

Streetcars in Hiroshima

Hiroshima is one of the few cities in Japan where streetcars form a major part of the public transport network. The Hiroshima Electric Railway Company, better known by local residents as Hiroden, has been running Hiroshima's trams since 1912. One of a handful of Japan's remaining streetcar operators, Hiroden operates the longest tram network in the country, with more than 35 kilometers of track.

The city is proud of its trams, which famously resumed operations a mere three days after the 1945 atomic bombing. Moreover, two streetcars that survived the bombing are still in service today, a testament both to their sturdy design and the city's resilience.

Hiroden has a policy of keeping older tram models in service, repairing and upgrading them as needed rather than replacing them. As other cities around the world have shut down their streetcar networks, Hiroden has purchased the old trams and put them in service, giving the city an eclectic fleet incorporating 26 different types of vehicles that has earned it the nickname "The Moving Streetcar Museum." Getting around the city could include a ride on historical trams from Kyoto and Osaka or more modern carriages from as far away as Germany. The oldest tram still in service is number 582, a former Kobe streetcar built before World War II.

On the weekend closest to June 10, the company holds the annual Hiroden Streetcar Festival at the tram depot beside its head office. The event, which attracts 15,000 visitors each year, is a chance for tram enthusiasts to see all the different streetcars up close, tour the workshop and garage, and buy old tram parts and memorabilia. Some collectors line up for hours to get their hands on old license plates and signs. There are numerous food stalls, and for children, there are mini replica trams to ride, as well as sketching contests and stage shows.