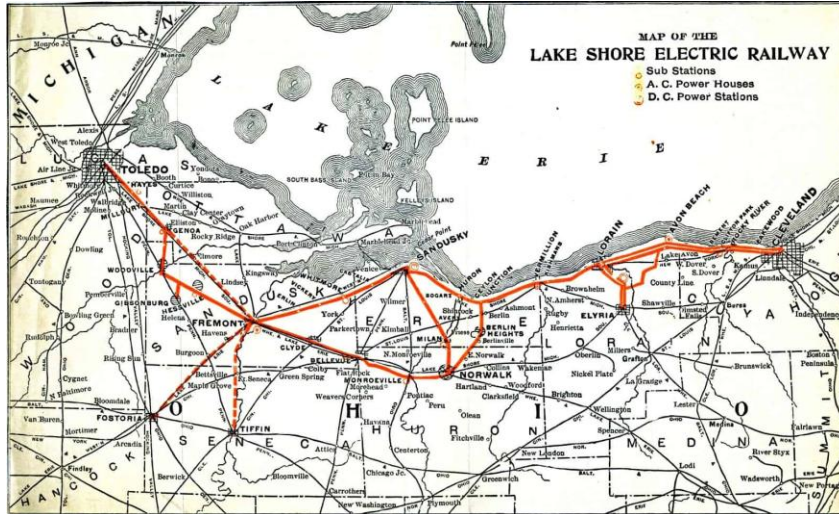


OHIO'S INTERURBAN RAIL SYSTEM

THE LAKE SHORE ELECTRIC RAILWAY

Ohio was once the epicenter of interurban rail in the United States, with nearly 2,800 miles of electric rail connecting towns and cities before the rise of automobiles.



Origins & Development

- The interurban system in Ohio began with the Newark & Granville Street Railway, which opened on December 28, 1889, and is widely recognized as the first modern interurban. Interurbans were electric railways designed to connect medium-sized towns and cities, providing frequent, affordable passenger service that traditional steam railroads

could not efficiently offer. Ohio's flat terrain, dense rural population, and proximity to car manufacturers like Niles Car & Manufacturing and Jewett Car Company made it ideal for interurban expansion.

Peak Operations - By World War I, Ohio's interurban network had reached its zenith, with 2,798 miles of track, more than any other state by roughly 1,000 miles. Nearly every town with a population over 5,000 was connected, and the system included almost 100 individual lines operated by a few major companies. Interurbans not only transported passengers but also carried freight such as farmers' crops, providing a vital link between rural communities and urban markets

The Ohio Electric Railway was an interurban railroad formed on May 16, 1907. The organizers of the new company were Randal Morgan, W. Kesley Schoepf, and Hugh J. McGowan. Beginning in September 1907 and continuing into 1908 the new company acquired or leased the fourteen other companies which would comprise its system. It was Ohio's largest interurban, connecting Toledo, Lima, Dayton, Columbus, and Cincinnati. At its peak it operated 617 miles (993 km) of track. Never financially healthy, the company went bankrupt in 1921 and was dissolved into its constituent companies.

The Ohio Electric proved to be financially unsound. It paid no dividends during its corporate existence and lost \$1.5 million as a result of the Great Dayton Flood in 1913. In 1918 it spun off its Cincinnati–Dayton line to the Cincinnati and Dayton Traction company. This trend continued in 1920 when spun off the Dayton and Western Traction in its entirety.

An article in the April 2, 1920 issue of the *Star Journal* reported that the Lake Shore Electric would soon occupy the Wilke building in downtown Sandusky. The headline stated that the new home for the Lake Shore Electric would be the “finest on system,” as the stations in Cleveland and Toledo were not nearly as grand as Sandusky's new station. You can explore the history of the Wilke Building [HERE](#).

The end came in 1921. The company went bankrupt and dissolved. Most of the constituent companies went bankrupt as well, but continued operating. Several

companies would later come together to form the Cincinnati and Lake Erie Railroad in 1930.

Decline - The interurban era in Ohio was relatively short-lived. After 1925, the rise of automobiles, improved roads, and buses led to declining ridership and revenue. Many lines could not sustain operations, and by the early 1930s, most interurban services had ceased. Some companies survived longer by selling electricity to communities along their routes rather than relying solely on passenger fares.

Legacy - Today, Ohio's interurban history is preserved through museums and online archives, such as the Western Ohio Interurban Online Museum, which documents photographs, maps, and remaining infrastructure. The interurban era remains a significant chapter in Ohio's transportation history, illustrating the state's early innovation in electric rail and regional connectivity.

There was quite a bit written about Ohio's Interurban:

[Ohio Interurbans and Streetcars: History, Lines, Photos](#)

The Western Reserve Historical Society sheds some more light:

[Lake Shore Electric Railway: The Interurban That Connected Northern Ohio's Communities, Commerce, and Imagination | Cleveland Historical](#)

Contains several photos of the old tracks that ran through Sandusky.

<https://sanduskyhistory.blogspot.com/2020/12/lake-shore-electric-railway-tracks-on.html>

Former Interurban cars have been put to good use all over Northern Ohio. For example, this house (private, of course) was an Interurban baggage car, originally designated Freight car #433. It was brought from Sandusky and converted to a summer resident around 1950. The core of the original car now forms the kitchen. The sloped ceiling and wood paneling of the original have been retained, and its original canvas tar compound roof is intact and coated with aluminum. The wood paneling of the original interior has been preserved. This unique home is on the Register of Historic Places.



From the Sandusky Library:

[Sandusky History: The Sandusky, Milan & Norwalk Electric Railway](#)



The Sandusky, Milan & Norwalk Electric Railway was in operation from Sandusky to Milan beginning in July of 1893. The line from Milan to Norwalk began running in September, 1893. The track connected with the Peoples Electric Railway in Sandusky. The electric railway car below is in Norwalk, Ohio.



In 1901 the Sandusky, Milan & Norwalk Electric Railway became part of the [Lake Shore Electric Railway](#). The Lake Shore Electric Railway was closed out in 1938, with the Lake Shore Coach Co., a bus transportation facility taking its place. The Lake Shore Coach Co. was sold to Greyhound in 1949.

OHIO
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ELECTRIC INTERURBAN RAILWAYS

For over three decades, the electric interurban railways played a major part in the economic life of the American Midwest. Their contribution was greatest in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois. The interurban railways were electrically-powered trams, faster than city streetcars that were designed to connect communities together. A quick and cheap alternative to regular railroads, trolleys or horses, the interurban became a popular mode of travel at the beginning of the 20th century. By 1905, Ohio had 1,330 miles of interurban track.

OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OHIO POWER FOUNDATION
OHIO ELECTRIC COMPANY

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