

full circle

A Tale of 68 years

Light Rail is Reborn in the Valley of the Sun: The Story of Lula and Alice

december 27, 2008 in a celebration stretching across three cities, light rail was reborn in the Valley of the Sun. Inaugurated with much fanfare by Mayors Phil Gordon, Hugh Hallman and Scott Smith of Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa Arizona; the ultra modern euro-styled trains began services along the 20-mile starter line. This event however, is not where the story begins.



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Photo of #116 courtesy of the Phoenix Trolley Museum

Almost two lifetimes before, in 1887, the Valley Street Railway began services using trolleys pulled by mules. As recorded by the Phoenix Trolley Museum, (<http://phoenixtrolley.com/>) the history of the Valley Trolley system was a complex tapestry of ups and downs leading to the system finally being abandoned on February 17th, 1948. That story did not end however, before two little girls had a chance to take a ride.

Sometime around 1940, in a car not unlike trolley number 116 pictured above, Lula and Alice Barnes rode the downtown line. "It was just down Jefferson," said Alice Harper now 72. "We could have walked, but daddy wanted us to ride." "Daddy took us on the train for a ride" continued Lula Brooks 83. "We were too young to worry about Jim Crow or who we sat next to. We were just glad to ride. It was like a merry-go-round."

Past and future connected in as a Christmas surprise when Lula and Alice received an invitation from the office of Mayor Gordon to take the inaugural ride. "It was exciting" said Lula (age 83). "And much more comfortable. This was a new century, a new day, a new time. It was as if we had been transported to a new era but going to the same place. It was like living Buck Rogers. The police escort was nice too." (see photo next page top)

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To Mayor Hallman of Tempe (photo left center), the light rail line is a major public investment that is already reaping benefits. "So far business has invested more than four billion dollars along the line" said the Mayor. "Not only will this generate the jobs we need to improve the quality of life in Tempe, but millions of dollars in tax revenue to the city so we can improve services to our residents. The rail line is also serving as a vehicle to revitalize the areas along the old Apache Trail (old U.S. 60) that lost revenue when the freeways were built. Finally, the rail will serve as vital component of our comprehensive transit system. Already as witnessed by my own children, youth are delaying driving in favor of mass transit thus freeing space on the roads and lowering insurance costs. These benefits did not occur by accident, they are a strategically planned short-term consequences of the drive toward long term social, economic and environmental sustainability for Tempe."

Mayor Smith of Mesa has a similar view. "The train creates an environment where problems can be solved. Whenever you have this kind of investment, it is a magnet that will draw businesses and the people that can help you solve the problems that are caused when areas go down, mature or when your city is ready to go to the next level. The other part is that this is a long-term solution. It is not here today and gone tomorrow. That is what is exciting about this project."

The story of Lula and Alice demonstrates that you can not kill a good idea and that time comes full circle. In the 1980's, a light rail starter line was initiated from downtown San Diego California to the border (photo left bottom). The common wisdom was that no one would ride it in a car friendly city. They were wrong, and now the system stretches across the city and is the nucleus of an expanding regional rail system. If San Diego is a witness to what can be done, then the future looks bright for the Valley's Metro Light Rail. **For more information on Phoenix Metro Light Rail click here** *SWG*

Photo Captions: Police escort for the inaugural train, Tempe Az. Mayor Hugh Hallman and Metro CEO Rick Simonetta, the San Diego Trolley



A photograph showing the interior of a light rail train. Several passengers are seated on dark green plastic seats. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue jacket, is seated next to an older woman with short, curly blonde hair wearing a tan jacket. They appear to be in conversation. Behind them, a man with glasses and a dark jacket is seated. The train has overhead handrails and a clean, modern interior. Large windows on the right side show bright sunlight streaming in. A white text box is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

Lula and Alice Ride the Light Rail