



Baltimore's Streetcars and Buses (Images of America: Maryland)

Gary Helton, Baltimore Streetcar Museum

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In the 1850s, Baltimore's 170,000 residents had few options when it came to getting around town. Before the decade's end, however, the omnibus--an urban version of the stagecoach--emerged as Baltimore's first mass-transit vehicle. Horsecars followed, then cable cars, and ultimately electrically powered streetcars. Recognizing the need for cohesion, the city's myriad transit providers merged into a single operator. United Railways and Electric Company, incorporated in 1899, faced the unenviable task of integrating routes being served by inadequate, incompatible, and often obsolete equipment. Over the next seven decades, privately run mass transit in Baltimore survived bankruptcy, a name change, two world wars, the proliferation of private automobiles, a takeover by out-of-town interests, and a plethora of new vehicles. Arguably a unified system of privately operated mass transit was no closer to being a reality in 1970, when it reached the end of the line and was taken over by the state.

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