

RAPID TRANSIT IS NOT A NEW IDEA

Over one hundred years ago, Hamiltonians could travel in an express electric rail car with a design speed of 50 mph from downtown Hamilton to Brantford in 37 minutes. Try doing that today. That is what I call "rapid transit". Electric freight cars could carry perishable goods such as milk, fruit, vegetables and eggs to market quickly. No speeding transport trucks making roadways unsafe back then. Believe it or not, at the turn of the century, Hamilton was connected to Brantford, Burlington, Oakville, Grimsby and Dundas with an electric interurban rapid transit system. But that is not all. An important feature of Hamilton's integrated transportation system long ago was its incline railways. This method of overcoming vertical distances, such as the Niagara Escarpment was rare but Hamilton could boast not one, but two such modes of commuting between the lower city and Hamilton Mountain. The first, the Hamilton and Barton or James Street Incline, opened in 1892 followed three years later by the East End or Wentworth Street Incline. Both were practical, efficient and affordable forms of rapid transit for the many thousands of riders who utilized them on a daily basis.



The Hamilton-Brantford rapid transit electric railway, built in 1906, is shown here as one of its 50 mph cars reached the top of the escarpment at Upper Horning Road (photo courtesy Special Collections HPL). The system ceased operating in 1932 and the same scene today shows nothing more than a "not very rapid" walking trail (photo by Robert Williamson).

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