

A-Bombed Streetcars

When the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, 108 of the city's 123 trams were destroyed. Some of the remaining streetcars were up and running again just three days later—a point of pride for both local residents and the Hiroden tram company. Two trams that were damaged in the bombing are still in use: numbers 651 and 652, both built in 1942, during World War II.

At the time, the two war-legacy trams were the largest and most modern trams in Hiroshima, with longer bodies to fit more passengers and a gently sloping floor that made it easier for commuters to get aboard quickly. The two trams were in service during the morning hours when the bomb was dropped, and 651 was only 1 kilometer from the hypocenter of the explosion. The wooden interior of the trams burned, but the vehicles remained intact, likely because of their solid steel bodies. After the war, both trams were restored and returned to service.

Although the two trams have since been upgraded—they now support contactless travel cards and have air conditioning—they still have their original chassis. No new technology has been added to the driver's cabin, meaning the streetcars are still entirely manually controlled, with wheels and levers in place of buttons and screens. A ride on one of these trams is like a journey back in time. In fact, Hiroden's policy is to keep at least one of them in service for as long as possible, as a way of preserving Hiroshima's history.

Unfortunately, due to the age of trams 651 and 652, they are not fully accessible. Hiroshima's newer streetcars, however, are designed to accommodate all passengers.