



A street car travels west down Cordova Street from the Carrall Street intersection during the Dominion Day celebrations on 1 July 1890. The brand-new transit system had commenced operations five days earlier.

## Early Transit

TO ALLOW THE YOUNG CITY, which had been created by the advent of the railway, to expand beyond its original core developers needed a transit system. In 1889 the city decided to build a public transit system, and not only that: it was decided that the streetcars should be electric, not horse-drawn, which would make Vancouver one of the first cities in North America to have such a system.

The Vancouver Street Railways Company was set up to put a streetcar system into operation, but the company failed, and the Vancouver Electric Railway and Light Company took over, of which Mayor Oppenheimer was a director. The company purchased streetcars in New York, and in an attempt to make its passengers think that their company was larger, the owners didn't number the first cars of the new fleet 1 to 6 but rather 10 to 15.

A street car in the Old Spaghetti Factory in Vancouver's Gastown.



On 26 June 1890 the new transit system started operation, offering free rides to potential customers on this first day—a day later the fares would cost 5 cents. The entire system at that time was only 9.6 kilometres, but the following year it doubled in size and went south across the new Granville Street Bridge over False Creek to reach Fairview Heights. Nevertheless, it was a hard battle to keep the operation profitable, and by 1892 the company was bankrupt. The Consolidated Railway and Light Company followed, but it too failed.

Then a new company appeared: the British Columbia Electric Railway Company (BCER), backed by British money. It merged with the company that ran the Interurban service to New Westminster, so that by 1897 the entire transit system from Vancouver to New Westminster was consolidated. Ridership increased steadily until 1914, when the monthly number of passengers reached 3.5 million. But competition from jitneys—automobiles that would pick up passengers at streetcar stops and undercut the streetcar fare—and later buses were the reason that this number was never reached again. The streetcars continued to roll in Vancouver until 1955, when the system was shut down.

WAITING FOR THE STREET CAR IN MOUNT PLEASANT, 1907. Pedestrians stand at the intersection of Westminster Avenue (Main Street) and Ninth Avenue (Broadway) and await the arrival of a streetcar from downtown Vancouver. The view is to the northwest and includes the Mount Pleasant Methodist Church, H. O. Lee Grocery Store and the Mount Pleasant Pharmacy. Today the Lee Building occupies this site.



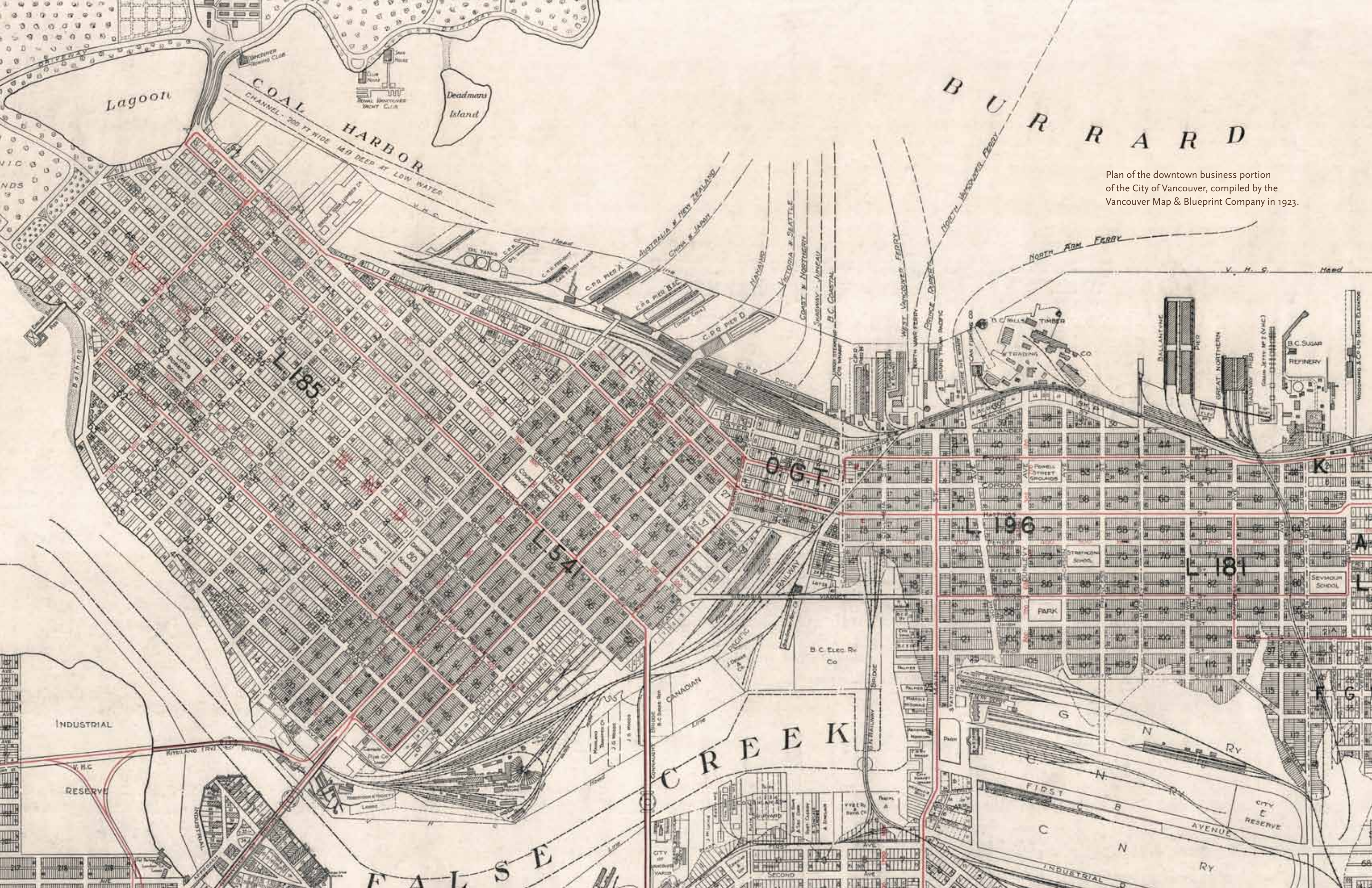




**FIERCE COMPETITION BETWEEN STREETCARS AND JITNEYS, 1923.**

A view to the east down Hastings Street at Columbia Street after the First World War shows the fierce competition between the streetcars and the jitneys. The automobiles (driven on the left hand side of the road) were undercutting the B.C. Electric's rail line by offering to transport passengers out to Fairview for 5 cents. The electric company's directors lobbied city council to have the cars banned from picking up fares and then upped the rates. At least 10 street cars are visible in the photo with twice as many cars. The sides of many of the larger buildings function as billboards advertising international brands.





Plan of the downtown business portion of the City of Vancouver, compiled by the Vancouver Map & Blueprint Company in 1923.