



## THE ODYSSEY OF ELECTRIC TRANSPORT The Last Parisian Tramway (1938)

Echoing Paris "*intra-muros*" (within city limits), the suburbs lost their last tramway line (Raincy-Montfermeil) on August 14, 1938. A day after, spanking new buses took over their duties.

Ten years earlier however, things were going quite well for the tramway. A lease with the departmental transit authority had taken over for the private concessions that had run out of steam.



The Paris tramway before its demise in 1938

Throughout the 1920's, the network had grown by 50%, thanks to public financing. Fleet equipment had been updated, and its ridership capacity increased. The public authorities at last offered a vision of the future – one in which high-speed electric tramways linked Paris to "satellite cities", ancestors of French *villes nouvelles* (new towns). Stated simply: eliminating the tramway seemed an aberration in both financial, and political terms. How then, did it happen?

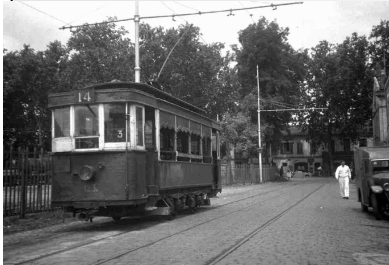
### Progress in automobile use in the 1920's and 30's

was a general one, no other European or American city had decided giant step the French capital had – quite the contrary, in fact. It's true that the automobile lobby was indeed very active in Paris, financing an unprecedented campaign in the press around the "smasher" tramway, or the "traffic jammer". Lobbyists were just as insistent before elected officials at City Hall, and with those in the

prefectoral administration. Facing

such a pugnacious adversary, it is of interest to recall the spiritless nature of the resistance of the electrical industry, which had reasons of its own. Firstly, with the introduction of the transit authority, electric utilities lost control of pricing and of ordering material, both to the benefit of the Seine departmental authority. And yet the tendency of latter was to clamp down on spending, thus rendering the sector unprofitable at a time when big, new construction

A Paris without tramways meant the loss of half of the national transport network – a heavy blow! Across the Atlantic, the fight was rather against the increasing presence of the automobile. Automakers, distributors, and municipal authorities on the East Coast formed a work group aimed at creating a "new look" for their tramway – one that would capture public attention. Rolled out in 1934, it was lighter, modular, silent, comfortable and capable of quick acceleration. It was christened the "PCC" ("President's Conference Committee") in reference to the work group. Manufactured in the US and licensed to numerous European countries, the PCC gave the tramway new life – except, that is, in France.



The Toulouse tramway in 1949



The Marseille tramway around 1955

projects were calling on electricians (power plant construction, high voltage line development projects, etc.). And finally, the Metro (underground) continued its expansion between the two World Wars, further obscuring the future of the tramway. Besides which the Empain group, controllers of both transport networks, most likely found it more interesting to sacrifice the surface railway and entice passengers to its far more profitable underground network.