

# RIDING DETROIT'S QLINE

by

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## ALL ABOARD THE QLINE



Following this year's Summerrail, Mary Ann and I drove north from Marion, Ohio, to Detroit, Michigan, to ride their new streetcar line, the QLine, which opened on 12 May 2017. The 3.4-mile streetcar line runs from Grand Boulevard and Woodward Avenue east to Congress Street

and Woodward Avenue. The line, as proposed in 2006, was to have been 9.5 miles long, but in 2010 it was decided by local officials that a streetcar line was too expensive and they opted for buses. A consortium of local businesses and private investors then formed M-1 Rail and pressed ahead to build a 3.4-mile-long streetcar line in Woodward Avenue.

While the streetcar line is owned by M-1 Rail, the line is known as the QLine. The M-1 Rail Line became the QLine in March 2016 when Quicken Loans bought the naming rights to the new streetcar line and renamed it QLine. The QLine, also spelled QLINE, serves both Detroit's People Mover and the city's Amtrak Station. Interestingly, when the streetcar approaches a stop and that stop is announced on board the streetcar, this message is immediately followed by a commercial for a local business. At present, riding on the QLine is free, with pay for riding to commence after the Labor Day weekend.

The QLine has twelve stops of which nine are curbside and three in the center of the street. The three western most stops, Grand Boulevard, Baltimore Street, and Amtrak Station, load and unload at platforms located in the center of the street. The car barn, the M-1 Rail Penske Tech Center, is located at Grand Boulevard and Woodward Avenue. The QLine has a total of six Brookville Liberty LRT cars of which five are normally in service. Track gauge is standard gauge, 4-feet 8.5-inches, and maximum allowable speed is 30 miles per hour. I do not think we ever went over 15 miles per hour. The line is operated by a contractor, Transdev.

The QLine streetcars are powered by overhead wire and lithium-ion batteries. From Martin Luther King Boulevard to Caufield Street the QLine runs under wire. For the rest of its run the streetcar operates on battery power. The batteries are recharged at both ends of the line, Congress Street and Grand Boulevard, from overhead power sources.

On reaching Detroit, we parked our car at Caufield and Woodward, making sure that our car fit between the curb and the white line that indicated that part of the street had to be kept clear for passage of the streetcars. Just to be safe I folded our side view mirror flush to the car body. We rode the streetcar west from Caufield to Grand Avenue where we had to exit the car as it ran on another 100-feet past the loading/unloading platform to position itself under the overhead re-charging plate. After re-boarding the streetcar, we rode the car to Congress Street, the east end of the line. Here we did not have to disembark but remained in our seats. We sat here for 10-minutes as the streetcar recharged its batteries. We then pulled west for Caufield Street. As we both approached and left downtown, our car was at 90 percent load factor. Load factor was down to 5 percent at Grand Boulevard. We had four individuals, with suitcases, get off the streetcar at the Amtrak Station as we ran west. Amtrak provides state funded passenger service from Detroit to Chicago, Illinois, and Pontiac, Michigan.

We lost ten minutes on our run west from downtown when we encountered a parked car extending over the white line. The operator first honked her horn and waited 30-seconds. When no one showed, she called the police who were quickly on the scene. As they began to write a ticket and wait for the tow truck, the owner showed up. He and his car were escorted from the scene by the police.

All in all, we enjoyed our ride. There were no weird people and everyone was polite and friendly. Like in Cincinnati, revitalization of buildings was taking place along the streetcar route. I would recommend that if you drive to Detroit and wish to ride the QLine that you park out by the carbarn. Traffic is not as crazy.



A view east toward downtown Detroit at Caufield Street. Notice the overhead wire.



Another view of a QLine streetcar at Caufield Street





We have moved west from Caufield Street and no longer are there overhead wires for the pantograph to pull electricity from. The car is now running on battery power.



A view of the center street loading/unloading platform at Baltimore Street. The streetcar on the right is west bound for Grand Boulevard and the one on the left is east bound for downtown.



A westbound streetcar at the Amtrak Station



At the end of the line at Grand Avenue. The streetcar has its pantograph raised to pull electricity from the overhead plate to recharge its lithium-ion batteries.





A view over our streetcar operator's shoulder at the car that was parked with its front wheel over the white line which guards the streetcar's right-of-way. A police car has just pulled in front of the streetcar getting ready to issue a citation and call for a tow truck. Some 30-seconds later the owner showed up and he and his car was given a police escort to another location at which he would get a ticket for blocking traffic.



The M-1 Rail's QLine car barn at Grand Boulevard and Woodward Street