

OAKRIDGE TRANSIT CENTRE

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

OCTOBER 2014

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Oakridge Transit Centre brochure, circa 1952, City of Vancouver Archives (CVA)

INTRODUCTION

The Oakridge Transit Centre, located along West 41st Avenue between Oak Street and Willow Street in Vancouver's Oakridge area, was constructed in 1948 and has since served as a maintenance and operations base for Translink.



Oakridge Transit Centre aerial view, Bing Maps

(Legend: 1. Administration Building; 2. Transfer Facility; 3. Maintenance Building; 4. Wash Rack)

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Since the first Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) train made its debut trip into its western terminus in May 1887, Vancouver has been continuously formed, developed, and reformed by transportation. The B.C. Electric Railway Company, which assumed control of the existing streetcar and interurban lines in Vancouver in 1897, allowed for the early residential settlement of the West End neighbourhood; the CPR founded the Shaughnessy neighbourhood, subdividing the land into generous estates; the continued extension of the streetcar allowed for the formation of 'streetcar suburbs' such as Grandview-Woodland and Kitsilano; and the advent of Vancouver's car culture propelled the paving of streets and the use of buses to increase the territory covered by residential development.

Indeed, by the end of the 1920s, Vancouver was substantially settled, having experienced two significant construction booms by the time of the 1929 stock market crash and the subsequent Great Depression. Vancouver's major landholder, the CPR, was strategic in its release of land for sale, opening new areas for settlement only when other neighbourhoods were full and demand for land was high. Such was the case for the CPR's holdings between Oak Street and Ontario Street, south of King Edward Avenue. Until the 1940s, the area south of King Edward Avenue was occupied by brushland and golf courses, interspersed by the occasional school or hospital complex, which had negotiated land acquisitions with the CPR. The area south of 41st Avenue however, remained bare and undeveloped; in fact, the land "was sufficiently remote for the Vancouver Gun Club's rifle range, which operated [in the area] until the early 1950s¹."

Following the Second World War, upon the return of soldiers and the increasing demand for housing and amenities, the CPR opened the lands south of King Edward Avenue and east of Oak Street for development. The postwar-era also saw the replacement of the poorly maintained streetcar system by the new trolley bus network. B.C. Electric acquired the land at West 41st Avenue and Oak Street in 1948 in order to establish a depot, which would house the new trolley buses and provide offices for the administration of the new system. It was during the establishment of this trolley depot that the name 'Oakridge' was first used to describe the neighbourhood: B.C. Electric named the depot the 'Oakridge Transit Centre'.

On August 13, 1948 there was a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new Oakridge Transit Centre, christening the new Brill T-44 electric trolley buses. On Sunday, August 15 "people eagerly mobbed each of the 30 Brill T-44 trolleys, which held 44 passengers, and praised the new vehicles' quiet, comfortable ride. Regular service began the next morning, when operator Charlie Street drove out in a gleaming Brill T-44. The first trolley route, Fraser-Cambie, operated from Fraser Street and Marine Drive via Fraser, Kingsway, Main, Pender, Seymour, Robson, and Cambie Street to 29th Avenue. A publicity pamphlet, distributed to all first passengers, included a route map, an explanation of how the trolleys worked, and the cost of construction: \$51,085 per mile for the 10.6 miles of the new route (or \$31,853 per kilometre for the 17-kilometre route)²".

The transit centre was formerly home to 244 trolley buses and 182 diesel units, as well as more than 1,200 transit staff, including drivers, mechanics and administrators. Most of the operations at

¹ Davis, Chuck ed. *The Greater Vancouver Book*. 1997. "Oakridge", Michael Kluckner, page 96.

² *Vancouver's Trolley Buses 1948-1998: Celebrating a Half-Century of Service*. 1998. Page 9.

the facility were transferred to the new Vancouver Transit Centre, located along the Fraser River in Marpole, in 2006.



Passengers aboard a Brill T-44 trolley bus for a free ride on August 15, 1948, the day before regular service would begin, CVA A28526

Trolley Buses in Vancouver

The first operation of trolleybuses in Vancouver was in December 1945 when a trolley coach brought up from Seattle by the B.C. Electric Railway Company provided 10 days of free rides from Burrard and Hastings to Alberni and Bidwell streets via Pender Street. Victoria had operated a similar experiment in October of the same year (Ewert 1986). While trolleybuses never again operated in Victoria, they were adopted on a large scale in Vancouver with revenue service on the new Fraser-Cambie line beginning on August 16, 1948. B.C. Electric provided the service with trolleybuses designed by the Brill Company of Philadelphia and manufactured in Canada by Canadian Car and Foundry. Lines were added rapidly as trolley coaches replaced streetcars and by the end of 1949, 168 trolleybuses were in operation in Vancouver. This "Rails to Rubber" programme had been accelerated by the 1948 decision that the new Granville Bridge, providing access to the west side of the city, would accommodate rubber-tired vehicles only. The conversion programme was complete in June 1955 when the Hastings East trolley coach line opened, replacing Vancouver's last streetcar line, which had ceased operation in April (Ewert 1986).

- Fisher, Ian. 1996. "Electric Trolleybuses in Vancouver", UBC

Following the war and the transition from streetcars to trolleys, the expansion of Vancouver marched further south, as the CPR made the decision to open the 112 hectares of land bounded by Oak Street, Cambie Street, 41st Avenue and 57th Avenue for development. "Announced in 1955, the newly formed Oakridge community featured 24-metre-wide single family housing lots, many on curving streets, and a small apartment area, next to which was proposed a large shopping mall

with Woodward's department store as the anchor tenant³." Oakridge Centre opened in 1959 and has continuously expanded over its lifespan. The shopping centre, located a few blocks east of the Transit Centre will soon transition into a node of higher density mixed-use development along the Canada Line. The stretch of 41st Avenue between Oak Street and Cambie Street, including the Oakridge Transit Centre site, is also poised for development as a result of the increased densities afforded by the proximity to the Canada Line.



Aerial view of Vancouver, before the Oakridge Transit Centre site was developed, circa 1948, CVA 1184-3422

³ Davis, Chuck ed. *The Greater Vancouver Book*. 1997. "Oakridge", Michael Kluckner, page 96.



Aerial photograph showing the context of the Oakridge Transit Centre. June 1948, CVA A31824



Administration Building under construction, 1948, *Vancouver's Trolley Buses 1948-1998*

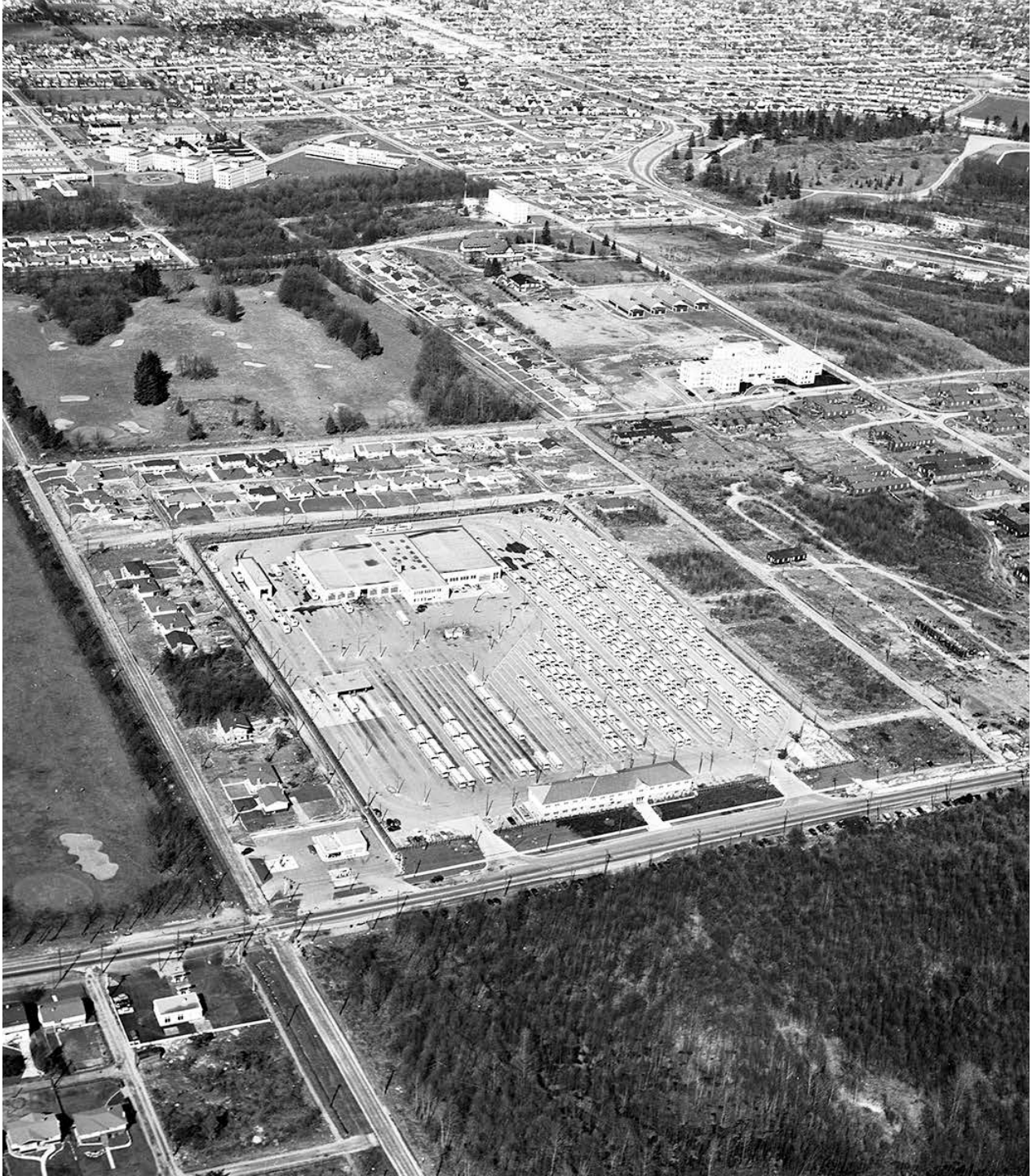
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE: OAKRIDGE TRANSIT CENTRE, VANCOUVER



Oakridge Transit Centre, 1952, Vancouver Public Library (VPL) 81774



Oakridge Transit Centre, 1952, VPL 81774A



Oakridge Transit Centre, 1952, VPL 81774C

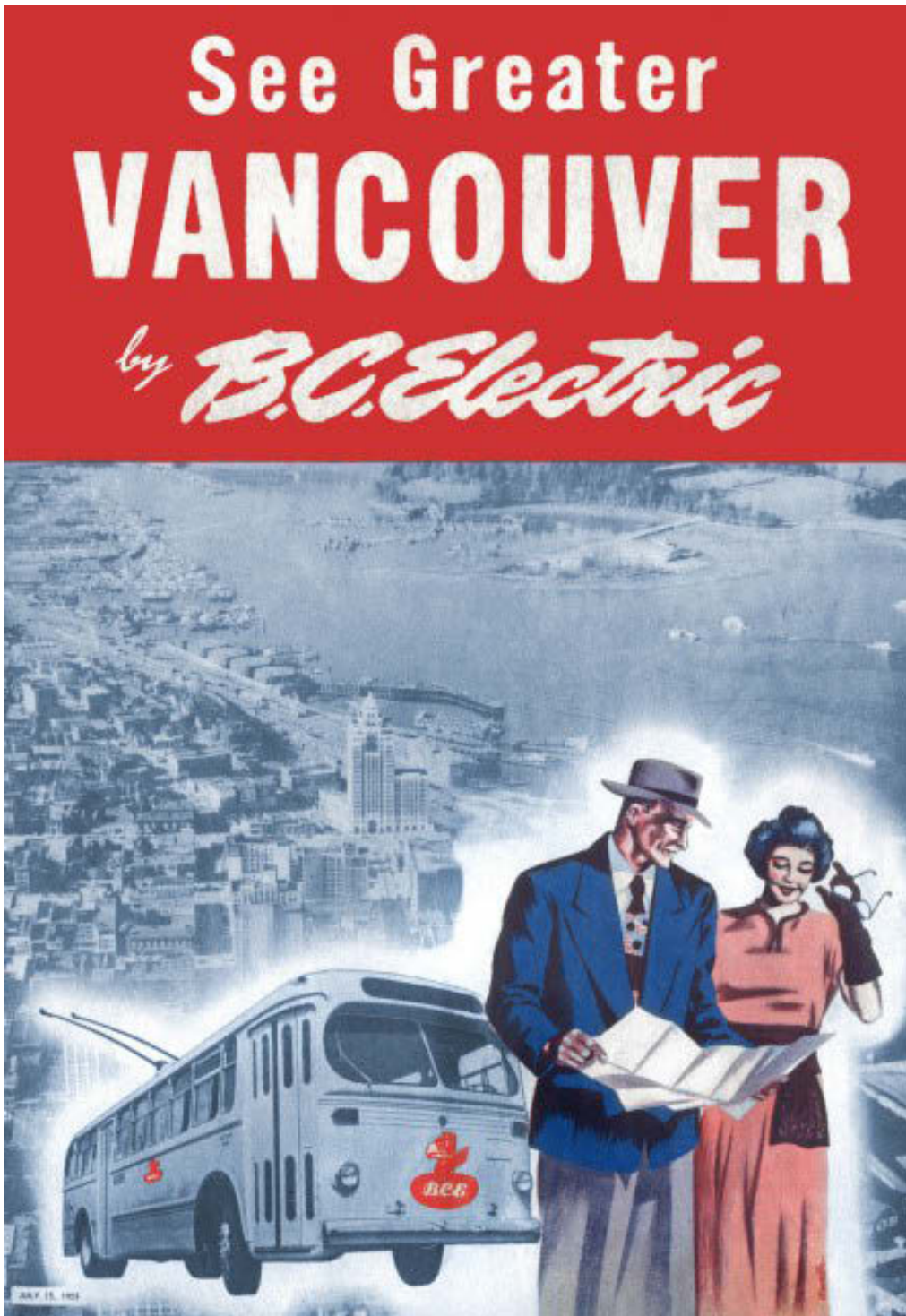
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Oakridge Transit Centre, 1954, VPL 82628A



Oakridge Transit Centre, view from lookout, 1954, VPL 82628A

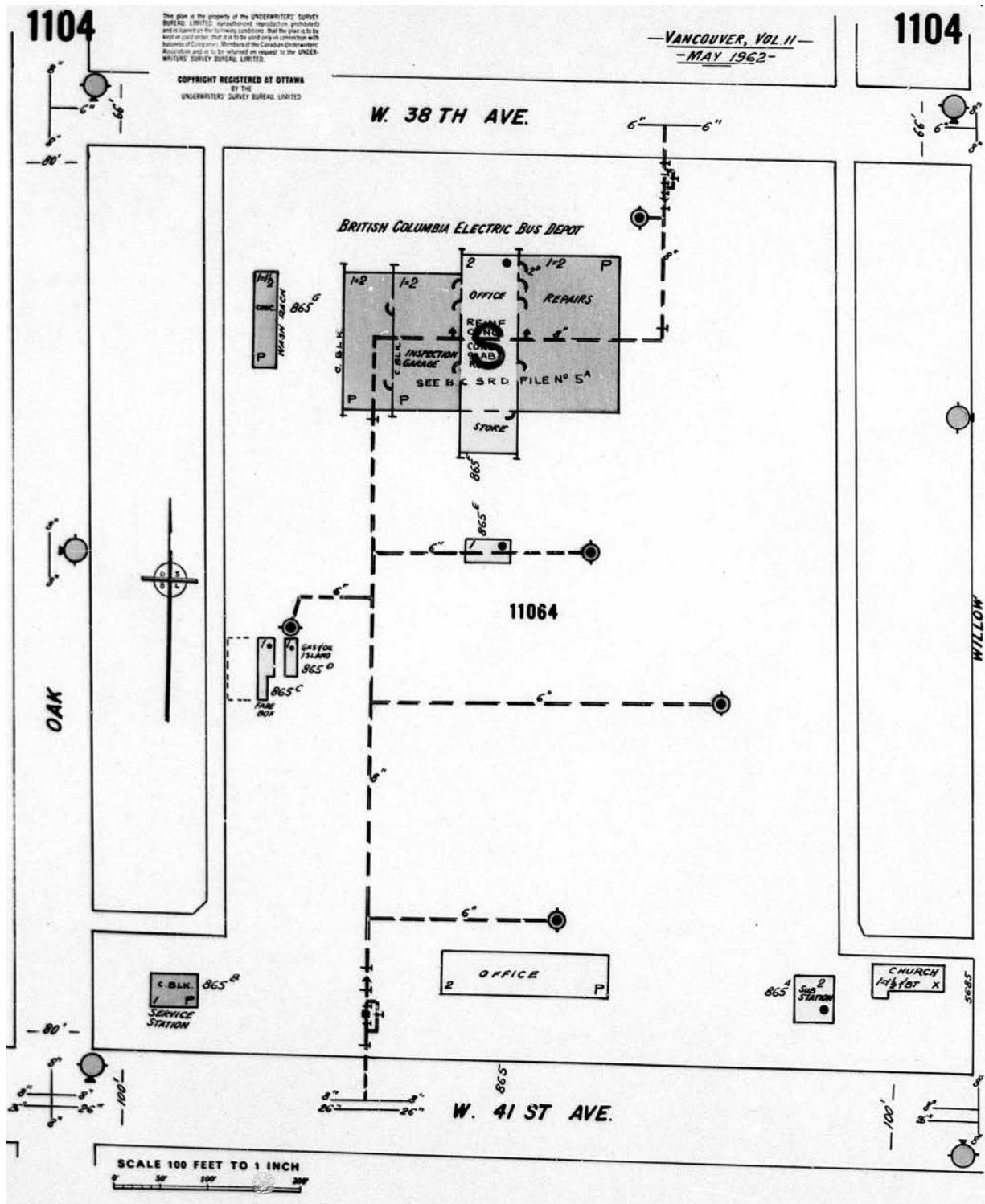


B.C. Electric Trolley Bus Pamphlet, 1951



B.C. Electric bus advertisement, Henry Ewert

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Fire Insurance Map of Oakridge Transit Centre site, 1962

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Name: Oakridge Transit Centre

Address: 949 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia

Date of Construction: 1948

Description of Historic Place

The Oakridge Transit Centre, located at 949 West 41st Avenue in the Oakridge area of Vancouver, consists of a variety of industrial and administrative buildings that were constructed to serve the maintenance and operational needs of BC Electric's transit vehicle fleet. The 5.6 hectare site is home to extant facilities and artifacts that recall transit infrastructure dating to the postwar era.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

The Oakridge Transit Centre is valued for its association with BC Electric's transit infrastructure development of the Lower Mainland, for the utilitarian design of its facilities, and for its construction on one of the last remaining large parcels of land during the postwar suburban expansion of Vancouver.

The Oakridge Transit Centre opened in 1948, amidst the postwar economic boom, which helped facilitate numerous infrastructure projects throughout the Lower Mainland. BC Electric, now known as BC Hydro, constructed the transit centre to serve its growing fleet of buses, at a time when streetcar service was drawing to a conclusion. Heralded as modern and efficient, the new trolley buses would replace the aging streetcars and would be maintained and dispatched from the Oakridge Transit Centre, strategically located near the heart of Vancouver and at the intersection of two trolley bus routes. The site served as a primary operation centre for Translink's Vancouver bus fleet until a new facility was constructed on the Fraser River in 2006.

The four remaining utilitarian industrial buildings on the Oakridge Transit Centre site illustrate the necessary support services for BC Electric's fleet of buses. The industrial buildings, including the wash rack and maintenance facility, were designed for the trolley buses and later adapted for diesel vehicles. The administration building, constructed along West 41st Avenue, was home to clerical and management functions, including the transit call centre and radio control room, which overlooked the site through full-width projecting windows. Additionally, a substation was constructed in the early 1950s on the southeast corner of the site. Together, the buildings represent a rational and institutional approach to design, reflecting the purely functional nature of the facility.

The Oakridge Transit Centre is also valued for its association with the postwar development of South Vancouver. The Transit Centre required a very large site and the area along West 41st Avenue to the west of Cambie Street offered some of the largest expanses of vacant land in Vancouver, as the dominant landowner, Canadian Pacific Railway, had not yet released all of its holdings in the area for development. The nearby Oakridge Mall would subsequently be constructed and together, the facilities represent the large-scale development of the area made possible by the availability of such a high number of contiguous lots. As the remaining land was sold and parcelled, the surrounding area developed as a suburban, single-family neighbourhood.

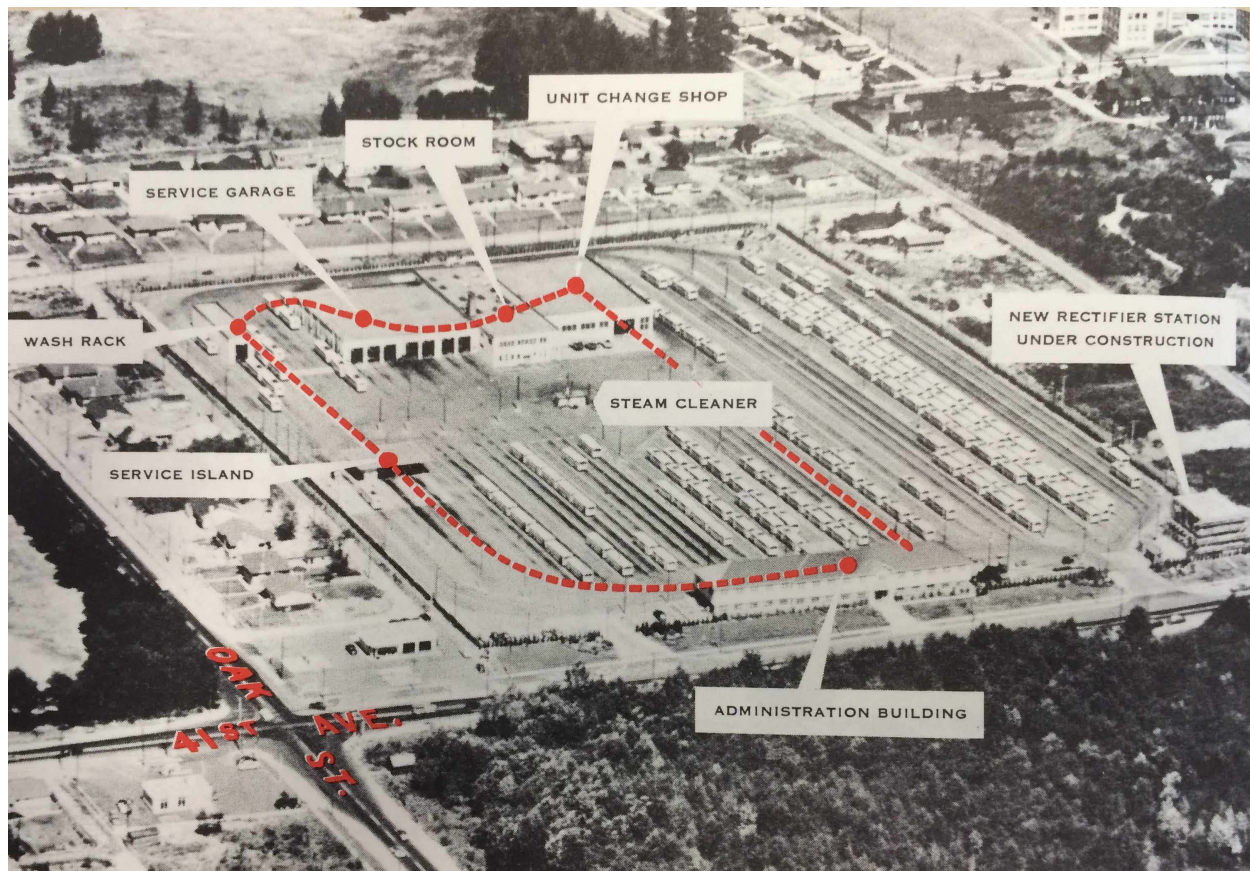
The Oakridge Transit Centre, as one of the older extant facilities in the area, recalls the formerly undeveloped tracts of land in South Vancouver.

Character-defining Elements

The elements that define the heritage character of the Oakridge Transit Centre are its:

- **Site:**
 - Location along West 41st Avenue in the Oakridge area of Vancouver;
 - Continued industrial use as a transit centre;
 - Site layout, including the large surface lot space, the administrative building along West 41st Avenue at the front of the site and the industrial, maintenance facilities at the rear of the site, toward West 38th Avenue;
 - Linear, north-south orientation; and
 - Views to the north, toward the North Shore Mountains.
- **Administration Building:**
 - Linear form, two-storey hipped roof structure;
 - Front-gabled entry bay;
 - Repetitive window openings;
 - Polychromatic brick pattern wrapping the main floor;
 - Stucco-clad second storey;
 - Internal brick chimney;
 - Second floor control room with projecting/angled windows;
- **Maintenance Facility:**
 - Two-storey rectangular massing with flat roof;
 - Board formed concrete construction;
 - Trolley wire connections in the maintenance bays and above garage doors;
 - Garage doors with glazing;
 - Utilitarian design features including irregularly spaced rectangular window openings;
 - Sewer grates with 'OTC' stamp;
- **Wash Rack:**
 - Over height rectangular massing with flat roof;
 - Linear form;
 - Board formed concrete construction;
 - Flat roof canopy on the west elevation;
 - Large garage door with glazing;
- **Substation:**
 - Two-storey cubic form with flat roof;
 - Concrete construction;
 - Exposed concrete structural frame with brick veneer;
 - Utilitarian design with void space to the west;

BUILDING PROFILES



OAKRIDGE TRANSIT CENTRE...

OAKRIDGE TRANSIT CENTRE is situated on 41st Avenue between Oak and Willow streets.

On this 13½ acre busdrome approximately 400 buses with a total cost of \$1,000,000 make their home. Here they receive gas and oil, checkovers for minor and major repairs, wash-ups, tire-changes and all the things that are necessary to make your transit system into the safe and efficient operation it is today.

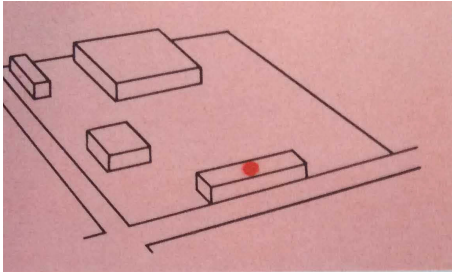
The men who drive the vehicles also have their headquarters here, where they receive their schedules and instructions, as well as specialized training in the use of buses. There are also recreational facilities for these men, and modern, up-to-date cafeterias for office and transit personnel.

Oakridge Transit Centre brochure, circa 1952, CVA

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING



The Administration Building is located on West 41st Avenue, along the southern edge of the property. The two-storey, hipped roof, linear building was designed in an austere manor, but features a handful of distinctive elements, including an alternating brick-cladding pattern on the base and chimney.



ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

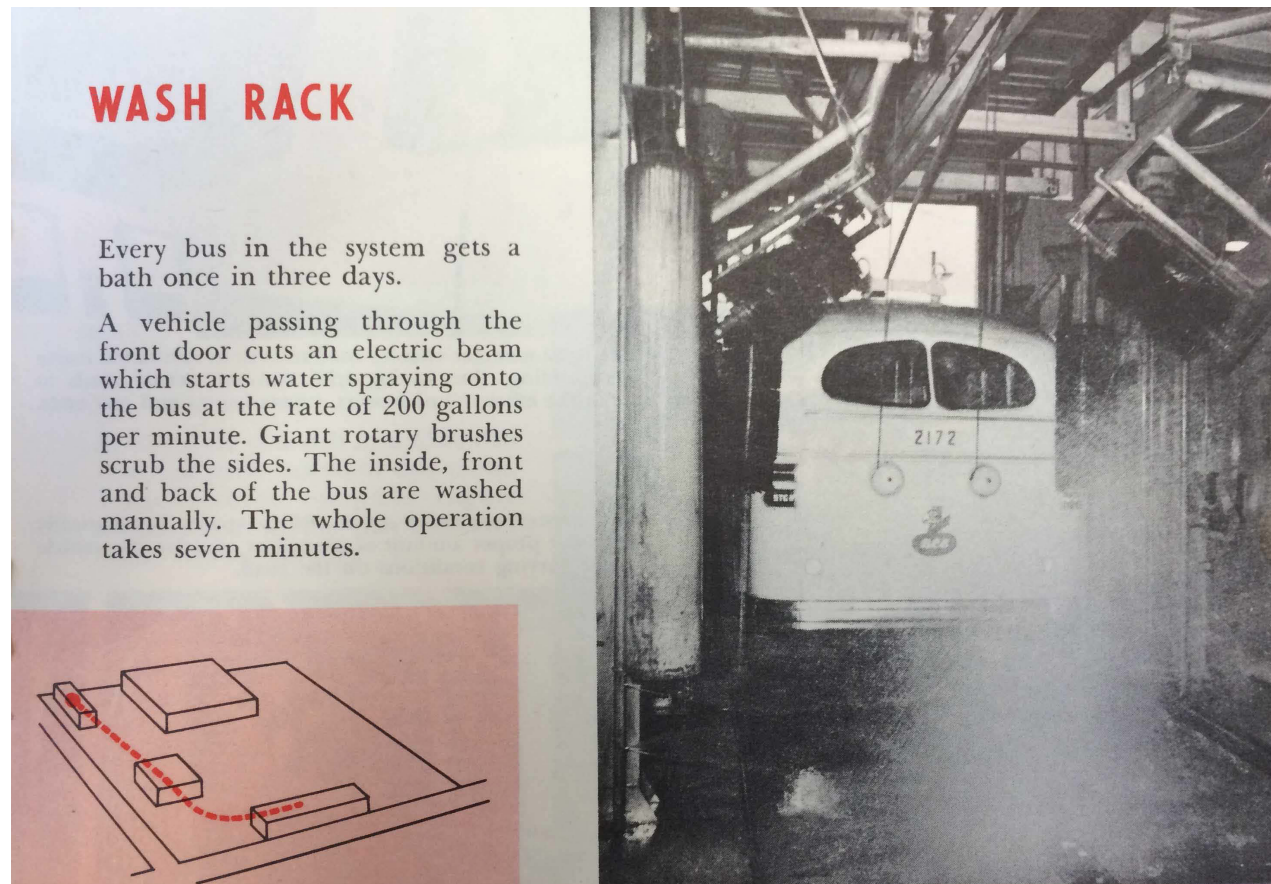
The administration building contains a variety of interesting departments. To the right, looking like the control tower of an airport, is the radio control room which is in direct contact, by two-way radio, with similarly equipped mobile units around the system. The function of this control room is to dispatch men to areas throughout the city in order to straighten out traffic tangles resulting from accidents or other disturbances.



WASH RACK



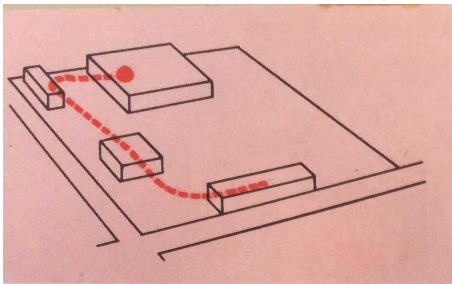
The Wash Rack, located at the northwest corner of the site features a large garage door and a canopy on the western elevation.



MAINTENANCE FACILITY



The two-storey, flat-roofed Maintenance Facility is positioned at the rear of the site, near West 38th Avenue, and contains a variety of functions.



SERVICE GARAGE

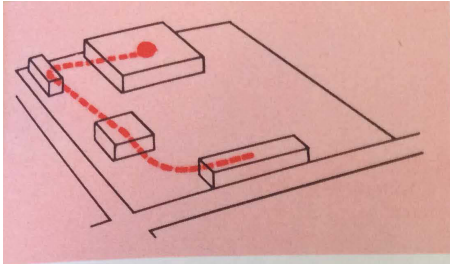
Here is where the miles of buses proceed regularly for running inspections and minor repairs. Twenty-one vehicles can be handled simultaneously in the seven pits contained in this section of the main garage.



The dynamometer enables road tests to be simulated inside the building, thus saving trial runs on actual roads to check the efficiency of motors, transmissions and rear ends.

The master controller of a trolley coach automatically feeds the proper amount of electricity to drive the vehicle under varying conditions on the road.

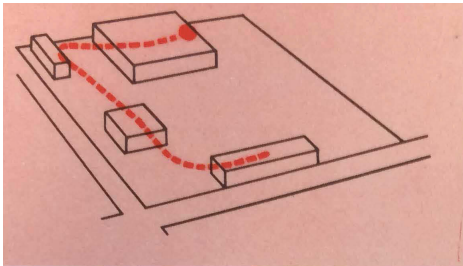
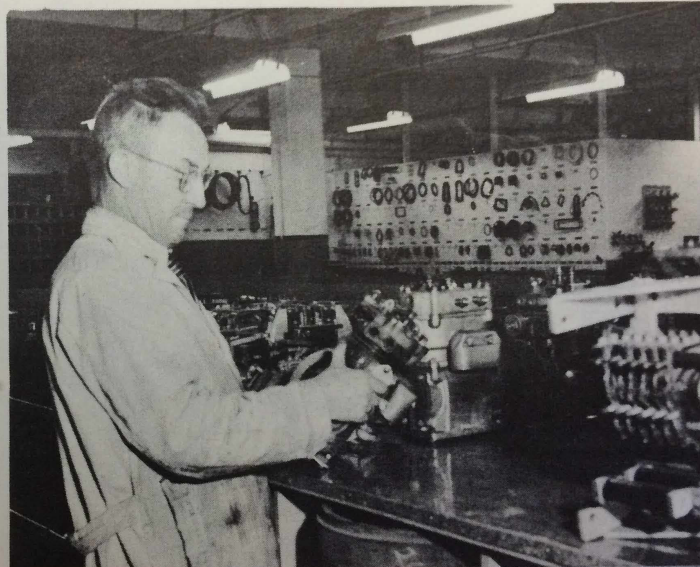




STOCK ROOM

At any time you will find \$300,000 worth of parts stored in this room. These include complete engine assemblies as well as tiny nuts and bolts, screws, springs.

Adjacent are battery, welding, machine and electrical shops, as well as a store room for tires. On the second floor are offices and locker rooms, wash rooms and lunch rooms for the employees.



UNIT CHANGE SHOP

Equipment to handle changes of units such as carburetors, radiators, chassis parts, etc., is supplied here. To keep the service operating at top speed these parts are completely changed and repairs done later at a more convenient time. The men who do the work have access to complete outfits of modern garage machinery and tools. At right is shown a section of the shop with some of the seven twin hydraulic posts in action that raise the buses to a working position.



SUBSTATION



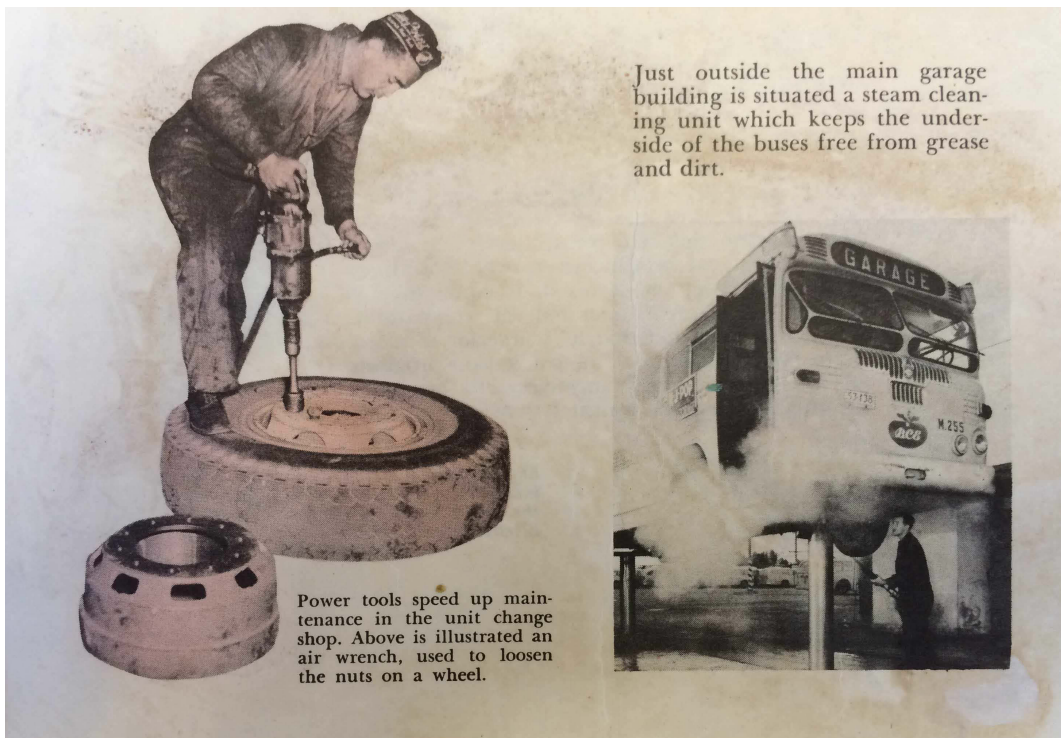
The two-storey, concrete Substation at the southeast corner of the site along West 41st Avenue features a series of brick cladded bays. It was not original to the construction of the Oakridge Transit Centre in 1948, but was built soon after, in the early 1950s.



Brill trolley buses beside the Substation, 1955, *Vancouver's Trolley Buses 1948-1998*

SERVICE ISLAND/STEAM CLEANER

Some facilities on the site no longer exist, including the Service Island and Steam Cleaner.



ARTIFACTS

Several artifacts on the site could present opportunities for public interpretation.

TROLLEY POLES



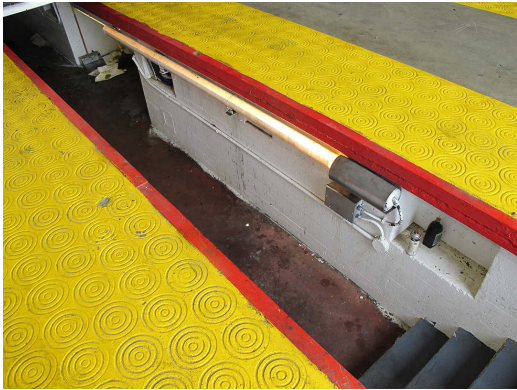
GARAGE DOORS OF MAINTENANCE FACILITY



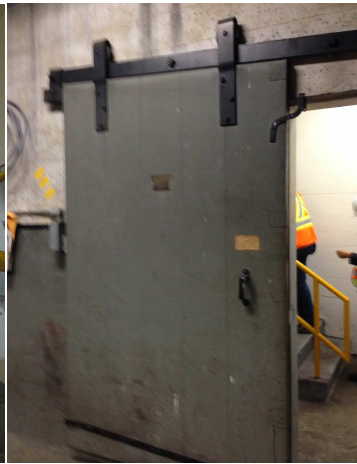
SEWER GRATES



MECHANIC PLATFORMS IN MAINTENANCE FACILITY



DOORS IN MAINTENANCE FACILITY



MACHINERY IN BASEMENT OF MAINTENANCE FACILITY

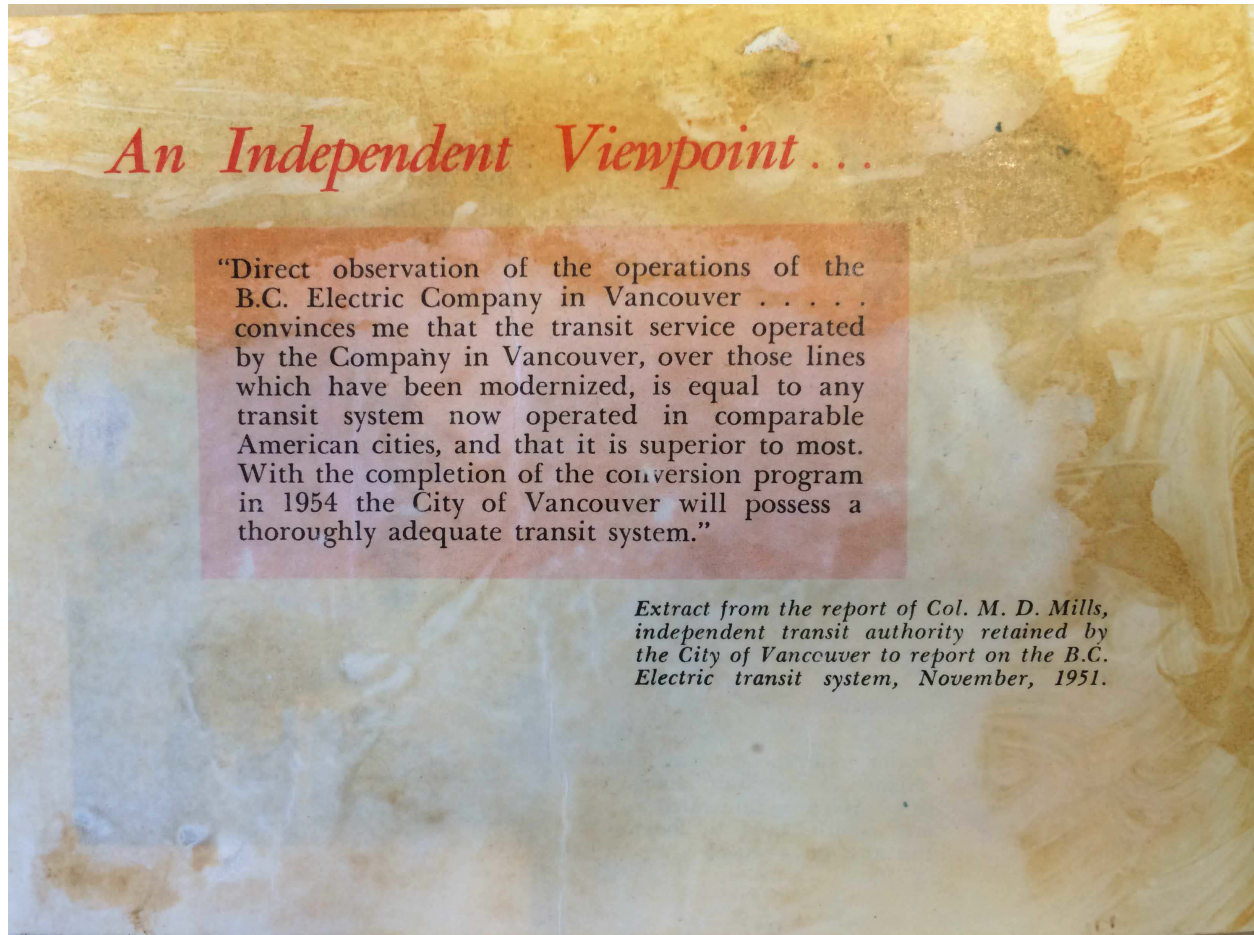


EQUIPMENT (PULLEYS/HOSES) IN MAINTENANCE FACILITY



ELEVATOR IN MAINTENANCE FACILITY





Oakridge Transit Centre brochure, circa 1952, CVA