

Fort Bliss had direct connection to El Paso with streetcar

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Special to The Monitor

The building of the Fort Bliss streetcar line from the summer of 1906 through Thanksgiving of the same year excited El Pasoans about the prospect of quick and clean transportation to the post, six miles away, northeast of the main part of town. It particularly excited the real estate developers and the home builders who advertised heavily in the *Times* and the *Herald* that the new streetcar line would be passing through their developments. Ads for lots and homes in Altura Park, Grandview, and Military Heights appeared often in the newspapers in this time period, all extolling the fact that the new car line would pass through their additions. Residence lots were being sold for \$10 down and \$5 monthly, and were advertised that no interest would be charged.

After much anticipation, the line, which did not quite make the Thanksgiving Day target for opening, did open for business the day after Thanksgiving, Nov. 29, 1906. An inspection party of company officials and local dignitaries made the trip over the line Thanksgiving Day, even though the wire was not strung around the loop on the Fort Bliss end. That overhead wire was completed, however, for the official opening, Nov. 29. Making the trip in Car 71, one of the new closed cars, were city officials and representatives of the parent company of the El Paso Electric Railway, the Stone & Webster Corporation of Boston. The electric railway company changed its name in the mid-1920s to the El Paso Electric Company with Power and Transportation Divisions. The Electric Company would eventually sell off the Transportation Division in 1944 to El Paso City Lines.

On that first trip in 1906, Car 71, after leaving east El Paso (now the Five Points area), climbed up a 2 1/2 per cent grade through Altura Park. Reaching the Grandview addition, the track made a wide curve to the east and proceeded down the middle of what would become Fort Boulevard.



The Stone & Webster roof Car No. 90, loading on Stanton St.

COURTESY PHOTO

It then made a slight left turn on Tompkins, crossed the Alamogordo Road, (later Dyer Street) and the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad (later to become the north line of the Southern Pacific) at grade. It then climbed up the mesa to a loop constructed near the guard house and to the north of the parade ground. On board the car was Col. Hunt, commander of the 25th Infantry. Arriving at the fort, the regimental band played a number of pieces for the group, while Captains Powell and Albright greeted the inspection party. Captain Powell, Regimental Adjutant, told reporters that the Army would be glad to see visitors and that they would be able to roam the grounds "as long as they behaved themselves". To inspect the quarters, they would, however, need the permission of the Adjutant and ladies would not be admitted to the quarters. Captain Powell also indicated that the Regimental Band, during the summer months, gave evening concerts to which the public would be welcome. The trip to the post took 45

minutes and the riders commented that the ride was, by far, the most picturesque of the streetcar company.

Officials of the streetcar company indicated the opening of the line would add six miles of track to the company which would total about 25 route miles. It was noted that now, passengers from Cd. Juarez could ride the six miles to the post; or from Washington Park, the nine miles to the post, for a nickel. Regular service began the next day, a Friday at 5 a.m., then every 1 1/2 hours after that.

During the Mexican revolution, World War I, and World War II, the streetcar line provided an important link between the military and civilian communities. After the Manhattan Heights and Government Hill lines were converted to buses in 1937, the Yandell Street trackage was abandoned and thereafter the Ft. Bliss streetcars came into town via Piedras, Alameda, and Myrtle Avenues. In 1940, the El Paso Electric Company, who operated the streetcar lines in El Paso, bought ten more cars from

Houston to meet the ridership demands of the Fort Bliss and Washington Park lines. There was, briefly, a streetcar shuttle to the old William Beaumont Hospital. One of the last lines built, it operated from 1923 to 1938. The small single truck streetcar would meet the Fort Bliss car at the intersection of Fort Blvd. and Stevens St. Passengers would then transfer to the Beaumont car which ran straight out unpaved Stevens St. to the hospital.

The Fort Bliss streetcar line ran continuously for 41 years, until Aug. 17, 1947. It served the post for two wars and a revolution and provided invaluable access for both civilians and soldiers. It also helped measurably in the development of northeast neighborhoods. After El Paso City Lines converted both the Fort Bliss and Washington Park lines to buses in 1947, only the Juarez line remained with streetcar service. That line operated all the way to 1974.

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