
RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Connecticut Avenue Trolley Car Line

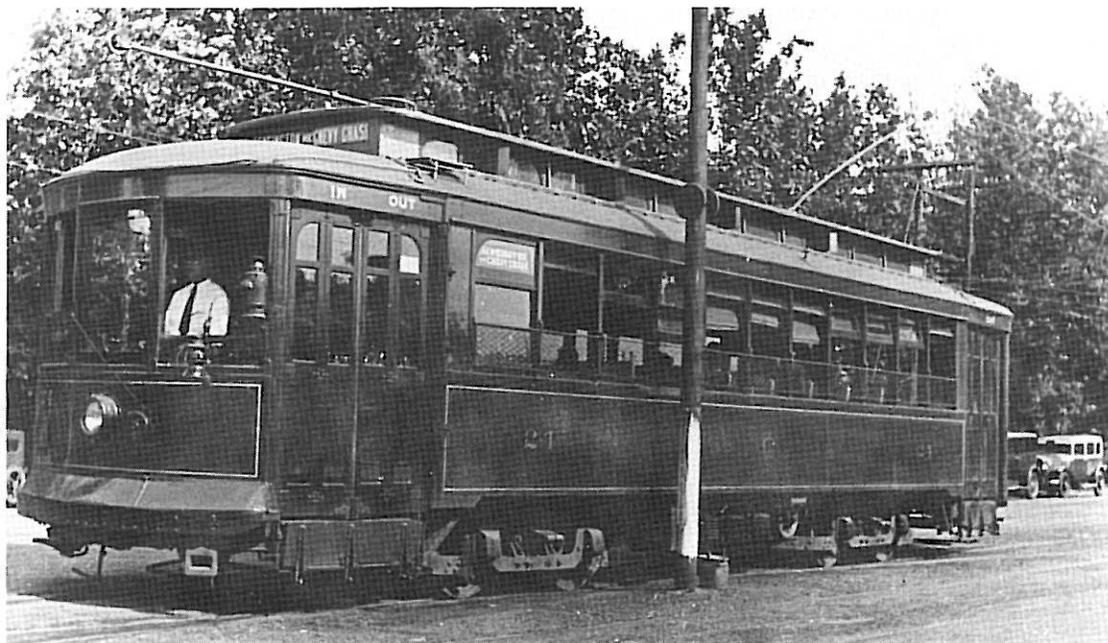
On a dark Hallowe'en night in the late 1920s, three young people waited at the Rosemary Street car stop on the west side of Connecticut Avenue. A dim headlight appeared as Capital Traction Company car number 20 southbound from Chevy Chase Lake lumbered closer. The trio walked toward the track as if to board, and the sturdy 44-seat car ground to a halt. Suddenly it was plunged into darkness and the motors were silenced. Accomplices had approached the car from the rear and lowered the trolley pole from the overhead electric wire, cutting off the power. Gales of laughter and the sound of pounding feet were heard as the pranksters fled the scene. The motorman grumbled impatiently and gripped the unresponsive controls at the front end of the car. The conductor cursed as he groped for the manual control of the rear door. He then stepped down to the pavement, and reset the trolley pole. A moment later the dark green car resumed its run to Chevy Chase Circle and downtown Washington.

Trolley cars on Connecticut Avenue provided a lifeline for the residents of Chevy Chase, Maryland. Before the streets were paved and automobiles prevailed, the trolleys served as the main means of transportation for people going to work, school, and other activities. An electric freight car made trips downtown with lists of homeowners' needs and returned with groceries, medicine, ice, and other household items.

Leroy King states in his *100 Years of Capital Traction* that the Rock Creek Railway built the District of Columbia portion of the line, and the Chevy Chase Land Company continued it into Maryland as a part of its real estate development plan. Trolley service began in 1892 on a right-of-way which later became Connecticut Avenue. In 1895 these companies were merged with others to form the Capital Traction Company.

This was a first-class passenger operation with a double track line in the middle of the Avenue all the way. The cars went south from our town, around the Chevy Chase Circle and continued on Connecticut Avenue to Calvert Street. They then went east on a high steel trestle over the Rock Creek Valley to 18th Street and continued to 7th Street and Florida Avenue. Over the years, destinations changed beyond this point, but they were always to locations in downtown Northwest Washington.

Cars continued north beyond our town limits to the junction of Connecticut Avenue and the B&O Georgetown Branch. This destination was Chevy Chase Lake where there was a loop for the trolleys to turn around for their trip back to Washington. On the west side of the avenue there was a passenger waiting station. On the east side, where the B. F. Saul building now stands, there was a large car storage barn and an electric power generating plant. North of this point, a single track wound through the farms and woods for 2½ miles to Kensington. The Kensington line, under changing management, operated from 1895 to 1935.



*Capital Traction
trolley car 24 at
Chevy Chase Lake
circa 1934*

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Wisconsin Avenue Trolley Car Line

During its peak years, the Wisconsin Avenue line ran from 5th and F Streets in downtown Washington through Georgetown and Bethesda to Rockville. It was authorized as the Tenallytown and Rockville Railroad by the Maryland Assembly in 1890.

According to Leroy King's *100 Years of Capital Traction*, the track ran along Wisconsin Avenue and then continued on Old Georgetown Road to Alta Vista near Cedar Lane. There was an amusement park at this location. In 1900, service was extended to Rockville on

a straight line through the fields and woods west of the Georgetown Preparatory School. The track then ran on what is now Route 355 and continued to Rockville. In 1902 it became part of the area-wide Washington Railway and Electric Company. This union made it possible to run through cars to downtown Washington.

Handsome suburban cars with 48 seats served the public from 1908 to 1935. The Maryland portion of the line was abandoned in 1935, and busses replaced the trolleys. In 1984, after an absence of 49 years, rail passenger service was restored to the Bethesda-Chevy Chase area. The Red Line of the Metro Subway between the Tenleytown and Bethesda stations follows the route of the former trolley track.



Westbound B&O freight passes under the East-West Highway in 1969.

PHOTO BY TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE

The Baltimore and Ohio Georgetown Branch

In railroad terms, the Georgetown Branch has always been "freight only." It has transported building materials for the construction of private homes, apartment buildings, and offices. It has moved coal and oil for heating and brought in paving materials for streets.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad constructed two miles of track from its main line west of Silver Spring to Chevy Chase Lake in 1892, the same year the trolley line from D.C. reached that destination. Building supplies were unloaded at the site now occupied by Thos. W. Perry, Inc. The development of Chevy Chase helped make the railroad profitable.

The Georgetown Branch terminated at Chevy Chase Lake for 17 years. In 1909 and 1910, nine additional miles of track were completed through Bethesda and Dalecarlia and continued down the Potomac River to Georgetown. H. H. Harwood, Jr., in his book, *The Impossible Challenge*, comments that the branch was an attempt by the B&O to cross the Potomac and gain access to Virginia in competition with other railroads.

During the 1960s and 1970s, business began to decline on the Georgetown Branch. The railroad discontinued operations on the entire branch in 1985. Montgomery County purchased the right of way from the CSX Transportation Company in 1988 for a hiker-biker trail and a proposed trolley line.

William Duvall