

SPEED!

The predecessor of the South Shore Line, The Chicago, Lake Shore and South Bend Railway (South Shore Lines) began service from South Bend to Hammond, Indiana, on 6 September 1908, only twenty-one days before the first Model T Ford left the Piquette Avenue Plant in Detroit.¹ In 1923, Ford made more than two million Model Ts and that was the peak production year. What had become the most common automobile in America came in any color the customer wanted so long as that color was black. Top speed of the two-speed Model T automobile was 40 to 45 miles per hour.

As automobile ownership rose, the interurban railway industry had begun its inexorable decline. The year 1915 was the last year of interurban construction of any significance; the year before was the beginning of a long series of abandonments.² The industry responded by venturing into freight service to increase revenue, lightweight passenger cars operated by a single crewman to cut passenger crew costs, and finally speed as a means of self-promotion. On their station grounds, the Insull Group's North Shore Line promoted its speed with statues of town criers asking the question "Did you ever travel 80 miles an hour?"



Town Crier, Briergate Station, Highland Park, Illinois, 1928 – an 18th Century tradition promoting 20th Century speed. The Highball magazine, August-September 1928.

¹ Ford Model T, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ford_Model_T (last visited Aug. 12, 2020).

² George W. Hilton & John F. Due, *The Electric Interurban Railways in America* 211-12 (1960).

As to the self-promotion of speed, the industry publication *Electric Traction Magazine* held an annual speed contest. A trophy was awarded to the fastest interurban in the country. The first winner was the Galveston-Houston Electric Railway in 1925. The South Shore Lines placed 7th in elapsed time, but 2nd in running time. The average running speed attained by the wooden interurban cars on the fastest scheduled runs between South Bend and Kensington in Chicago was 48.6 mph.³ The South Shore Lines *average* running speed bested the Model T's *top* speed by four to nine miles per hour.

³ Elec. Traction, 62 (1925).

FEBRUARY SPEED RANKING

ELECTRIC TRACTION'S Big Speed Contest

The following table was compiled from actual timetables and such other information as was possible to obtain. The Galveston-Houston Electric Company still retains undisputed claim for first place, while several additional roads appear in the table and some of the roads formerly shown have improved their ratings. The next publication of this table will be in the annual September Souvenir issue when announcement of the prize-winner will be made.—Editor.

NAME OF RAILWAY	RUN	Distance	Regular Stops	Time	M. P. H. including stops	Rank by elapsed time	M.P.H. not including stops*	Rank by running time
Galveston-Houston Electric Company	Galveston to Houston	50.41	6	1 hr. 15 min.	40.3	①	48.0	③
Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee R. R.	Chicago to Milwaukee	85.5	9	2 hrs. 9 min.	39.7	②	46.5	④
†Chicago, Aurora & Elgin R. R. Co.	Chicago to Elgin	41.5	8	1 hr. 5 min.	38.3	③	50.9	①
Union Traction Co.	Muncie to Indianapolis	63.6	1	1 hr. 45 min.	36.3	④	37.0	⑫
Milwaukee Northern Railway	Milwaukee to Sheboygan	57.4	3	1 hr. 36 min.	35.9	⑤	38.2	⑩
Terre Haute, Indianapolis & Eastern	Terre Haute to Indianapolis	71.8	3	2 hrs. 5 min.	34.5	⑥	36.2	⑬
†Chicago, Lake Shore & South Bend Railway Co.	South Bend to Kensington	76.05	26	2 hrs. 15 min.	33.8	⑦	48.6	②
New York State Railways	Syracuse to Utica	48.56	2	1 hr. 28 min.	33.1	⑧	34.7	⑪
Interstate Public Service	Indianapolis to Louisville	117.02	10	3 hrs. 35 min.	32.6	⑨	36.0	⑪
Rochester and Syracuse R. R.	Rochester to Syracuse	87.0	16	2 hrs. 43 min.	32.2	⑩	40.0	⑨
Buffalo & Erie R. R.	Buffalo to Erie	91.	6	2 hrs. 50 min.	32.1	⑪	33.4	⑳
Pacific Electric	Los Angeles to San Bernardino	57.78	12	1 hr. 45 min.	32.0	⑫	40.3	⑧
Illinois Traction System	Peoria to St. Louis	173.2	11	5 hrs. 25 min.	31.8	⑬	34.3	⑱
Waterloo, Cedar Falls and Northern Ry. Co.	Cedar Rapids to Waterloo	60.39	13	1 hr. 55 min.	31.5	⑭	40.7	⑥
Texas Electric	Dallas to Waco	97.19	13	3 hrs. 5 min.	31.4	⑮	36.6	⑮
The Milwaukee Electric Ry. and Light Co.	Milwaukee to Watertown	50.1	7	1 hr. 40 min.	30.6	⑯	35.0	⑱
Indianapolis and Cincinnati Traction Co.	Connersville to Indianapolis	58.2	11	1 hr. 55 min.	33.4	⑰	37.6	⑪
†Michigan Electric Railway	Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo	49.72	2	1 hr. 33 min.	29.8	⑱	33.4	⑲
Kansas City, Clay County & St. Joseph Ry. Co.	Kansas City to St. Joseph	51.3	1	1 hr. 43 min.	29.8	⑲	31.6	⑳
Columbus, Delaware and Marion Elec. Co.	Columbus to Marion	49.3	2	1 hr. 40 min.	29.6	⑳	30.7	㉔
Lake Shore Electric	Cleveland to Toledo	120.0	18	4 hrs. 15 min.	28.2	㉑	32.0	㉒
Detroit United Lines	Detroit to Toledo	57.9	2	2 hrs. 5 min.	27.9	㉒	28.8	㉓
Youngstown and Ohio River R. R.	Salem to E. Liverpool	37.	6	1 hr. 20 min.	27.7	㉓	32.6	㉑
Denver & Interurban Railroad Co.	Denver to Boulder	29.5	11	1 hr. 5 min.	27.2	㉔	41.1	⑤
Olean, Bradford and Salamanca Railway	Olean to Salamanca	22.	3	50 min.	26.4	㉕	28.2	㉕
The Cleveland Southwestern Ry. & Lt. Co.	Cleveland to Bucyrus	115.	13	4 hrs. 30 min.	26.	㉖	28.6	㉗
†San Francisco, Napa and Calistoga Railway	San Francisco to Calistoga	41.6	18	1 hr. 38 min.	25.5	㉗	40.7	⑦
Fonda, Johnston and Gloversville R. R.	Gloversville to Schenectady	33.01	6	1 hr. 24 min.	23.5	㉘	28.4	㉘
Cincinnati, Georgetown and Portsmouth R. R.	Cincinnati to Georgetown	42.2	11	1 hr. 50 min.	23.0	㉙	29.4	㉙
Cincinnati and Dayton Traction Company	Cincinnati to Dayton	54.	13	2 hrs. 25 min.	22.3	㉚	27.4	㉚

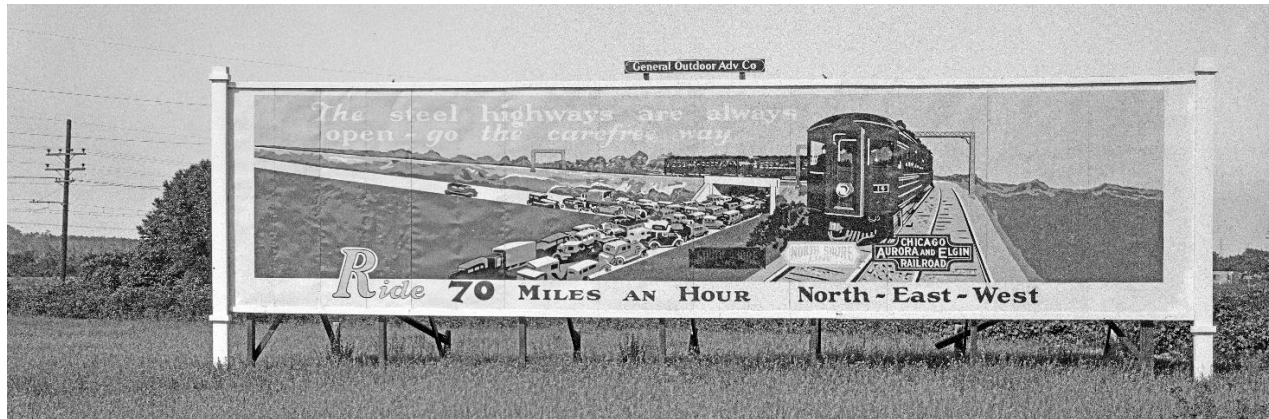
*Stops have been arbitrarily figured at two minutes each.

†A. C. operation.

††Third Rail System.



Speed was still an important marketing tool for the Insull Group when it ordered the new steel cars of the South Shore Line for delivery in 1926. Geared for a maximum speed of 67 mph, the new South Shore Line cars were not as fast as the North Shore Line cars of the same era, which were geared for 75 mph.⁴ Nonetheless, the South Shore Line advertised a 70 mile an hour ride.



The Insull Group billboard along the South Shore Line advertised all three of their Chicago-area interurbans.

But the South Shore Line was fast, nonetheless. Even as the interurban industry was being decimated, Electric Traction Magazine still held a national speed contest. In 1929, the Insull Group's Chicago-area interurbans made a clean sweep – win, place, and show went to the South Shore Line, North Shore Line, and Chicago, Aurora and Elgin.

⁴ Elec. Ry. J., May 29, 1926 at 954.

CHICAGO WINS

CLEAN SWEEP!

**AMERICA'S FASTEST ELECTRIC
INTERURBAN RAILROADS**

1st **SOUTH SHORE
LINE** EAST

2nd **NORTH SHORE
LINE** NORTH

3rd **CHICAGO
AURORA AND ELGIN
RAILROAD** WEST

**NATIONAL SPEED
CONTEST**

At American Electric Railway Association Convention
Atlantic City, N.J. October 1929

Winning once was not enough. On 21 January 1929, the South Shore Line drafted AFE 477 for the purchase and installation of a speed indicator on car #106. The reason for the recommendation was to accurately determine the speed of the new steel cars. Why a speed indicator was needed is a mystery. Railroaders are able to accurately tell their speed by their highly accurate watches. Every South Shore Line timetable of the period included a table showing how many seconds it took to complete a mile at any given speed.

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SPEED SCHEDULE

SPEED SCHEDULE

Time per Mile	Miles per Hour	Time per Mile	Miles per Hour	Time per Mile	Miles per Hour	Time per Mile	Miles per Hour
0 min. 36 sec.	100.00	1 min. 30 sec.	40.00	2 min. 24 sec.	25.00	3 min. 18 sec.	18.18
0 " 37 "	97.30	1 " 31 "	39.56	2 " 25 "	24.83	3 " 19 "	18.09
0 " 38 "	94.74	1 " 32 "	39.13	2 " 26 "	24.66	3 " 20 "	18.00
0 " 39 "	92.31	1 " 33 "	38.71	2 " 27 "	24.49	3 " 21 "	17.91
0 " 40 "	90.00	1 " 34 "	38.30	2 " 28 "	24.32	3 " 22 "	17.82
0 " 41 "	87.80	1 " 35 "	37.89	2 " 29 "	24.16	3 " 23 "	17.73
0 " 42 "	85.71	1 " 36 "	37.50	2 " 30 "	24.00	3 " 24 "	17.65
0 " 43 "	83.72	1 " 37 "	37.11	2 " 31 "	23.84	3 " 25 "	17.56
0 " 44 "	81.82	1 " 38 "	36.73	2 " 32 "	23.68	3 " 26 "	17.48
0 " 45 "	80.00	1 " 39 "	36.36	2 " 33 "	23.53	3 " 27 "	17.39
0 " 46 "	78.26	1 " 40 "	36.00	2 " 34 "	23.38	3 " 28 "	17.31
0 " 47 "	76.60	1 " 41 "	35.64	2 " 35 "	23.23	3 " 29 "	17.22
0 " 48 "	75.00	1 " 42 "	35.29	2 " 36 "	23.08	3 " 30 "	17.14
0 " 49 "	73.47	1 " 43 "	34.95	2 " 37 "	22.93	3 " 31 "	17.06
0 " 50 "	72.00	1 " 44 "	34.62	2 " 38 "	22.78	3 " 32 "	16.98
0 " 51 "	70.59	1 " 45 "	34.29	2 " 39 "	22.64	3 " 33 "	16.90
0 " 52 "	69.23	1 " 46 "	33.96	2 " 40 "	22.50	3 " 34 "	16.82
0 " 53 "	67.92	1 " 47 "	33.64	2 " 41 "	22.36	3 " 35 "	16.74
0 " 54 "	66.67	1 " 48 "	33.33	2 " 42 "	22.22	3 " 36 "	16.67
0 " 55 "	65.45	1 " 49 "	33.03	2 " 43 "	22.08	3 " 37 "	16.59
0 " 56 "	64.29	1 " 50 "	32.73	2 " 44 "	21.95	3 " 38 "	16.51
0 " 57 "	63.16	1 " 51 "	32.43	2 " 45 "	21.82	3 " 39 "	16.44
0 " 58 "	62.07	1 " 52 "	32.14	2 " 46 "	21.69	3 " 40 "	16.36
0 " 59 "	61.02	1 " 53 "	31.86	2 " 47 "	21.56	3 " 41 "	16.29
1 " 0 "	60.00	1 " 54 "	31.58	2 " 48 "	21.43	3 " 42 "	16.22
1 " 1 "	59.02	1 " 55 "	31.30	2 " 49 "	21.30	3 " 43 "	16.14
1 " 2 "	58.06	1 " 56 "	31.03	2 " 50 "	21.18	3 " 44 "	16.07
1 " 3 "	57.14	1 " 57 "	30.77	2 " 51 "	21.05	3 " 45 "	16.00
1 " 4 "	56.25	1 " 58 "	30.51	2 " 52 "	20.93	3 " 46 "	15.93
1 " 5 "	55.38	1 " 59 "	30.25	2 " 53 "	20.81	3 " 47 "	15.86
1 " 6 "	54.55	2 " 0 "	30.00	2 " 54 "	20.69	3 " 48 "	15.79
1 " 7 "	53.73	2 " 1 "	29.75	2 " 55 "	20.57	3 " 49 "	15.72
1 " 8 "	52.94	2 " 2 "	29.51	2 " 56 "	20.45	3 " 50 "	15.65
1 " 9 "	52.17	2 " 3 "	29.27	2 " 57 "	20.34	3 " 51 "	15.58
1 " 10 "	51.43	2 " 4 "	29.03	2 " 58 "	20.22	3 " 52 "	15.52
1 " 11 "	50.70	2 " 5 "	28.80	2 " 59 "	20.11	3 " 53 "	15.45
1 " 12 "	50.00	2 " 6 "	28.57	3 " 0 "	20.00	3 " 54 "	15.38
1 " 13 "	49.31	2 " 7 "	28.35	3 " 1 "	19.89	3 " 55 "	15.32
1 " 14 "	48.65	2 " 8 "	28.12	3 " 2 "	19.78	3 " 56 "	15.25
1 " 15 "	48.00	2 " 9 "	27.91	3 " 3 "	19.67	3 " 57 "	15.19
1 " 16 "	47.37	2 " 10 "	27.69	3 " 4 "	19.57	3 " 58 "	15.13
1 " 17 "	46.75	2 " 11 "	27.48	3 " 5 "	19.46	3 " 59 "	15.06
1 " 18 "	46.15	2 " 12 "	27.27	3 " 6 "	19.35	4 " 0 "	15.00
1 " 19 "	45.57	2 " 13 "	27.07	3 " 7 "	19.25	4 " 17 "	14.00
1 " 20 "	45.00	2 " 14 "	26.87	3 " 8 "	19.15	4 " 36 "	13.00
1 " 21 "	44.44	2 " 15 "	26.67	3 " 9 "	19.05	5 " 0 "	12.00
1 " 22 "	43.90	2 " 16 "	26.47	3 " 10 "	18.95	5 " 27 "	11.00
1 " 23 "	43.37	2 " 17 "	26.28	3 " 11 "	18.85	6 " 0 "	10.00
1 " 24 "	42.86	2 " 18 "	26.09	3 " 12 "	18.75	6 " 40 "	9.00
1 " 25 "	42.35	2 " 19 "	25.90	3 " 13 "	18.65	7 " 30 "	8.00
1 " 26 "	41.86	2 " 20 "	25.71	3 " 14 "	18.56	8 " 34 "	7.00
1 " 27 "	41.38	2 " 21 "	25.53	3 " 15 "	18.46	10 " 0 "	6.00
1 " 28 "	40.91	2 " 22 "	25.35	3 " 16 "	18.37	12 " 0 "	5.00
1 " 29 "	40.45	2 " 23 "	25.17	3 " 17 "	18.27		

The need for greater speed had gripped the South Shore Line. A new top speed was required. Just over a year later, on 27 February 1930, job order 9064 called for an increase in the air gap of the passenger car traction motors. By increasing horsepower from 210 to 225, this modification was expected to increase the speed by eight to ten miles per hour. Tests conducted in February and March of 1939 showed that the motor modification was successful – trains of motor cars operated on level stretches of track in the Dunes Country were able to attain 75 to 77 mph. A local train made up of a motor and trailer reached 68 mph on the Illinois Central. Running downgrade westbound from Tee Lake, cars #34 and 103 ran 87 miles per hour on 2 March 1939.

The net effect of the increase in train speeds did not translate to a great effect on scheduled speed: the average speed of the fastest scheduled trains in 1930 only increased by two mph in 1931, from 45.6 to 47.6 mph.^{5 6} The South Shore Line was plagued by slow operating speeds while operating in the streets of South Bend, Michigan City, and East Chicago where trains were restricted to 25 mph. In 1931, the South Shore Line placed second in the Speed Contest as the North Shore Line's best scheduled speeds were 3½ miles per hour faster.

Speed in 1931 – Perhaps second place is not as impressive as you, dear reader, would have liked. After all, everyone loves to be in first place. But consider this: under the efforts of the Insull Group, the average amount of time a passenger spent riding the South Shore Line from any two given points on the railroad decreased by nearly 30% in the six years after 1925. So yes, South Shore Line Passengers Won!

And as to those folks tooling around in their Fords, the new Model A of 1931 had three forward speeds and topped out at 65, some 25 miles per hour better than the Model T of 1925. But the benefits of speed in electric railroading are elusive as they do not equate with instant convenience. Speed *and* convenience soon awaited in everyman's driveway, and so it was with little wonder that nearly all the rest of the interurban network was gone by the end of the Great Depression.

⁵ Elec. Traction, May 1930 at 236.

⁶ Elec. Traction, April 1931 at 174.