

70th Anniversary Series

Give Us a Railway!



Artist's rendering of Langley City Centre SkyTrain Station
Credit: Province of British Columbia

The universal cry from Langley is give us a railway and our highest gratification is fulfilled." That appeal, recorded in Vancouver's *Daily World* newspaper in 1891, could have been made by many municipalities at the time. But Langley was fortunate. By 1915, the 41-year-old municipality could boast not one, but three railway lines, two of which ran through what is now the City of Langley.

In the late 1800s, Langley residents were disappointed that the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) - the nation's first trans-continental railway - had chosen to build on the north side of the Fraser River. Although its completion in 1885 had facilitated settlement in Langley, the route had little other impact on the community.

Langley's first railway was the short-lived (1897-1933) and now largely forgotten Fraser Valley branch of the Vancouver, Victoria and Eastern Railway (VV&E) which operated in Langley from 1908 to 1933. Crossing the international border at Sumas and continuing west through the Fraser Valley, the railway bypassed both Murrayville and Langley Prairie. Its owners promoted long-distance haulage over local needs. Despite building spur lines to a few local sawmills, the railway had little effect on Langley. The construction of the British Columbia Electric Railway (BCER) in 1909-1910, however, was to have major and long-lasting influences on the community's growth and development.

By 1907 the British-owned company was already operating electric streetcar services in Victoria, Vancouver, and New Westminster. The construction of its

"Interurban" electric railway system in the Fraser Valley followed shortly afterward. The company's chosen route began in New Westminster and ended in Chilliwack. Construction was remarkably quick. The line between Langley and New Westminster was carrying agricultural produce and milk to urban markets by March 1910. Passenger service began just four months later. The Interurban served Langley and the rest of the Fraser Valley until its replacement by buses in 1950.

The railway's impact on Langley Prairie was profound, enabling farmers to "ship milk" and prompting entrepreneurs such as the Timms family to establish businesses, hotels, and retail operations. Three stations were constructed in Langley Prairie: Hunter (on 200th Street north of the Nicomekl River), Langley Prairie (at the southwest corner of 204th Street and the Fraser Highway), and Norris (on Glover Road north of the Langley Bypass).

The third railway to run through the Langleys was the ill-fated Canadian Northern Railway, built through the municipality's northern extremity in 1915. Plagued from the outset by financial difficulties, the railway was forcibly merged with the federally-owned Canadian Government Railways in 1923. Its only station in the Langleys was built in Fort Langley. Now 110 years old, the building currently operates as a museum, no longer providing the freight and passenger services to which residents and businesses were formerly accustomed.

Just as the BC Electric Railway had a profound effect on Langley Prairie, so will the completion in 2029 of the Surrey Langley SkyTrain Extension. With stations being built at Willowbrook and at the intersection of 203rd Street and Industrial Avenue (Langley City Centre), the expanded rail system will also include a new transit exchange. The extension will revitalize the City while connecting passengers from the Fraser Valley to other areas of Metro Vancouver. Mindful of the impacts that will come with the extension, the City adopted a new Official Community Plan (OCP) in 2021. The OCP is largely transit-driven while emphasizing public safety, affordable housing, social connection,

increased employment, public amenities, environmental protection, and improved quality of life. **The pending arrival of SkyTrain and diligent planning promise to truly make the City of Langley "The Place to Be."**

-Warren Sommer



British Columbia Electric Railway train and power poles, c. 1911
Credit: salishan Place by the River



VV&E Railway steam locomotive and coal tender
Credit: Great Northern Railway



BC Electric Railway Train on today's Michaud Crescent, 1910
Credit: salishan Place by the River