse-drawn omnibuses, horse cars, and commuter railroads. At that time, New York suffered from overcrowded and unhealthy slums adjacent to business centers. Its new suburbs were located east and west of the rivers in Brooklyn and New Jersey, and there were miles of undeveloped land in the northern part of Manhattan where a few farmers and squatters lived.

In 1866, the New York State Senate appointed a committee of five members—Senators Andrews, Low, and Cornell, New York City's Mayor Hoffman, and Alfred Craven, the Engineer of the Croton Board—who were ordered to submit plans for a rapid transit system. The committee preferred a subway, but they could not solve the problem of removing the smoke generated by the steam engines. Instead, they recommended a cable-powered elevated railway, which was built on Greenwich Street and Ninth Avenue. Trains started running between Dey Street and 29th Street on February 14, 1870.

In 1875, Manhattan was very crowded. With a million people living south of 59th Street and a half million crammed into the area south of 14th Street, New Yorkers certainly needed rapid transit. Construction of Manhattan's elevated lines proceeded rapidly and trains started running on the following lines:

DATE	LINE	FROM	TO
June 5, 1878	Sixth Avenue	Rector Street	58 th Street
August 26, 1878	Third Avenue	South Ferry	Grand Central
March 1, 1880	Second Avenue	South Ferry	65 th Street

All lines were extended during the next decade. A complete record of these extensions was published in *Electric Railroads* #25, dated December, 1956. These elevated railways were a stopgap solution that provided temporary relief. Within ten years, they were inadequate, having created more traffic than they could handle.

Fares were originally set at ten cents between the Battery and 59th Street, and 15 cents on the East Side, and 17 cents on the West Side between the Battery and the Harlem River. Half-price fares were in effect during rush hours. A ride on the elevated lines was too expensive for the tenement dwellers of the Lower East Side, whose salaries ranged from \$8 to \$17 a week.

Riding increased rapidly; the "L" carried over 115 million passengers in 1886. Effective June 1, 1886, the company reduced the fare to five cents on the Second Avenue Ninth Avenue "L"s, which ran through poor neighborhoods. Because the bulk of traffic occurred during rush hours, the company did not expect to lose much money by reducing

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