

Brief Background History of Tramways in Manly

In 1888 the North Shore, Manly and Pittwater Tramway and Railway Act was passed. On 9th March 1899 the Manly to Pittwater Tramway League was established.

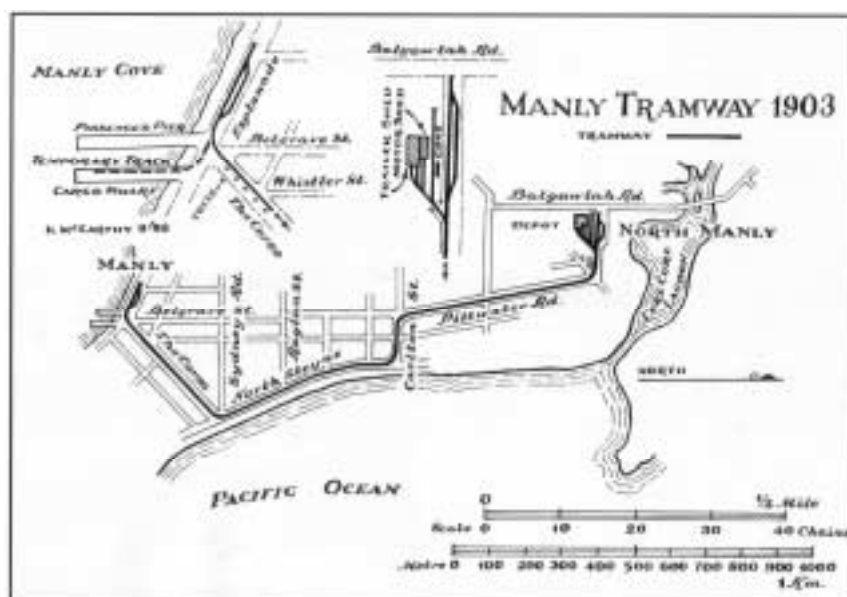
The Tramway League delivered petitions calling for construction of a tramway in the Manly-Warringah area. At the time, public works projects over 20,000 pounds in cost had to be reviewed by the parliamentary Public Works Committee and if rejected could not be proposed again for another 5 years. It was reported the Manly Tramway system was therefore constructed in stages costing under 20,000 pounds.

The initial Manly line was built in a period of rapid tramway expansion in Sydney with the tramway system then part of the NSW Department of Railways.

The first line in Manly ran from West Esplanade (near ferry Wharf) to the intersection of Pittwater and Balgowlah Road at “North Manly”. The route (see drawing below) was via the Corso, North Steyne, Carlton Street, and Pittwater Road. It opened on 14th February 1903.



Steam Tram at North Manly Terminus circa 1908

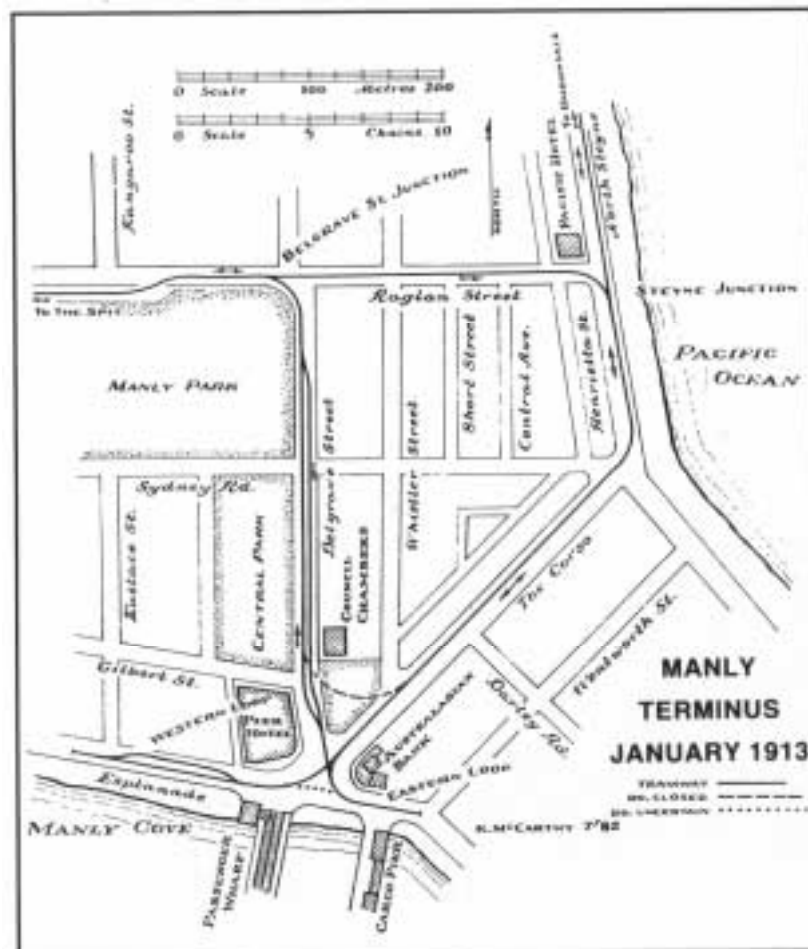


The trams operated to connect with the ferry service. Unfortunately the patronage was found to be very seasonal and also more passengers were carried from the ferries than to them. The line was not a financial success and steam traction was replaced by a horse between July 1903 and October 1907 and the line operation given to a contractor (in lieu of Railways staff) to lower the operating costs.

Between 1901 and 1907 there was considerable lobbying from the Tramway League and Manly Council for an extension to The Spit to connect with the existing tram line back to North Sydney (*note there was no Spit or Harbour Bridge at this point*). After investigation by a parliamentary committee, resolving 4-3 to approve the line, the Spit to Manly Electric Tramway Act was passed in 1908.

In 1905 a study was made of possible routes and gradients for a tramway extension from North Manly to Newport and Bayview at Pittwater, a distance of 12 and 13 miles from Manly Wharf.

Following a promise made to Warringah Council by the Minister for Works in 1907, approval was also given to extend the Manly line to Brookvale in 1909. Although initially operated by steam trams, the track was welded, indicating the line was constructed for electric operation. The line terminated with a loop at Pittwater and Winbourne Roads.



The line to the Spit followed and the line went from the existing tracks at North Steyne via Raglan Street, then via a off road reservation around the perimeter of what we now call Ivanhoe Park to join Sydney Road at James Street, proceed along Sydney Road for a short distance and then deviating via a reservation between George Street and Parkview Road before again rejoining Sydney Road. When returning from the Spit the line turned off Raglan Street into Belgrave Street to run more directly to the Wharf terminus. Thus Spit line trams initially ran on a loop around Manly town centre.



Raglan Street with Tramway circa 1913

Above Manly the Spit line travelled along Sydney Road via Fairlight, Balgowlah than turned left onto Whittle Avenue on the edge of Seaforth. It then crossed Ethel Street and ran via a steeply graded off-road reservation all the way down to a flat area near the water adjacent to the existing (later built) Spit Bridge. The section of tramway reservation just after Ethel Street was later formed into Kanangra Crescent, the remainder of the reservation generally still exists in present day reserves with possibly a short section under (later built) Manly Road.



The Corso with Electric Tram bound for Manly Wharf circa 1913

The key feature of the Manly to the Spit line were the extreme gradients requiring off road deviations (easier routes) to minimise them. E.g. through Ivanhoe Park and down to the Spit. The ruling (highest) gradient of the Spit line was 1 in 15 which is very steep for a tramway or railway.

The first public electric tram to the Spit departed Manly at 7:11 am on 9th January 1911 with the official ceremony at 3:00 pm that afternoon.

In 1911 the decision was taken to extend the Brookvale Line to Narrabeen, but to keep the project under the 20,000 pound limit, the project was split into two parts with the first section ending at Collaroy Beach. The route from Brookvale was via Pittwater Road. Interestingly it was reported that to get the line built it was specified Warringah council had to do some of the grading earth works on the side of the road and improve the tourist amenities at Narrabeen Lakes. Public tramway operation to Collaroy Beach commenced with the 6:22am tram from Manly depot on the 3rd of August 1912.

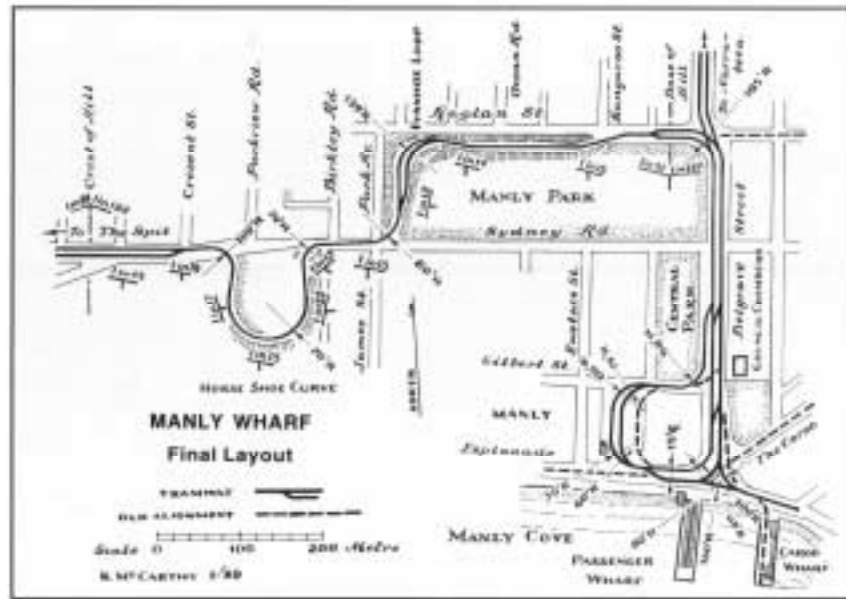
Initially the service to Collaroy was hourly, with the service to Brookvale every 30 minutes. From the opening of the line to Collaroy, Spit Line trams only used Belgrave Street on the weekends to leave the single line North Steyne and the Corso section for the popular excursion services to Collaroy Beach.

The second section extension of the line along Pittwater Road to Ramsay Street Narrabeen (Narrabeen Bridge) was opened on Monday 8th December 1913.

Due to high tramway patronage, the extension to Narrabeen, the planned extension to Newport and an expectation of the 15 minute frequency to the Spit being increased to every 10 minutes, the terminal arrangements at Manly were reviewed in 1913 and the decision was made to build a double track line along Belgrave Street to Carlton Street to replace the original loop via the Corso and North Steyne and Raglan/Carlton Streets with a loop near the Wharf on a reservation parallel to Eustace Street. The works, including the new *Belgrave, Gilbert, reservation and West Esplanade loop* were completed on 20th August 1914 and the Corso and North Steyne loop route was then abandoned.

Despite the earlier plans, other than duplications and track work rearrangements in Manly, the final extension of the Manly System was to Harbord Beach. The lobbying for this started in 1911 with the support of the Harbord Tramway League and Warringah Council. The project was delayed for many years due to high costs of the route to accommodate the gradients over the hilly terrain and questions whether sufficient patronage existed to cover operation and construction costs, given the (then) sparsely settled nature of the area. Eventually the line became a short but costly extension which opened on 19th December 1925.

The first Spit Bridge was opened in December 1924 and the Harbour Bridge opened in March 1932.



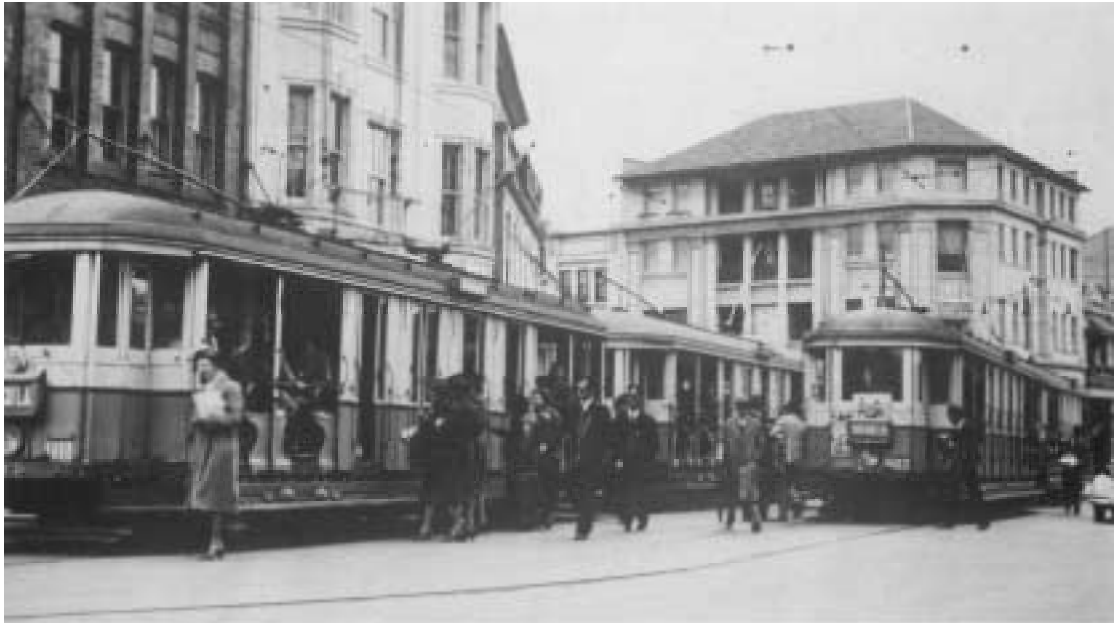
Manly tramway track work arrangement from 1926

Due to the low population density in the Manly-Warringah area in the 1920 and 30s, there were continuing financial losses on the Manly-Warringah tramway system. The revenue was not sufficient to cover the operating costs and pay the interest on the construction costs of the lines. Additionally there were the effects of the financial depression of the early 1930s which reduced patronage, the seasonal nature of the patronage due to the high excursion traffic and the rise in the number of private motor buses. These motor buses were often operated in direct competition to government tram services, attracting passengers by means such as cheaper fares, earlier departures and faster trips - particularly on the Narrabeen route.

In 1932 the first government motor-bus service commenced with the route 144 from Manly, which duplicated the Spit-Manly tram line. On the 4th October 1938 the government route 150 was commenced between Palm Beach and Wynyard, which duplicated the Manly Narrabeen line between Brookvale and Narrabeen. From 3rd November 1938, Tram services on the Manly System were only operated in peak hours for commuters and on weekends for the excursion traffic. Motor-buses operated the services at other times. Finally all public Manly tram services were ended on the night of the 30th September 1939.

The last Manly tram passenger operation was an officially sanctioned special photographic return trip by members of the Manly Historical Society from the Spit to Parsley Loop (on the reservation down to the Spit) and back to the Spit terminus in one of the last four trams to be transferred from the Manly depot to the Spit, following closure (for transfer to the North Sydney system) on 20th October 1939.

(The detail of the above history was compiled from the book *The Manly Lines of the Sydney Tramway System* by Ken McCarthy published by Transit Press 1995.)



Manly Trams at West Promenade in September 1939 – note the prominent Bank of Commerce building on the corner of East Esplanade and the Corso



Manly Trams at Spit in October 1939 awaiting transfer back to North Sydney

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