

Cfb nTHE INC. ROTTERDAMSCH E TRAMWAY COMPANY

a contribution by Mark Grootendorst



The first activities

On November 12, 1878, the N.V. Rotterdamsche Tramweg Maatschappij was founded with the aim of operating a network of horse tramways in Rotterdam. This made it the seventh tram company in our country, but it would soon grow into one of the largest. Between 1878 and 1881 it was only the horse trams that attracted the attention of the young company. In 1881 the first steam tram line of the RTM was opened, the Rotterdam-Schiedam line, a standard gauge steam tram line that still exists today as one of the long-distance lines of the RET. In 1898 the first long-distance steam tram road to the islands was opened, the line from Rotterdam Rosestraat to Hoekse Waard, but now constructed with narrow gauge (1067 mm. instead of 1435 mm standard gauge). In the meantime, the RTM also functioned as a kind of employment agency for small horse-drawn tramway companies, which were unable to cope on their own. For example, in Schiedam, Leiden, Sloterdijk (Amsterdam), Hillegersberg (Rotterdam) and Dordrecht, the tram companies were helped with coachmen, carriages and sometimes conductors for a contractually agreed amount.

The islands

At the end of the 19th century, Rotterdam grew fast; Rotterdam-South in particular was the site where the new ports for transport to the new German Empire and especially the Ruhr area were constructed. The population increased dramatically in number.

It was mainly people from the rural areas of West Brabant and the South Holland Islands who had to be counted among the "new Rotterdammers". These people maintained their family and social relationships in the area they had left and so slowly but surely a flow of traffic in that direction emerged.

Moreover, the Hoekse Waard has been opened up since 1870 by the famous Barendrechtse Brug. However, the road construction was largely too slow or was not carried out at all. A network of clay and in more favorable cases gravel roads caused transport to stagnate, especially in wet times. If the islands wanted to benefit from Rotterdam as a growing market, an acceptable form of mass transport had to be created.

At the turn of the century this could only have been the steam tram. The same committee that realized the construction of the Barendrechtse Brug promoted the construction of a steam tram line to Rotterdam.

At Schouwen Duiveland it was also a citizens' committee that made plans for a steam tram line between Brouwershaven and Steenberg (with extension to Roosendaal). Both committees eventually came into contact with the RTM, which would be responsible for the construction and operation: the Rotterdam-South Beijerland line was opened in 1898, and the Brouwershaven-Steenbergen line in 1900.

In the period 1903 to 1909 the line network was expanded or opened in the Hoekse Waard, on Voorne Putten and Goeree Overflakkee. The line Brouwershaven - Burgh op Schouwen became closer to the finish in 1915. By putting ferries and tugs into service, the steam tramways on the then still isolated islands were connected to the spider in the web, the metropolis of Rotterdam, on the understanding that the line between IJsselmonde (Middeldijk) and Zwijndrecht was oriented towards Dordrecht and the line between St.Philipsland (ferry port Anna Jacobapolder) and Steenberg on West Brabant (Roosendaal and Breda).

Extension

Now that the RTM had its hands free for its island network, things were tackled in a big way. The tramways on the islands were connected by ferry services. To this end, various steamboat companies were taken over, national ferry ports were built and own ships, both for passengers and freight wagons (tugs), put into service. Track improvements made it possible to increase the maximum speed of the trams on many routes from 20 km/h (1889) to 45 km/h (1934). In 1923, the first bus lines were opened in the Hoekse Waard, as a supplier for our own tram transport.

After the opening of the last line to Burgh (Schouwen-duiveland) in 1915, the total length of the tram network was 235 kilometers. Together with the above activities, the nature of the company and the number of trams per day, one could rightly speak of a small railway company.

Many tram activities took place on fairly large tram yards, visible from the public road, but "Access to the Tramway is Forbidden" as could be read on the many cast iron and wooden signs along the tram tracks. Long trams, actually trains, ran between the islands and the big city. Combined with a ferry trip between Zijpe and Numansdorp, this all gave the atmosphere of "a great travel".

Issues

The RTM also had its problems. The management was regularly at odds with the bondholders. From a social point of view, the management pursued a very conservative course. The remuneration of the staff was not generous. Yet many employees remained loyal to the RTM for years, sometimes their entire working life.

Although the management also kept the expenditure on equipment and track very economical, they were forced to improve track maintenance due to the many derailments. During the First World War it was the poor coal and the shortage of personnel that ensured that the timetable was regularly disrupted. In the twenties, small private bus companies also appeared, which caused a significant decline in passenger transport on the RTM.

Nevertheless, the RTM has done a lot to improve the quality of transport. The increase in the maximum speed, the commissioning of motor railcars and the improvement of the track are certainly worth mentioning in this context. In the 1930s, however, the economic crisis on the islands also had a disruptive effect. Transport declined, until 1937 the small bus companies were able to skim off the declining transport by RTM tram even more and the contributions of the government to the tram companies in general became smaller and smaller.

In 1939 the passenger service was replaced by buses on some lines in the Hoekse Waard. In the meantime, Rotterdam South had grown into a complete city and the tram had become part of city traffic. Numerous accidents, largely caused by traffic that did not take the tram into account, wrongly awarded the RTM tram the predicate "killer".

However, one would experience in the war years that this apparently murderous tram was of vital importance to Rotterdam.

The second World War

The war saved the RTM. That sounds a bit crude, but the fact that private car transport was soon made impossible caused the transport figures to rise sharply as early as 1940. On the other hand, the work for the staff did not become more pleasant. The trams became longer, the services heavier, the coal worse, the lubricants and spare parts and therefore the state of maintenance of the equipment less. In addition, a large part of the transport area was declared a "Sperrgebiet", ie forbidden territory. Air raids already made traveling to and from the islands by tram and boat a risky business. Victims have also fallen among RTM personnel at the tram and ferry services. On September 18, 1944, RTM personnel went on strike. Only freight transport by tram for the food supply of the city of Rotterdam was still carried out when requested.

Reconstruction

Just like the Dutch Railways, the RTM suffered a lot from the German destruction during the period of the railway strike between September 1944 and May 1945. Various ferry ports had become unusable, station buildings were destroyed, staff houses demolished or destroyed, bridges blown up or disappeared, parts of the tram network broken up and rolling stock destroyed or badly damaged. Many tram companies (eg NBM, MBS, ZVTM and NTM) gave up and converted their company into a bus company. However, the RTM did not. A very capable management, motivated tram staff and a wide choice of replacement equipment ensured that the damage was repaired as well as possible at the end of the 1940s. In the fifties, the RTM modernized part of its equipment by using the existing rock-solid equipment, but adapted to the taste and style of the fifties. The new colors red and cream became the corporate identity of the RTM. The traveler and staff members were kept informed of everything by the quarterly magazine "de Tramcourier". Modern buses served the smaller towns.

After the Flood Disaster

The flood disaster of February 1953 roughly disrupted this build-up. The damage to the tram network was soon repaired and the rolling stock had suffered little. However, after the island of Schouwen dried up, the population and the authorities did not want the tram back. Land consolidation and bus transport were the priorities in Zeeland, although a ticket for the bus soon turned out to be more expensive than for the tram.

On October 10, 1956, a passing tram collapsed on a straight stretch of track along Dordtse Straatweg (Rotterdam) through the track. The track had not been returned to a good condition after the flood disaster. Research showed that it would cost a fortune to repair the network in such a way that responsible and safe tram operation was assured. In addition, it was decided to implement the Delta Plan. Many lines would have to be diverted (for which plans had been made, by the way) and the ferry services would disappear so that sticking to the tram operation was no longer logical. For example, in

1956 and '57 the tramways in the Hoekse Waard and on Goeree-Overflakkee disappeared and after the dams were completed, in the 1960s and 1970s, the boat services between Numansdorp, Zijpe, Middelharnis and Hellevoetsluis. The Anna Jacoba-Zijpe ferry was the only RTM ferry service that remained in service until the completion of the Philipsdam in 1988.

Only the tram services between Rotterdam and Voorne Putten were maintained and were further modernised. The steam traction first disappeared from the passenger service, but later also from the freight service, existing rolling stock was modernized and even in 1963 a new tram set, the "Sparrowhawk", was put into service. But this too was to no avail.

The end of the tram

The increasing car ownership and the fact that the shares of the RTM had been transferred via the municipality of Rotterdam (a declared anti-RTM municipality, they had metro plans!) to the Dutch Railways, which did not like long-distance trams at all, ensured that tram services were increasingly reduced in favor of bus services. No more passengers were allowed to board between Rotterdam Rosestraat and Spijkenisse, this became the RET area. After the summer season of 1964, the beach tram to Oostvoorne disappeared, soon followed by the Spijkenisse - Oostvoorne service. Trams between Rotterdam and Spijkenisse were abandoned at the end of 1965. On February 14, 1966, in a flying snowstorm, the last tram ran between Hellevoetsluis and Spijkenisse. After 68 years, the narrow gauge tram road operation had come to an end and the RTM had become a bus company. Only a few railway embankments, bridges, buildings and the former ferry ports still recall the existence of the Island Tram.

The NV.Rotterdamsche Tramweg Maatschappij soon merged with several ex-tram companies in Zeeland until in 1978, one hundred years after the foundation of the RTM, the Regional transport company Southwest Netherlands (ZWN) was founded. On 1 May 1999, this company was merged into the Connexxion conglomerate, which also includes old tram company NZH.

Still no end

It was the Tramway Foundation, which, with the purchase of a collection of steam tram equipment from the RTM in 1965 and subsequently with other purchases, ensured that, in addition to immovable property, also rolling stock, the memory of one of the largest Dutch interurban tramway companies remains alive. From 1966 to 1988, restored trams of the RTM ran on a small piece of track between Hellevoetsluis Tramhaven and the hamlet of Vlotbrug, later the shopping center de Struyste Hoek.

In 1989 the largely restored RTM rolling stock moved to Ouddorp, where in 1990 the first part (2 km) of the new tram track between the depot at the Punt and the Grevelingen visitor center was opened. Exactly thirty years after the last RTM ride on Voorne Putten, the entire museum tram line between De Punt and Kabbelaarsbank was finally put into use on 14 February 1996. On March 23, 2007, the runway extension from Port Zélande to Middelplaat Haven was put into use by the mayors of Goedereede and Schouwen-Duiveland. From this moment on, the RTM is back in Zeeland and lived up to its name "the island tram" again. On the day of opening of this section, the museum was recognized as a "Registered Museum". In 2008, the Transport and Water Management Inspectorate, now the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate, issued the concession for the use of the track and recognition as an official tram line. Finally, on 16 November 2011, the Middelplaat Harbor to West Repart/Dolfijn section at the end of the dam, shortly before Scharendijke, was opened. Major maintenance is carried out on the track every year. To this end, a complete work train was built under our own management, machinery was purchased and invested in new rail material. The tram track is for the most part on a ballast bed of gravel and crushed stone and meets all the requirements of the Railways Act. In order to honor the 235 kilometers of the RTM, there is now a track of more than 10 kilometers in length on which only rolling stock from the former RTM is used. The track and rolling

stock are managed and maintained by volunteers, who see it as their job to let you experience what a large steam tram company once looked like.

In 2013, after years of preparation, the construction of the first phase of the expansion of the museum building started, followed in 2015 by a second part. Construction of the third and final section of the museum building began on April 1, 2022, and was officially opened on September 27, 2024. The permanent collection of vehicles and models is presented in an attractive way, along with model railways and a retrospective exhibition.