

South Shore #13



Type: Steel Interurban Car

Built - 1926

Rebuilt/modernized in 1946

Seats - 80

Length – 77' 6"

Weight – 80 Tons



During the early 20th century, electric interurban railroads crisscrossed America and were vital to the development of urban and suburban land. In the 1920s, the Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railroad was an interurban rail line that operated in Chicago and northern Indiana. It was owned by the famous electrical utilities magnate Samuel Insull.

The "South Shore Line" ran on tracks owned by the Illinois Central Railroad from Randolph Street Station where Millennium Station currently is to Kensington, before turning onto its own route through northern Indiana and towns like Gary, Michigan City, and finally to South Bend. The railroad still operates today, being one of the last few electric interurban railways left in the United States, with the East Troy Electric Railroad being another.



Roger Puta photos

The railroad now operates with stainless steel cars introduced in the early 1980s and newer bi-level coaches, but before then, a large fleet of iconic, bright orange rail cars ran as the backbone of society in northern Indiana, ferrying people from Indiana to work in Chicago and around the steel mills, and people from Chicago to the dunes on Lake Michigan and sporting events in cities along the line.

One of these cars was #13. When Insull took over the railroad in the early 1920s, he placed an order for several new steel cars to phase out the slow, outdated wooden cars of the time. Some of these cars were built in 1926 by the Pullman Car Company, and more orders were built in 1927 and in 1929. During the second world war, some of these cars, including the 13, were "stretched" by cutting them in half and inserting seventeen additional feet into the center. They also received an updated interior and more seats, so that the railroad could increase the passenger capacity to what was needed during the conflict. 13 did not receive air conditioning and larger, sealed windows like some of the other "stretched" cars.

By 1983, the old cars were no longer reliable and had become too expensive to maintain, and so the railroad replaced them. As the South Shore was one of the last interurbans in the nation, rail museums and historians stepped in and saved some of the "orange cars" and the rail line was saved by the formation of Indiana-government-oriented NICTD.

Many of the "orange cars" were later scrapped, but 13 was restored to its condition after its wartime upgrades, and had its pantographs replaced with trolley poles, as pantographs would not work properly on the ETRM's overhead wire system. 13 now regularly runs on the six mile line between East Troy and Mukwonago, Wisconsin, as one of the last operational "orange cars."



Tom Fleming photo