

South Shore #33



Type: Steel Interurban Car

Built: 1929

(Modernized 1940s)

Seats: 48

Length – 62' 8"

Width – 10' 1"

Height – 13' 5"

Weight – 129,600 lbs.



During the early 1900s, travel across the midwest by electric interurban railroads was popular, reliable, and stylish. During this time, one could travel from Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, to upstate New York by means of these interurban railways.

Around this time, an electric utilities businessman by the name of Samuel Insull controlled most of the interurban routes in and around Chicago, including the Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railway. The "South Shore Line" operated frequent electric trains between downtown Chicago and South Bend, Indiana, by way of Gary and Michigan City. Before the 1920s, the railroad operated with old wooden cars worn down by age and years of use along the sand-dune strung shoreline. In 1925, Insull bought the company and sought to swiftly modernize it by improving infrastructure and by buying new all-steel cars.

Car 33 was part of a 1929 order of additional steel cars from the Standard Steel Car Company. Unlike the previous orders, this series of cars had a smoker room that could seat 8 people. These cars were painted bright orange, quickly becoming an icon of northwestern Indiana. The cars were also very versatile, as they were very easy to start up and attach and detach from trains. Because of this, the orange cars were able to stay in service well past most passenger trains in the United States, carrying workers to the steel mills, commuters around Chicago and Indiana, and tourists to the lakeshore and Notre Dame football games.



The cars stayed in service for over 50 years, finally being replaced with more modern stainless-steel cars, some of which are still in service to this day. When the cars were retired in the early 1980s, preservationists jumped in to save some of them. The National Park Service protected over a dozen of these cars from being scrapped, realizing their historical significance to the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. In 2010, the NPS donated several of these cars to the East Troy Railroad Museum. After a multi-year restoration led by the museum's dedicated volunteers, car 33 was able to return to service as one of the last fully restored and operational "South Shore Line" orange cars.

