

# The Bulletin



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## ***The Bulletin***

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## **BROOKLYN BRIDGE "L" SERVICE FROM BROOKLYN TO MANHATTAN BEGAN 110 YEARS AGO**

For 15 years, passengers riding cable cars across the Brooklyn Bridge were transported only as far as Sands Street, where they transferred to elevated trains or horse cars. Through service across the bridge started operating 110 years ago, June 18, 1898.

When the Brooklyn elevated trains started running in the late 1880s, they could not operate across the Brooklyn Bridge, which was not strong enough to support steam engines, whose brakes were unreliable. Therefore, the Bridge Trustees chose the technology of the 1880s — a cable railway that the bridge could support and whose speed on the steep grades could be controlled by the cable.

After Frank Sprague perfected electric traction and George Westinghouse invented the air brake, it was obvious that electric trains could provide through service across the Brooklyn Bridge.

A February, 1897 engineer's report recommended running through elevated service across the bridge. A contract signed August 23, 1897 between the bridge trustees and several Brooklyn trolley and elevated companies provided for through service across the bridge. The Brooklyn Elevated Railroad Company was required to complete its work in six months, while Kings County Elevated was allowed one year. The latter was also required to electrify the entire line at a cost of \$1.5 million. The companies were charged a 12½-cent toll for each elevated car operated across the bridge. The cars were required to have center doors, cable grips, and the same braking system as the bridge cars, in addition to one motor car in each train.

The Brooklyn Elevated made a trial trip on

June 3, 1898 and through service across the bridge started on June 18 in conjunction with the Long Island Rail Road and the Prospect Park & Coney Island Railroad. The first train, a five-car special train with 300 passengers, most of whom were railroad and public officials, departed from Park Row at 11:30 AM. The train was pulled by one motor car at Park Row, by cable across the bridge, and by a locomotive in Brooklyn. The train was routed via the Fifth Avenue "L" and the Culver Line to Parkville. Then the train operated via the Long Island Rail Road tracks to Manhattan Beach for a banquet. This non-stop train made the trip in 37 minutes 50 seconds. Regular trains, running until 6 PM, made the trip in 50 minutes.

The next day, Sunday, trains running on a ten-minute headway were jammed to the doors. During the first weekday, Fifth Avenue trains ran on a ten-minute headway until 3 PM, when service was increased to a six-minute headway for the evening rush. Bridge shuttles continued operating frequently.

Trolley cars started operating across the bridge on January 23, 1898. Because they provided through service to many Brooklyn neighborhoods, the bridge cable railway lost 13,000 to 15,000 daily passengers to the trolley cars. After through elevated trains started running to Park Row, riding increased rapidly. On June 22, trolley cars had empty seats in the evening rush and the elevated trains' loss of passengers was reduced to 2,000.

The 310 bridge employees were dismissed on June 30 and about 200 were rehired by the Brooklyn Elevated Railroad Company,

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**NEXT TRIP — SCRANTON (STEAMTOWN/ELECTRIC CITY TROLLEY), JULY 18**