

The Digs

from the photo archives of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

1967: Pittsburgh's Skybus

A story of Skybus, as the Transit Expressway Revenue Line became known in the 1960s, is a chapter of shattered dreams in Pittsburgh's public transit saga.

It had a grand vision for superior rapid transit service that would move large crowds day and night, year in and year out. Call it a commuter's dream.

The opportunities it presented promised a break-through in public transit technology. The system developed by Westinghouse used a dedicated elevated concrete track, rubber-tired cars and driverless operation — all were innovative concepts in 1960, the year it was conceived.

In 1964, federal money poured in to build a demonstration track in South Park that would be 1.77 miles long. In 1965, the Transportation Systems Group unveiled the demo system for the Allegheny County Fair. According to the Post-Gazette, more than 30,000 people paid the ten-cent fair for a chance to take an air-conditioned Skybus ride around the loop during the several days of the fair. Even Walt Disney came to South Park to evaluate the Skybus system, many thought it would serve as a prototype for Disney World.

"The system was originally named Skybus until it was discovered that Skybus was a trademark for one of the airlines," according to the Post-Gazette. "The name was then changed to Transit-Expressway and later to People-Mover when it finally evolved into a special purpose transportation system."

But People-Mover never quite moved to Pittsburgh. It was too controversial and too ambitious, too big for the Port Authority and political factions on the city and state levels to stomach: a 92 mile long trolley line, 460+ cars at the cost of \$295 million. The system was meant to connect suburbs with downtown. The Skybus route would originate in South Hills and would follow a streetcar route through Mt. Lebanon and Beechview before reaching Downtown Pittsburgh through the unused Wabash Tunnel.

Evaluations were made, papers were written and the work began, the plan was revised several times in the process. In 1976, it died because of the political stalemate and a recommendation to withdraw support from the project.

We may not have Skybus in Pittsburgh, but we do have internet to dream. Want to live commuter's dream for a minute and **take a ride on Skybus?**

— *Mila Sanina*







