

# New Orleans' trolley cars used to be main option

Steve Eldridge, The Examiner  
Jul 18, 2007 3:00 AM (104 days ago)

## WASHINGTON -

I must say that I never expected there to be quite so much passion about trolley cars. After I wrote last week that I was in New Orleans and would be taking a look at the system there that has been in place since the 1800s, I got a number of e-mails telling me I was in the wrong place, that the only place where trolleys should be observed (apparently) was Portland, Ore.

Some people called me an idiot for spending time in New Orleans and taking some time to ride the trolley and to talk to some of the people who rode it and who operated it.

Of course, there were other reasons for me to be in New Orleans, and fortunately for the good people of Portland, they didn't have the same problems that led me to the Big Easy.

It should be noted that the Portland region is about one-third the size of the one that makes up Washington, and it doesn't have the same growth problems. Portland has been the poster child for everything from "smart growth" to "new urbanism," but not all of the experiments there have been successful.

Free transit rides in the city core place a great demand on taxes and other revenues to make up for them. There have also been some bumps in the road in trying to complete a north/south route. Still, one would have to agree that Portland is making transit work.

The interesting thing is that much of the criticism people wanted to put on me for discussing the trolley system in New Orleans was that it is, in their opinion, a "kiddie ride" or little more than a gimmick for tourists.

The fact is that the streetcars existed there for more than 100 years and were the main option for residents. Over time, they were replaced by buses, which offered more flexible routes as the city expanded. Still, several of the main lines remained and should be celebrated. In fact, Portland went out of its way to ensure that the trolley and streetcars it installed in recent years harkened back to the old days.

My goal is not to defend or promote any one system over the other. I thought it might be interesting to look into the trolley system since I was going to be in the town for other reasons.

I am certain that there are wonderful examples of trolleys in Europe as well in Portland.

Sometimes those who advocate for one position or another do so with such passion that they forget things like being polite and accepting of other person's positions.

Some of those who wrote e-mails might want to take a step back and consider a more reasoned approach.

By the way, I see during all of this discussion about trolleys that the Sierra Club is urging the District government to reconsider its approach and to revive its plans for a 40– to 50-mile streetcar system.

I wonder if they'll get some of the same e-mails from the Portland people.

*Questions, comments, random musings? Write to [Steve@SprawlandCrawl.com](mailto:Steve@SprawlandCrawl.com).*

*Examiner*