

NORTH MELBOURNE ELECTRIC TRAMWAY AND LIGHTING  
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Inaugurated 11th October, 1906.

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During the early nineteen hundreds, local residents of the Northern Suburbs of Melbourne commenced a considerable agitation for the provision of better transport facilities to and from the city.

Those residing in the Essendon, Moonee Ponds, Ascot Vale and Flemington areas thought that the progress of their suburbs was considerably hampered by this lack and that it was causing their districts to lag behind the Eastern ones in development, while those suburbs appeared to receive many favours from the hands of successive governments.

At this juncture Mr. A. E. Morgans, lately of Western Australia, appeared on the scene, with an offer to build, on behalf of himself and others, two routes of electric tramway and also, to provide electric light and power to the areas served by the electric street railway. Immediately on this announcement however, as it might be expected, the Metropolitan Gas Company and the Victorian Railways strongly attacked the scheme and it was not until twelve months later, after it had been pointed out on numerous occasions, that the railways department realized that the projected tramways, if built, would act as feeders to their own network.

On the 29th July, 1904, it was declared publicly at the Essendon Council Chambers that a plebescite of residents had resulted in totals of 2874 in favour and 146 against, the tramway scheme and that in view of the support given the project, land would soon be purchased in order to enable the erection of a power house and car barn.

The ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the power station took place on the 24th May, 1905, in the presence of a large gathering and in which the then Mayors of Essendon and Flemington (Crs. Showers and Raisbech respectively) officiated. A month later the Premier, Mr. T. Bent, laid the first rail, the function taking place at the west end of Racecourse Road, a portion of the route, in the presence of a crowd so large that vehicular traffic had to be suspended.

The two routes of tramway decided upon and subsequently laid, coming from termini in Maribyrnong and Essendon, made a common terminus at Flemington Bridge and because this shunt was located adjacent to the railway station and co-linear with the terminus of the Flemington Road cable tramway, the easiest possible transfer of passengers was thus rendered practicable.

Dealing with the Essendon route first; the double track line ran along Mount Alexander Road, from Flemington Bridge, to Puckle Street, where the line became single and at this point also, a single track spur branched and ran westwards along Puckle Street to Moonee Ponds railway station. The main line, now single, turned northwards into Pascoe Vale Road and ran via. this thoroughfare, Fletcher Street and Mount Alexander Road to a terminus at Keilor Road. A crossover was provided on the double track section of the route, in Mount Alexander Road, at South Street, while passing loops were installed on the single track sections at the Essendon Town Hall, at Bent Street and at Fletcher Street, in Pascoe Vale Road; at Hoddle Street in Fletcher Street, and at the Essendon railway station and at Brewster Street, in Mount Alexander Road.

The second route, that from Flemington Bridge to Maribyrnong, was of double track and commenced from a junction with the Essendon line, in Mount Alexander Road, at Victoria Street and ran via. Victoria Street, Racecourse Road, Epsom Road and Union Road to Maribyrnong Road, where it became single, continuing thence, westerly, down Maribyrnong Road to come to a terminus at the Maribyrnong River. Crossovers on this route being provided, on the double track sections, at Epsom Road in Racecourse Road and on both sides of the location of the railway-tramway level crossing in Epsom Road, while a passing loop was laid in on the single track stretch of the route, in Maribyrnong Road, at Bowen Street.

The construction of the permanent way was of the concrete stringer type and the rails were of 90 lb. 30 ft. section, doubly bonded to ensure good negative returns, while in addition, the rails were fitted with tie-bars spaced at 7 feet 6 inch centres, and all crossovers and turnouts were of toughened cast steel from Messrs. Hadfields of Sheffield, being supplied to the Company direct from their East Hecla Works.

An acre of ground in Mount Alexander Road opposite South Street was selected for the position of the power house and car barn, as being centrally situated. The power house was erected in red brick, measuring 90 feet x 63 feet and enclosed three Babcock and Wilcox water tube boilers, each machine being capable of developing 360 H.P. at 350 R.P.M.. The electrical equipment comprised three G.E. generators driven directly from the engine shafts and capable of generating 250 Kw. at 550 volts. The switchboard was built by Thomas Houston and consisted of three generator panels, two traction feeder panels, four lighting panels and one Board of Trade panel. An unusual feature of the engine room was the passing of the exhaust steam outside into a cooling tower of approximately 50 feet in height and in which the steam was condensed and the water, thus obtained, re-used.

The car barn was built adjacent to the power house and was also erected in red brick, measuring 200 feet x 68 feet. The structure, itself, taking in six bays of lines which spread out from a track fan situated in the depot yard and which in turn, had its ladder track connected to the north-east side main line, in Mount Alexander Road, in a facing direction. It must also be mentioned that a small double storied office block was erected immediately in front of the car barn entrance and facing and bounding on Mount Alexander Road.

The rolling stock totalled 25 cars, three types being used; the first, Nos.1 to 10, were saloon motor cars with open end platforms, while the second comprised open cross seat motor cars, Nos.11 to 15, and the third, open cross seat trailers, Nos.16 to 25. The motor cars were imported from J.G.Brill and Company of Philadelphia, U.S.A. and were assembled by Duncan and Fraser, while the trailers were built by Duncan and Fraser at their own works in Adelaide, South Australia. All the cars being fitted with life guards and in the case of the motor cars, with fixed head trolley poles for straight under running trolley wire collection.

The overhead gear throughout the system was supported by span pole and centre pole construction on the single line and double track sections, respectively. Although as the years passed on, because of the danger of centre poles to passengers and the obstruction to other road transport caused by their use, this form of support was abandoned in favour of complete span pole construction.

After enjoying 16 years of prosperous independent operation, the North Melbourne Electric Tramway and Lighting Company sold out to the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board and on the 1st. August, 1922, its 6.883 route and 10.902 single track miles of tramway and all other property, became that of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that history will record that this tramway, one of six of Melbourne's original metropolitan electric traction networks and the first of them to be constructed, was the last to come under the amalgamation scheme, the action of which, it can be said, forged what is now one of the worlds finest electric tramway undertakings.