

Detroit United Railway

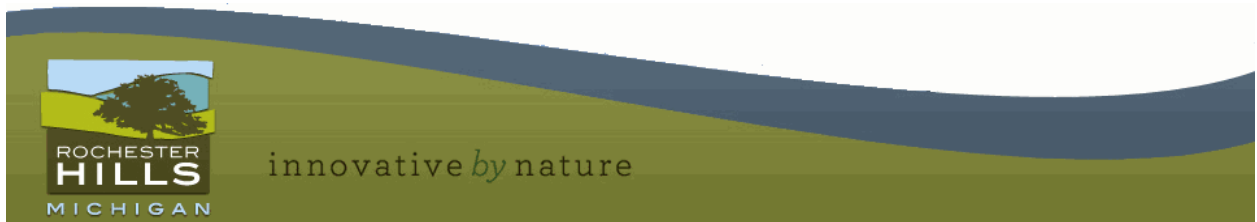
In January 1899, the Avon Township board granted John Winter and Oliver Law a franchise to construct and maintain a street railway for thirty years for transporting passengers and light freight across Avon Township. The pair promised that the railway would make at least four round trips per day in the winter and six round trips per day in the summer. The fare was also fixed at one and one half cents per mile. In the fall, Law and Winter sold their franchise to the Detroit, Rochester, Romeo, and Lake Orion Railway. Farmers in town were eager for a light railway to come through; some even gave up land in order for that to happen. Work commenced in May 1899, and on September 27, 1899 the first electric interurban railway car reached the south end of Rochester. A large excited crowd greeted the 42 foot long maroon car. Many in Rochester hoped the car would increase the population and show those outside Rochester that it was a "good place to live and start a business."



A long bar called a trolley extended from the roof and connected the car to the electric wire (where the power to run the car came from). A motorman (or driver) stood at the front of the car and the conductor stood at the rear. Some of the cars even had heated bathrooms or separate smoking cars. The cars usually traveled between 35 and 40 miles per hour in the city and between 50 to 80 miles per hour outside Detroit. The interurbans provided passenger service between Detroit and the rural suburbs. The tracks sometimes ran alongside railroad tracks and roads or even down the main street of towns.

In 1901, twelve lines were purchased and consolidated into the Detroit United Railway (D.U.R.). Detroit workers used the interurban to get to jobs in Rochester such as the Detroit Sugar Mill or Parke-Davis. It also allowed farmers to get dropped off right at the market. The D.U.R. built a powerhouse, mechanical department, and main barns (which were east of Main St. between Paint Creek and the Michigan Central tracks) in Rochester, employing many men. People in Rochester could go to stores in Detroit in a short amount of time and come home quickly because cars ran every hour or half hour. By 1925, Rochester was a thriving community; citizens, however, did not need to travel to Detroit so often for supplies because of the new stores in their town. Some patrons also had bad experiences on the D.U.R.; the companies were often improperly run or profit-driven and not very kind to its patrons. When the D.U.R. hit hard times and went bankrupt in 1928, few people mourned its loss. By 1930, there were 4,000 residents in Rochester (compared to 1,535 residents at the turn of the century); the interurban played a large part in Rochester's growth. In April 1931, the *Era* reported with





sadness, "a parade of cars [left] the Rochester carhouse on their last trip to Highland Park." Today, there are no tracks that remain from the D.U.R. in Rochester.