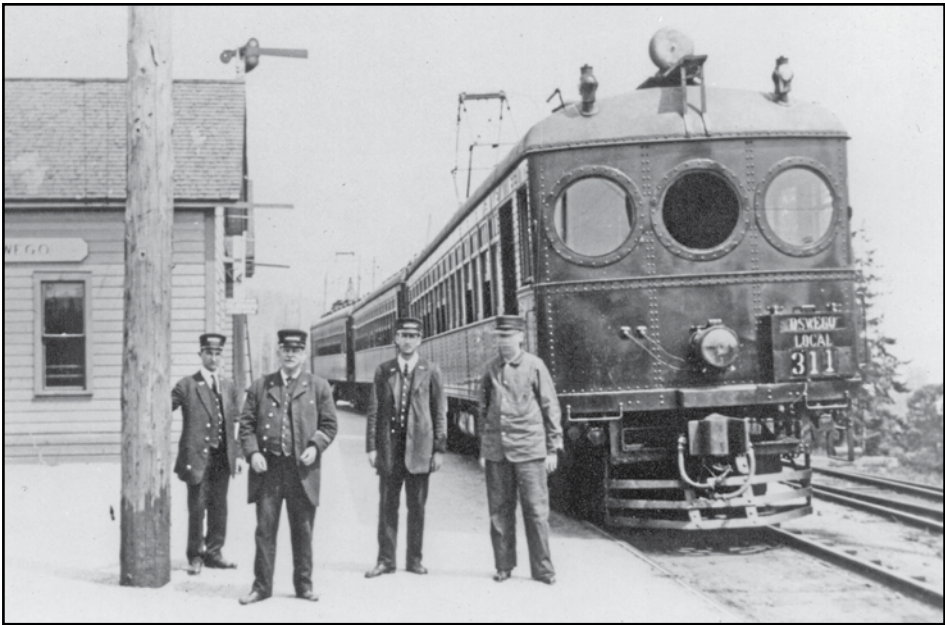


“Red Electric” railroad may become regional trail

(Continued from Page 1)

The Oregon Electric Railway was an interurban railroad line that linked Portland to Eugene. Service from Portland to Salem began in 1907. The Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway purchased the system in 1910, and extended service to Eugene in 1912. Starting at Union Station, the Oregon Electric traveled through downtown Portland and along roughly what is now Interstate 5, Multnomah Boulevard, through Maplewood to a junction and station at Garden Home. From there separate lines went south to Salem and Eugene and east to Forest Grove. In 1912, the Southern Pacific began to look into the possibility of converting its trackage in the Willamette Valley to overhead electrification.

By 1914 the Southern Pacific’s “Red Electric” was also in business and it was the stunner. These interurbans were painted bright red with innovative round ship port windows to offer more protection to railway men. The Red Electric’s “West Side Local” began at Union Station and traveled through downtown Portland and along what is now Barbur Boulevard, Bertha Boulevard, passed by the northern segment of what is now Alpenrose Dairy, and made other stops on its way to Hillsboro and Forest Grove. The train met up with the “East Side Local” in St. Joseph, just north of McMinnville. The railroad line then extended south to Corvallis. Like its competitor, the Southern Pacific Red Electric Railway’s lifetime was brief, just 15 years. By the late 1920s, with improved highways, more people were turning to private automobiles. While freight trains continued for many years, 1929 marked the end of passenger service



A Southern Pacific Red Electric train stops at Oswego Station circa 1920. (Photo courtesy of Richard Thompson)

for the Red Electric. Meanwhile, regular passenger service on the Oregon Electric Railway in the Willamette Valley ended in May 1933. Operation as an electric railroad ended July 10, 1945. Blumenauer explained the additional impacts of the electric interurbans. “These areas that had dedicated right of ways were of double significance because they tied together activity nodes.” “Stations along the old rail lines developed into neighborhoods and cities that predominated the metropolitan area,” said Blumenauer. The Red Electric Trail will follow a portion of the former railroad it is named for. When completed, it will offer Southwest Portlanders safety and recreation, not to mention transportation to downtown Portland work places. Southwest Trails PDX, begun in 1996 and headed up by Don Baack, is already responsible for creating, signing and

maintaining 40 miles of walking trails through Southwest Portland. The proposed “Red Electric Trail” is the most ambitious Southwest Trails project its current 100 volunteers have undertaken. Baack is first to admit the endeavor is not without its challenges. “It’s impossible to give a completion date for the entire trail. There are right of way issues, and dedicated city of Portland funding gets tied up in red tape.” “The funds can get bureaucratically shifted from place to place. Then some land owner doesn’t want to move a fence even though we have the right of way. Someone else doesn’t want the trail to sustain any benches at this point. On it goes...” Baack, well versed in fiscal kurfuffles, remains confident the Red Electric Trail will be completed. With its 3 percent incline, it will closely follow the original Red Electric railroad’s route from the Fanno Creek

Trail in Garden Home all the way to downtown Portland. Still, there are some costs looming that the city or others will need to pick up. These include a 20-foot-wide strip of land north of Alpenrose Dairy, and two other strips west of Southwest 33rd and Bertha, another bit west of Southwest 33rd and six additional small plots. Baack says the trail’s first segment is funded. It is a pedestrian and bicycle bridge spanning a gulch between Southwest Capitol Highway at Southwest Nebraska and Southwest Bertha Boulevard westbound. Its completion deadline is 2016. SOURCES: The Red Electrics: Southern Pacific’s Oregon Interurban by Tom Dill & Walter R. Grande (dustjacket,) Pacific Fast Mail, 1994. Oregon Electric Railway: The Oregon Encyclopedia, Wikipedia citations. Additional interurban history at pdxhistory.com. To learn more about the Red Electric Trail, related Southwest Trails PDX walks or volunteering, visit www.swtrailspx.com.

Sellwood Bridge opens soon (Continued from Page 7)

Apr. 17 until as late as 6 a.m. on Mon., Apr. 20 to implement a traffic pattern change at the west end of the bridge. When the bridge reopens on the 20th, traffic will use the new west approach which will transition onto the detour bridge. This will allow construction of the ramp from the bridge to northbound Hwy. 43. Highway traffic will not be impacted by the weekend bridge closure. All construction is on schedule to be completed by Thanksgiving 2016. For project information, visit www.sellwoodbridge.org. To view the arch installation, visit the project’s webcam.

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