

# Philadelphia SEPTA Streetcar & Subway Lines (Kawasaki K Cars)

A historical transit system for a historic city. Philadelphia is one of the last cities left in North America to still operate its legacy streetcar system. Philadelphia boasts a diverse group of transit vehicles such as streetcars, subways, trains, and light rails. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) is the commanding authority and controller of this streetcar system. SEPTA is responsible for the largest trolley system in the United States.

SEPTA relies on Kawasaki Type K cars to transport nearly 4 million people. Only Philadelphia's famous Girard St line uses the classic PCC streetcars. The Kawasaki-built streetcars have mostly retained their iconic look throughout their 50-year reign. The lack of modernization of such cars has been the subject of much discourse among residents and politicians.

Philadelphia and SEPTA are proud of their streetcars and their system. They value their history and their significance to the city.

While routes 101/102 operate in suburban Philadelphia and the surrounding area, the subway-surface trolley lines and Route 15 shuttle passengers within the city. Route 15 is a streetcar line operated by SEPTA that is independent of the subway-surface trolley line.

Routes 101 and 102, also known as the Media-Sharon Hill Line, have a history that extends before WWI. Route 102 opened in the year 1906 while Route 101 followed in 1913. Originally owned by the Philadelphia and West Chester Company, the lines were purchased by the Philadelphia Suburban Transit Company in 1954. Routes 101 and 102 are the last remaining lines from the iconic Red Arrow trolley system. SEPTA took over these lines in 1970 after purchasing them for \$13.5 million.

Just like routes 101 and 102, the SEPTA subway-surface trolley lines have a long history extending beyond SEPTA itself. This system is a relic of an expansive streetcar system. Once owned and operated by the Philadelphia Rapid Transit Company (PRT), SEPTA took control in 1968 after PRT went bankrupt.

Passengers on routes 101 and 102 get shuttled by Kawasaki Type K light rail cars. Their double-ended design with pantograph apparatus distinguishes them from other SEPTA cars. The Kawasaki cars took over during the Reagan administration and have been the manufacturer ever since. A proposal in 2018 has called for a modernization of these streetcars.

The SEPTA subway-surface trolley lines are a connected group of 5 lines that flow through the city. Similar to routes 101/102, these lines use Kawasaki Type K cars. Philadelphia is the only such city to use this manufacturer. Cars on these lines are characterized by their single-end doors and the use of trolley poles for power. The subway-surface trolley lines are more comprehensive than their route 101/102 counterparts.

While Philly loves their streetcars, complaints regarding capacity and handicap accessibility have gained significant traction.

Route 15 on Girard St has a PCC streetcar that has been the subject of much discourse. A once discontinued trolley line, the Girard St streetcar was resurrected from the ashes after Philadelphia residents clamored for the return of the historic streetcar. The route was being serviced by buses after SEPTA discontinued their PCC streetcars, but the line was returned to service in 2005. The cars were rebuilt internally to suit modern-day necessities such as air conditioning and wheelchair accessibility.

The restoration project was controversial from the start as the project was delayed after fights with residents and neighborhood politicians over street parking. The return of the cars was a call for a return of an iconic, historic streetcar and everything that it brings. The green and cream streetcar shuttled Philadelphians for 90 years before SEPTA declared the cars antiquated and shifted to buses. Their much called for resurrection from citizens signified a desire to return to these landmark streetcars and boost economic conditions along their line. The return of the historical trolley was welcomed by many citizens. However, there remains the fact that there is comprehensive data that calls for their abandonment as they face many practical barriers.

Some believe the current model of Kawasaki streetcars is sufficient, while others think it's time to modernize completely. What is known for sure is that Philadelphia deserves comprehensive, concise public transport while preserving its illustrious and unique history.