

## East Falls Past--East Falls Transit History

*The Fallser*, January 2011, by Adam Eyring

One of the greatest benefits of living in East Falls is that it is quite a transit hub, allowing you to catch a ride to many places in the City and suburbs with very few transfers. From Midvale and Ridge, you can ride the 61 bus to Center City and Manayunk, ride the R bus to the far northeast, and ride the K bus to Germantown and points northeast. One train will take you to Norristown and Center City. Another train will take you to Chestnut Hill. The Wissahickon Transportation Center allows you to catch buses to King of Prussia, West Philly, Plymouth Meeting Mall, Andorra Shopping Center, and many other places.

Many of the routes go back far in history. Ridge Avenue served as the location of one of the earliest forms of electric transit, consisting of a buried conduit that allowed streetcars to run off electricity starting in the 1880s. The operation, which went as far as Laurel Hill Cemetery, ceased in the 1890s and streetcars powered by overhead wires started soon after. The streetcars ran as Route 61 from Center City to a loop at Leverington and Ridge in Manayunk and stopped running in 1941. The 61 then operated as one of only seven Philadelphia lines with trackless trolleys, or electric buses, until buses took over in 1960. Considering how polluting diesel buses have been, it's sad that electric transit wasn't retained on the 61 the same way there still are trackless trolleys in the northeast and trolleys in West Philly/Center City/Girard Ave.

The current K bus replaced a former streetcar line numbered 52. The 52 went from in front of what is now Johnny Mañanas to Cheltenham Ave./Old York Road. Many local folks used this trolley to ride between Germantown and East Falls to get to church, school, etc. At Ridge and Midvale, it actually pulled over to the curb – something unique among the dozens of Philadelphia trolley lines. Former Philadelphia resident Carlos Mercado of Rochester, New York treasures his memories of getting to Mifflin School on that line. The trolleys stopped running on January 28, 1956, but fortunately two original cars from that line are preserved in museums in Scranton and near Pittsburgh.

The Norristown Line (former SEPTA R6) dates back to 1834 and started with trains of several stagecoaches coupled together to share one horse team under the company of the Philadelphia Germantown and Norristown. A connection in Norristown gave access to Reading (now possible with the 93 bus). Horses gave way to steam engines and the line to Norristown was electrified in 1933. From 1912 to 1951, one could transfer in Norristown to another line, the Liberty Bell Route, and ride to Allentown and points in between. For many years, East Falls had a majestic station not unlike other stations in northwest Philadelphia. Unfortunately, it suffered from arson in 1982.

Thanks to East Falls Historical Society, Heather Petrone, and Billy Ross for helpful information on the Norristown Line station. *Although Adam Eyring relocated from East Falls, he continues to find its history exciting to research.*



Rt. 52 trolley approaching the end in East Falls in July 1955 before returning to Cheltenham Ave./Old York Road. Frank Pfuhrer collection.



Route 61 trackless trolley at Wissahickon Transfer. Date unknown. Bill Volkmer collection.



Norristown Line station, circa 1927. East Falls Historical Society collection.