



Railroads

Before the railroad, the main modes of transportation were by water or plank roads. By the 1840s, railroads had proven their worth as an inexpensive means of transportation. Michigan built the Michigan Central Railroad, which the state sold to John Murray Forbes in 1846 because it could not afford to repair the lines. The first lines north from Detroit bypassed Rochester. During the Civil War, a stagecoach line was used to connect Romeo to Pontiac via Rochester to the Grand Trunk Western railway; a connection could also be made to the Detroit and Milwaukee Railroad (at Pontiac).

In 1871, Lysander Woodward helped organize the Detroit and Bay City Railroad by securing the right of way and getting Rochester residents to contribute money; he became the company's president. In 1872 the tracks were laid and the first train arrived in Rochester in October of that year. In 1881, the Detroit and Bay City became the Michigan Central Company with a depot located just east of Main Street at University and Water Street. The railroad was vital because Rochester needed to ship freight, such as perishable goods, long distances and the system could do that in a shorter period of time versus other modes of transportation. The railroad also opened Rochester up to new markets and allowed mills and farms to sell their goods outside the immediate area, even out of state. Passengers could buy tickets for anywhere in the country and travel. It was hoped Rochester would become "quite a railroad center."



The Michigan Air Line Railway was organized in 1875. Tracks were laid from Romeo to Rochester in March 1879 and then to Pontiac in 1880. The Air Line ran an east-west course in Rochester from Bloomer State Park through the Clinton Valley, following the bank of the Clinton-Kalamazoo canal to the village limits. In 1880, the Air Line consolidated with the Grand Trunk Western Railroad. By 1900, eight passenger trains and twenty-five freight trains traveled through Rochester everyday. Also around that

time, the Detroit Urban Railway (D.U.R.) began taking many of the railroad's passengers, leaving the railroads with mostly freight shipping. During both World Wars, the railroads experienced a boom in freight and soldier passage but after World War II, more people used cars and trucks transported goods. Highways and airplanes also caused railroad passage to decline further, forcing some lines to be cut.

Passenger trains were cut entirely during the postwar era and freight trains ran less frequently. The Michigan Central went bankrupt after 125 years in the 1960s. Most of the railroad freight to Rochester came via the Grand Trunk; the Detroit-Bay City was closed by 1964. The last passenger train left Rochester in March 1964. Amtrak took most of the passengers that did travel by the lines in 1968.

