

WHEELS OF THE PAST: TRAMS AS THE LIFELINE OF SEMARANG CITY 1881-1940

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ABSTRACT

Trams played an important role in the development of Semarang City from 1881 to 1940. As a mode of transportation in the city, trams are not only a means of transporting passengers and goods, but also a major driver of economic growth and urban spatial development. This research uses historical methods, including heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The results show that the Semarang-Juana steam tram, operated by Samarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij (SJS), is the backbone of transportation to connect produce production areas with ports, as well as encourage urbanization and economic growth. Trams also form new economic corridors and expand social interaction between community groups. However, trams eventually disappeared due to the development of transportation technology and changes in urban spatial planning.

Keywords: Tram, Semarang, Urban Transportation

INTRODUCTION

Transportation is one of the essential elements in urban development, particularly in supporting the social, economic, and cultural activities of society. To facilitate these activities, the Dutch colonial government developed key infrastructure, including a railway network, which served as the main means of transportation and distribution for plantation and mining products. The first railway in the Dutch East Indies used steam locomotives imported from Europe.¹ These steam locomotives were used on the first railway line in Java, between Kemijen and Tanggung in Semarang, which was completed in 1867 with a total length of 26 kilometers.² Therefore, the history of railways in Indonesia is particularly fascinating, as trains represent the oldest form of mass transportation that remains in use even in 2025. The railway network, originally built during the Dutch colonial period, extended across Java, Sumatra, Madura, and Sulawesi, and continues to serve both freight and passenger transportation today.³ The need for transportation capable of carrying agricultural products quickly and in large quantities encouraged private companies to construct railway lines.⁴ Therefore, the construction of the railway network became a large-scale effort by the Dutch.⁵ Over time, railways developed into the main mode of transportation due to their large carrying capacity and efficiency for long-distance travel. Their growth was driven by technological advancements, making them more modern and efficient than in previous periods.

In its early development in Europe, the railway was known as an exclusive means of transportation for the elite. By the late 19th century, it had become a symbol of modernity and technological progress, although its use remained limited to upper-class society. The influence of this technology was also felt in the Dutch East Indies, where the colonial government-owned railway company, *Nederlandsch Spoorweg Maatschappij*, grew into a highly significant enterprise.⁶ In addition to its main railway network with a track gauge of 1,435 meters stretching over 228 kilometers, the company also expanded by adding steam tram lines in Central Java (Gundhi–Surabaya, Yogyakarta–Magelang–Willem I, and Solo–Boyolali with their respective branches) with a narrower gauge of 1.06 meters, totaling 385 kilometers in length. This

¹ Ravico and Budi Susetyo, "Sejarah Pembangunan Jalur Kereta Api Sebagai Alat Transportasi di Sumatera Selatan Tahun 1914-1933," *AGASTYA: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Pembelajarannya*, 11.1 (2021), p. 69.

² Hartono, *Lokomotif dan Kereta Rel Diesel di Indonesia* (Depok: PT. Ilalang Sakti Komunikasi, 2012).

³ R. Saraswati and L. M. F. Purwanto, "Jejak Sejarah Trem Kota Semarang 1881–1840," *Jurnal Arsitektur Kolaborasi*, 2.1 (2022), p. 11.

⁴ C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, "Dinamika Perusahaan Semarang-Joana *Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS): Jejak Kereta Api di Pulau Jawa Tahun 1881–1900," *Chronologia*, 4.3 (2023). p. 112.

⁵ Ravico and Budi Susetyo, "Sejarah Pembangunan Jalur Kereta Api Sebagai Alat Transportasi di Sumatera Selatan Tahun 1914-1933," p. 69.

⁶ Ten Hagen. (1910). *Algemeene en internationale tentoonstelling te Brussel in 1910: De spoor- en tramwegen op het eiland Java, Nederlandsche afdeling*, p. 20

innovation had a significant impact, particularly in the city of Semarang, where railways and trams were integrated to support urban growth and increasingly dynamic economic activities. As a center of trade and agricultural distribution, Semarang utilized trams as an essential mode of urban transportation.⁷ Beyond their practical function as a mode of transport, trams in colonial cities such as Batavia and Semarang also embodied urban modernity and the rise of a mobile middle class, symbolizing progress and technological advancement in early twentieth-century Java.⁸ Although the tracks no longer exist today, the role of trams at that time was an important part of Semarang's urban development.⁹

The transportation route between Semarang and Rembang was supported by a steam tram network operated by the *Semarang–Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS), a private railway company established in 1881 after obtaining a concession from the colonial government and beginning operations on 28 September of the same year.¹⁰ Initially, the concession to construct the Semarang – Demak – Kudus – Pati – Juwana line was granted to other parties but was later transferred to SJS, which subsequently developed an urban and intercity tram network starting in 1882. By 1900, this network had been expanded through various branch lines and the acquisition of older routes, making it the backbone of plantation and agricultural transport from the Pati and Rembang regions to the Port of Semarang. Semarang's strategic position facilitated the growth of this network as a crucial component of the colonial logistics system. Within the city, steam trams functioned primarily as a means of passenger mobility, forming an urban transport network that, by 1913, had reached various parts of the city.

In 1916, the *Semarang–Joana Stoomtram* line was widened to increase transport capacity and efficiency in the region (Mulyanto, 2023). Unfortunately, trams in Semarang are rarely discussed today due to the disappearance of their tracks and the changing urban structure, even though they once played a significant role in the city's development during the Dutch East Indies era. The SJS tram line originally started from Jurnatan Station as its central hub, with long-distance routes extending eastward toward East Java, following a path from Jurnatan Station northward before turning east toward Demak. Semarang Jurnatan Station served as the main station of the *Semarang–Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS) and functioned as the central hub for steam tram transportation activities.¹¹ Although the station no longer exists

⁷ C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, "Dinamika Perusahaan *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS): Jejak Kereta Api di Pulau Jawa Tahun 1881–1900," *Chronologia*, 4.3 (2023), p. 112.

⁸ Tom Hoogervorst and Henk Schulte Nordholt, "Urban Middle Classes in Colonial Java (1900–1942): Images and Language," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde/ Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia*, 173, no. 4 (2017), p. 447–448

⁹ R. Saraswati and L. M. F. Purwanto, *Op. Cit.*, p.13.

¹⁰ T. Boom. *Bijdrage tot dal kennis der stoomtramwegen in verband met hunne ontwikkeling op Java.* (1886). Soerabaja: Gebr. Donker & Co, p. 14.

¹¹ Heri Mulyanto dan Dwi Agus Lubis, "Stasiun Djoernatan Centraal Semarang: Sebuah Riwayat Stasiun Trem Kolonial," *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah* 7, no. 2 (2023), p. 142.

today, the SJS logo remains visible atop the Kawasaki shop building, serving as a historical witness to the development of transportation in the Dutch East Indies. The total length of the SJS railway reached 407 km, connecting key areas in East Semarang to other regions producing agricultural and plantation products.¹²

Research on trams in Semarang during the Dutch colonial period has primarily focused on the role of tram lines as a crucial component of the transportation infrastructure that facilitated social and economic mobility. For instance, the study by Cahya Adhitya Pratama and Gery Erlangga (2023) highlights the role of the *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS) in developing railway and tram lines up to 1900, particularly for transporting agricultural products from the hinterlands to the port of Semarang.¹³ However, these studies pay less attention to the role of trams as urban transport, which influences the city's spatial structure and the daily mobility of residents. To address this gap, Saraswati and Purwanto's (2022) study provides a comprehensive overview of Semarang's urban trams from 1881 until their cessation in 1940, emphasizing the intra-city routes and their contributions to urban development and patterns of resident mobility. Therefore, this research expands the study of colonial transportation by examining trams not only from the perspective of companies and main lines but also as an urban transport mode closely linked to social dynamics and city development, offering new insights into the role of trams in urban life before their operations ceased.

The issue addressed in this study is the extent to which trams contributed to the development of Semarang City in the late 19th century. This research aims to explore the role of trams as a mode of transportation that supports population mobility and goods distribution, as well as their influence on urban planning and the city's economic growth. The main question is how the Semarang–Juwana steam tram could function effectively as an urban transportation system and a driver of city development during the colonial period, and what its impact was on the socio-economic development of the local population. Therefore, this study also aims to explore the role of trams as a key urban transportation medium in Semarang's development in the 19th century, while contributing to the historiography of transportation in Indonesia. The theoretical framework employed includes urban transportation and city development theories, as well as the history of railway development in colonial Indonesia.¹⁴ Furthermore, this study is expected to enrich the historiography of transportation in Indonesia and provide insight into the importance of integrating transportation modes in urban development. From an epistemological perspective, this research enriches transportation historiography by employing a social and urban historical approach that views trams as an integral part of everyday life in colonial society. From an axiological perspective, the findings contribute to a better understanding of the role of

¹² H. Mulyanto and D. A. Lubis, *op. cit*, p.142.

¹³ C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, *op. cit*, p. 112.

¹⁴ H. Mulyanto and D. A. Lubis, *op. cit*, p. 143.

transportation in urban development and serve as a reference for urban planning studies and the preservation of transportation history.

METHOD

As an academic discipline, history is bound by scientific research procedures.¹⁵ In accordance with this study, the historical method is employed as the primary basis for writing and analysis. This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of the role of trams as an urban transportation system in the development of Semarang City during the 19th century. The historical method is a scientific procedure designed to critically reconstruct past events based on historical evidence. The purpose of employing the historical method is to obtain historical truth itself.¹⁶ The method used in this study is the historical method, which includes four main stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography.¹⁷

The first stage is heuristics, which constitutes the initial phase of historical research, namely the collection of data or historical sources. At this stage, various relevant historical sources are examined in order to obtain traces of past events. The sources are categorized into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources in this research include colonial archives, newspapers, and documents from the Dutch East Indies government, and historical records of Semarang City, accessed online through the Delpher and KITLV websites. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from history books, scientific journals, articles, and relevant online media. The reference books used were accessed online via Google Books or offline from the History Library of Universitas Negeri Semarang. The scientific journals used as secondary data are nationally accredited journals accessed through Google Scholar.

Next, the source criticism stage was conducted to evaluate the validity and credibility of the collected data. Internal criticism was used to evaluate the content and consistency of information within the sources, while external criticism aimed to examine the authenticity, authority, and background of the sources¹⁸. The third stage, interpretation, involved analyzing the verified historical data. At this stage, the researcher sought to understand and construct the meaning of various historical data in relation to the development of the tram transportation system and its influence on the urban development patterns of Semarang during the colonial period. The final stage is historiography, which involves writing historical narratives based on data that have been critically and interpretively analyzed. The writing is organized systematically, emphasizing the continuity of scientific arguments grounded in historical facts. All data used in this research derive from accountable information,

¹⁵ Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2013), p. 10.

¹⁶ Wasino & Endah Sri Hartatik, *Metode Penelitian Sejarah: dari Riset hingga Penulisan* (Yogyakarta: Magnum Pustaka Utama, 2018), p. 11.

¹⁷ N. Herlina, *Metode Sejarah* (Bandung: Penerbit Satya Historika, 2020), p. 30.

¹⁸ Wasino, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

whether obtained directly from the research site or from relevant written and documentary sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Presence of the Tram within Urban Society

The implementation of the forced cultivation system (*cultuurstelsel*) by Governor-General Johannes van den Bosch in 1830 brought significant changes to the trading cities of the Dutch East Indies, including Surabaya, Batavia, and Semarang. This policy increased agricultural production, which required the rapid transportation of commodities to ports for export to Europe or shipment to other regions. This marked the beginning of railway development in Indonesia, initiated during the *cultuurstelsel* period (1830–1834) under Governor-General Van Den Bosch to support revenue from plantations and agriculture.¹⁹ This system required efficient transportation infrastructure, making Semarang, as one of the main trading cities, a key distribution center for cash-crop commodities. In response to growing transportation demand, the Dutch East Indies' colonial government established the first railway line through the private company Nederlandsch-Indische Spoorweg Maatschappij (NIS), inaugurated on August 10, 1867, connecting Semarang and Tanggung.²⁰ The success of this railway line spurred the establishment of various other railway and tram companies across Java, including state-owned enterprises such as Staatsspoorwegen, founded on April 6, 1875, with a route from Surabaya to Malang.²¹



Picture 1. Train owned by *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS)
(Source: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:912922>)

In addition, private companies such as the *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS), established on 28 September 1881, also contributed to the development of the transportation network in Semarang.²² Then, when the first SJS line was constructed, passenger services were designed in a simple manner, following

¹⁹ C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁰ R. Saraswati and L. M. F. Purwanto, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

²¹ N. Fitroh, N., 'Peranan Kereta Api di Jawa Timur dalam Pengangkutan Hasil Perkebunan ke Surabaya Tahun 1878–1930', *AVATARA: E-Journal Pendidikan Sejarah*, 3.3 (2015), p. 488.

²² R. Kusuma, A. Purnomo, and R. Romadi, 'Sejarah Kereta Api Rute Semarang–Rembang Tahun 1967–1988', *Journal of Indonesian History*, 7.1 (2018), p. 58.

the tram model used in the Netherlands.²³ Initially, stations and stops provided only simple waiting areas without shelters, which were later added to some stops. SJS became the pioneer of the first steam tram line in Java and the second private railway company in the Dutch East Indies after NIS. The railway company gradually expanded its network, and by 1910, its operational lines had reached a total length of 392 kilometers.²⁴ This tram network connected various cities in Java, including routes from Semarang to Demak, Pati, and Juwana. The presence of railways and trams brought significant changes to Java, especially trading cities like Semarang. Trade expanded rapidly, and urbanization increased as rural residents who lost their land moved to cities in search of work. Many found employment in sectors such as administration, mechanics, carpentry, and railway labor, illustrating how transportation infrastructure influenced social and economic transformation in the Dutch East Indies.



Picture 2. Tram locomotive route *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij (SJS)*
(Source: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:914093>)

Semarang is located on the northern coast of Java, a region characterized by strategic and fertile conditions, which led the Dutch East Indies government to designate the city as a center for trade and administration.²⁵ The city competed with Jepara as a major port, eventually becoming known as “*Javas Noord-Oost Kust*.”²⁶ By the late 19th century, Semarang experienced rapid growth as a trade- and service-based city. As one of the key urban centers in the Dutch East Indies, it attracted a large influx of migrants, leading to increased urbanization and population density. This growth created a demand for an integrated and efficient public transportation system to support mobility. In response, SJS obtained a government concession in 1881 to

²³ De Tramwegen op Java. "De locomotief". Samarang, 23-11-1907, p. 1. Geraadpleegd op Delpher op 30-05-2025, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB23:001643058:mpeg21:p00001>

²⁴ Ten Hagen. (1910). *Op Cit*, p.20.

²⁵ C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, *op. cit*, p. 115.

²⁶ D. Yulianti, *Menuju Kota Industri, Semarang pada Era Kolonial* (Semarang: Badan Penerbit Universitas Diponegoro, 2009), p 9-10.

develop a railway network.²⁷ Thus, the *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS) became a pioneer in the development of tram lines in the Dutch East Indies, managing both urban tram routes in Semarang and intercity lines to the east, primarily to transport agricultural products and facilitate their distribution to Semarang Port.²⁸ On December 1, 1882, the first steam tram line, spanning 4.4 km, officially began operation, connecting Jurnatan with Jomblang via Jalan Mataram. The Semarang–Juwana route itself extended 87.6 km, including an 11.8 km urban section from Jurnatan to Jomblang, which was later expanded to reach the West Flood Canal (Banjir Kanal Barat).²⁹ The construction of the tram lines by SJS largely followed the existing road network, although some sections had to be built farther from the roads, such as routes leading to plantations and sugar factories.



Picture 3. Jurnatan Station is owned by the *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS)
(Source: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:908129>)

By the late 19th century, SJS also constructed several branch lines to accommodate transportation needs in the surrounding areas, connecting Semarang with smaller towns in northern Central Java, including Kudus-Mayong, Pati, Rembang, Demak-Wirosari, Wirosari-Blora, and Cepu.³⁰ In addition to facilitating the transportation of industrial products, such as sugar, the tram system was intended to ease the mobility of people in both urban and rural areas. Therefore, the construction of the Semarang–Juwana railway line by SJS benefited both the company and the local population by creating new employment opportunities as technicians, ticket clerks, conductors, track inspectors, clerks, and train engineers. Therefore, the Semarang–Juwana steam tram played a crucial role in supporting the economic stability of the regions along its route. As a primary means of transporting goods, particularly plantation products, this tram became the backbone of transportation, connecting

²⁷ T. Boom. *Op Cit.* p. 21.

²⁸ C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

²⁹ E. Susilowati, *Op Cit.* p. 29.

³⁰ C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

production areas with the Port of Semarang.³¹ The importance of this network became particularly evident during the sugar shipping season, when the tram served as the primary means of transporting sugar from factories along the Semarang-Juwana route to the port, given the limited availability of other transportation options at the time.



Picture 4. Tram from *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS)
(source: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB31:045472000:00012>)

The first tram operated by *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS) ran from Jurnatan Station to Jomblang, passing through the Karangturi and Bangkong areas.³² Over time, the tram system in Semarang continued to expand, including the line from Jurnatan to Bulu and Banjir Kanal, which passed through key areas such as Jalan Bodjong (now Jalan Pemuda) and the Semarang Regency square. Initially, the concession to operate trams in Semarang was granted to *Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij* (SJS), a steam tram company. However, in 1921, tram management was taken over by the Gemeente Semarang (Semarang city government) to improve public transportation services in the city.³³ This new management reflected the government's effort to provide more affordable transportation for the public. Tram fares at the time were reasonably priced for various social groups for instance, the Jurnatan-Bulu route cost 8 cents for indigenous residents, while the Jurnatan-Jomblang route was 10 cents making trams a popular mode of transport for local residents in Semarang. However, the rise of automobiles and buses after World War I, coupled with infrastructure funding constraints, led to a decline in tram operations, which officially ceased in 1940. Jurnatan Station was closed in 1974 and converted into the Main Bus Terminal, despite

³¹C. A. Pratama and G. Erlangga, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

³²R. Saraswati and L. M. F. Purwanto, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³³Endang Susilowati, Peranan Trem Semarang–Juwana Sebagai Alat Transportasi di Pantura Jawa Tengah Pada Akhir Abad 19', dalam Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pengembangan Kebudayaan Nasional Berbasis Kearifan Lokal. (2012), p.11.

SJS reporting increased revenue in its 1936–1937 annual report.³⁴ Today, the Semarang tram exists only as part of transportation history, having once supported the city's economy and the mobility of its residents.

³⁴Semarang-Joana Stoom-Tram Mij. "De locomotief". Samarang, 24-09-1938, p. 13. Geraadpleegd op Delpher op 30-05-2025, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=MMKB23:003480044:mpeg21:p00013>

The Role of Trams in Socio-Economic Dynamics

The rapid development of trams in the early 20th century undoubtedly had a significant impact on the social and economic aspects of Semarang. This is in line with Walter Christaller's *Central Place Theory*, which posits that the ease of transportation access significantly influences the formation of service centers within a region. When an area has good accessibility, it tends to develop economically and becomes an important meeting point for social activities.³⁵ In the context of Semarang City, the existence of trams was not merely a means of transportation, but also a catalyst for social and economic dynamics, as it opened interregional connectivity and accelerated the mobility of people and goods. The impact of trams was not only felt in the city but also reached rural areas that were previously relatively isolated. The Semarang–Juana steam tram line, for example, opened connectivity between Semarang as the main port city and smaller towns along the northern coast of Central Java such as Demak, Kudus, and Pati. The presence of trams made it easier for people to move around, who had previously depended on carts or river transportation, thus significantly accelerating the flow of goods and people.³⁶

This condition encouraged the emergence of local markets and accelerated the economic growth of areas along the tram route. Villages that were previously unknown began to grow into new centers of economic activity. This was also supported by the trams that connected other regions with the port in Semarang.³⁷ Trading activities became more organized, allowing local traders to expand their businesses to port cities or regency capitals. In this case, the tram functioned as a vital connector between agrarian production centers and commercial distribution centers, thereby creating a more dynamic economic circulation. Socially, the increase in mobility also brought together groups of people from diverse backgrounds, creating opportunities for cultural and informational exchange. The tram became a new social meeting place, strengthening interregional interaction and forming a broader social network among urban and rural communities. Therefore, it can be said that the existence of trams not only accelerated the wheels of the economy but also helped shape the social face of Semarang City and its surroundings at that time.

One concrete example of the strategic role of trams in shaping the social and economic dynamics of Semarang can be seen in the existence of Djoernatan Centraal Station, the center of the city's tram network, built by the *Samarang–Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij (SJS)*. This station not only served as a hub for passenger and goods movement but also became an important node connecting the port area, trade center, and residential and inland areas.³⁸ The presence of trams departing and arriving at this

³⁵Von Böventer, E. (1968). Walter Christallers zentrale Orte und periphere Gebiete. *Geographische Zeitschrift*, p. 104.

³⁶Endang Susilowati, *Riwayat Kota Lama Semarang dan Keunggulannya Sebagai Warisan Budaya* (Semarang: Penerbit Sinar Hidoep, 2020), p. 29.

³⁷*Het Vaderland, Indisch Nieuws*. (27 June 1925), p. 2.

³⁸H. Mulyanto and D. A. Lubis, "Stasiun Djoernatan Centraal Semarang: Sebuah Riwayat Stasiun Trem Kolonial", *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah*, 7.2 (2023), p. 142.

station encouraged economic activities along the routes, accelerated the distribution of local commodities such as agricultural products and daily necessities, and created new job opportunities. In addition, tram lines that cut across various parts of the city created spaces of encounter among residents from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds, making the tram a social arena that strengthened interaction and cohesion among community groups.

The tram system in Semarang was recognized as a technical success by an engineer named Jankhoff in the *Het Nederlandsch Wegencongres* forum in The Hague. In the discussion about mechanical transportation, the Semarang tram was used as a concrete example of efficient goods transportation within the city, although there were doubts about its system from other parties.³⁹ Even toward the end of its operation, discussions regarding the abolition of the city tram in Semarang attracted great public attention, especially from the *bumiputera* community, because it concerned the fate of a cheap mode of transportation that had become the backbone of people's economic mobility. The plan to replace trams with buses was questioned because the cost could not match the tram's low fare (there was an officially announced increase of up to 50% in bus fares). This tension reflected how technical decisions in transportation were closely related to the economic access of the lower classes and the sustainability of social balance in the colonial city.⁴⁰

City Development Support

Semarang is one of the cities on the island of Java that has a favorable geographical position, as it is situated on a key economic and trade route. With its port, railway, highway, and airport, Semarang plays a crucial role in supporting the growth of Central Java, particularly as a major hub in the sea, land, and air transportation networks.⁴¹ Trains and trams had a significant influence on urban development from the early to mid-20th century, in terms of space, settlement patterns, and the development of other supporting infrastructure. Trams operated in Semarang for a considerable time before being discontinued in 1940. This discontinuation occurred because the existence of trams was considered no longer in line with the city of Semarang's evolving spatial development.

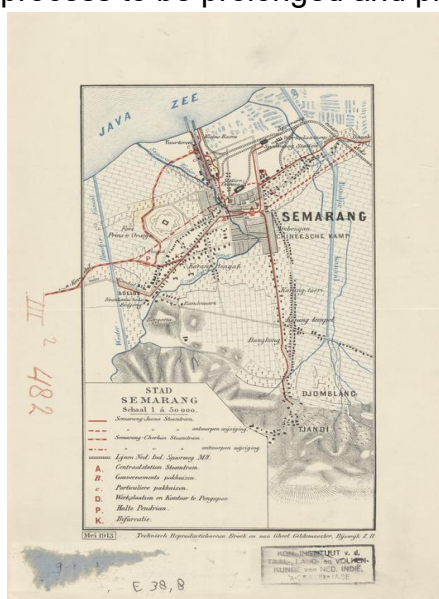
The tram was one of the most modern forms of transportation at the time, as well as a symbol of progress and a vital tool for connecting areas within the city. In 1881, the Dutch East Indies government commissioned SJS to open a tram line serving the Semarang City area, which also became the first tram line in Indonesia. The company obtained permission to build a tram line that could cross or run parallel to

³⁹*De Locomotief*. Mechanisch rail- en wegtransport. Semarang: De Locomotief. (1926, 3 Februari), p. 1.

⁴⁰*De Indische Courant*. Semarangs Stadstram verdwijnt! Ondanks de vele protestvergaderingen. (1894, August 21), p. 4.

⁴¹Haryati, Soebadio. Sejarah Sosial Kota Semarang (1900-1950). Departemen Kebudayaan. Pendidikan Jakarta.(1985). p. 9.

existing government (*Gouvernemen*) roads.⁴² The tram route starts from Centraal Jurnatan Station and covers several lines, one of which is the Jurnatan-Jomblang line that passes through the southern part of Semarang, including Karangturi, Bangkong, until it reaches Jomblang Station.⁴³ The tram departing from Central Station at half past eleven has to wait more than five minutes at the Karangturi junction because of the tram from Djomblang, and delays like this often occur. At the Bangkong junction, trams coming from the city often have to wait a long time to give way to trams from Djomblang, and the latter trams stop for a considerable time at Ambengan, waiting for the arrival of trams from Central Station.⁴⁴ The construction of tramways also often faces land conflicts, especially differences in opinion between owners who want high prices and entrepreneurs who want low prices. These differences in interests often cause the land acquisition process to be prolonged and protracted.⁴⁵



Picture 5. Map of the Tram Lines in Semarang City, 1913
(source: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:817585>)

The presence of trams in the city center has increased the mobility of Semarang's citizens, making it easier and faster to travel, especially in key areas, as transportation plays a significant role in supporting increased human activity.⁴⁶ The first tram line to open is 4.4 kilometers long, connecting Jurnatan as the central station to Jomblang via Jalan Mataram. This line is the main means of transportation for workers

⁴²Endang Susilowati. Peranan Trem... *op.cit.* p. 4.

⁴³Dewi Afriani Lubis, Heru Mulyanto. "Stasiun Djoernatan Centraal Semarang: Sebuah Riwayat Stasiun Trem Kolonial". *Historia Madania: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah*, 7(2), (2023), p. 142.

⁴⁴De Locomotief. Mechanisch rail- en wegtransport. Semarang: De Locomotief. p. 1.(1926, 3 Februari)

⁴⁵Endang Susilowati, Peranan Trem... *op. cit.* p. 3.

⁴⁶ C. A. Pratama, & G. Erlangga, "Dinamika Perusahaan Semarang-Joana Stoomtram Maatschappij (SJS): Jejak Kereta Api di Pulau Jawa Tahun 1881-1900". *Chronologia*, 4(3), (2023), p. 116.

from outside Semarang, including those heading to villages located on the west side of Jalan Mataram.⁴⁷ The location of this road is closely related to the activities of the people of Semarang, where this route serves as the main link between commercial activities in the Chinatown area and the buying and selling of agricultural products belonging to the indigenous people, such as pepper and chili, which are commonly found in the Mrican area and its surroundings. This has led to the development of a new area that was originally on the outskirts of the city, now at the heart of Semarang's activities. The tram line connecting the city center with the port, market, and worker settlements facilitated the development of new economic corridors, influencing the direction of the city's spatial development.

However, the use of this mode of transportation still revealed differences in facilities between the indigenous population and Europeans, who were divided into distinct social classes. First Class, known as *Eerste Klasse*, was used by European officials, high-ranking natives, and wealthy Europeans and Chinese, although the number of passengers was relatively small. Meanwhile, Second Class (*Tweede Klasse*) was for Europeans, Chinese, and indigenous people of middle economic status, and Third Class was most often used by the indigenous population and was known as *Inlander Klasse* (*van de Kolonie niets en goeds: Nederlandsch Indië in Beeld 1912–1942*).⁴⁸ Then, the initial fare for the 'first class' was quite high, at 50 cents plus 6 cents per kilometer (later reduced to 3 cents in 1885) with a minimum of 1 guilder, but it remained less popular than the more economical 'second class' with an initial fare of 3 cents per kilometer (reduced to 2 cents in 1885). To attract native passengers, a rate of one cent per kilometer was introduced on certain routes, following the success of similar strategies by other companies such as the *Nederlandsch-Indische Spoorweg Maatschappij* on the *Semarang-Vorstenlanden* and *Batavia-Buitenzorg* routes.⁴⁹ The construction of tram lines by SJS also largely followed the existing road network,

⁴⁷ R. D. Saraswati, & R. Tarigan. *Kajian Historis dan Morfologi Kampung-Kampung di Sekitar Jagalan dan Jalan Petudungan Semarang (Periode Tahun 1740-2015)*. Unika. (2015), p. 5.

⁴⁸ I. R. M. Anwari. "Sistem Transportasi Darat Perkotaan Surabaya Masa Kolonial 1900-1942 (Urban Land Transportation System in Colonial Era Surabaya 1900-1942)". *Mozaik*, 17(2), (2017), p. 175.

⁴⁹ *De Tramwegen op Java. "De locomotief"*. Samarang, 23-11-1907, p. 1.

although some sections had to be built across areas further away from the highway, such as lines to plantations and sugar factories.⁵⁰



Picture 6. Tram traffic at the colonial exhibition in Semarang.

Source: KITLV, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:931406>

The Semarang region, which previously relied on traditional land transportation such as ox carts, horse-drawn carriages, and other animal-drawn vehicles, began to undergo changes with the arrival of motorized land transportation, namely trains. Along the railroad tracks, the people of Semarang were accustomed to using trams as a means of daily transportation. Schoolchildren, civil servants, and private employees used short-distance trains to commute to work every day. Additionally, at several small, remote stations, there were specific market days that were well known. On those days, small traders flocked to these stations carrying goods they had obtained from the city. Male traders usually carried their goods on their shoulders, while female traders carried their goods on their heads or on their backs.⁵¹ Through this, urban spaces become more functionally connected, and people have easier access to travel to service centers, markets, and workplaces. The existence of trams also encourages more structured urban planning, as the development of infrastructure, roads, and commercial areas follows the flow of this transportation network.

The increasing complexity of issues arising at the local level necessitated the implementation of decentralization in various regions of the Dutch East Indies, in order to facilitate the management of affairs in various sectors.⁵² One of them was the tram. In the early 20th century, a transportation network comprising trams and urban road infrastructure was established. This system not only connected the city center with the suburbs, but also encouraged changes in the city's orientation. As a result, centers of

⁵⁰ Endang Susilowati, *Peranan Trem...op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁵¹Yusi Ratnawati. *Perkembangan perkeretaapian pada masa kolonial di Semarang tahun 1867-1901* (Skripsi). Universitas Negeri Semarang, Fakultas Ilmu Sosial, Jurusan Sejarah. (2015). p. 4.

⁵²Heru Mulyanto. *Gemeente Semarang 1906–1942: Sebuah Riwayat Tata Kota Kolonial*. *Jurnal Arsitektur TERRACOTTA*, 5(1), (2023), p. 55.

activity that had previously developed along the river began to move to new locations.⁵³ This led to the decentralization of settlements. The middle class and workers began to live in areas further away from the city center, as they could still easily access it by tram. This phenomenon led to the formation of suburban areas in the upper part of Semarang (*heuvelterein*) and along the tram corridor to serve Dutch residents living in southern areas such as Candi and Kaliwiru. The tram departed from Jurnatan Station and passed through a number of important areas in the south, such as Karangturi and Bangkong, before reaching its final stop in Jomblang (now in front of the Java Mall shopping area). However, the tram was unable to reach higher areas due to the steep terrain.⁵⁴ The spatial separation between European, Chinese, and indigenous settlements became increasingly apparent as part of the colonial spatial order, but the tram became a means of breaking down these boundaries through mobility.

In addition, drainage and water management systems also began to receive more serious attention, especially since the tram line passed through low-lying areas prone to flooding. Therefore, the colonial government took steps to dredge and create diversions on several rivers, allowing them to continue being used optimally to overcome this problem.⁵⁵ This measure is not only intended to maintain the smooth operation of the tram, but also forms part of a broader flood control strategy in the city of Semarang. These efforts demonstrate how the development of transportation systems cannot be separated from urban planning and environmental management, particularly in the face of geographical challenges and a tropical climate that tends to trigger seasonal flooding.

However, by the mid-20th century, the tram system began to face serious challenges. In January 1925, S.J.S. sold part of the Djoernatan tram line, namely the Djoernatan-Djomblang line. In 1940, this station was closed. It was agreed that the relocation of the S.J.S. passenger station from Djoernatan to Tawang was desirable, both because of traffic congestion intersecting with the busy Kerkstraat and located on a public road junction, and because the connection was considered inefficient due to increasing traffic, limited opportunities for expansion, and a lack of integration with stations and yards belonging to other services.⁵⁶ As transportation technology developed and private vehicle ownership increased, the popularity of trams declined dramatically. The tram infrastructure, which had not been adequately updated, also led to a decline in service quality. Road widening also resulted in the burial of the electric tram line on the Banjir Kanal Barat–Jomblang route, located on the south side.⁵⁷

⁵³Dwi Ratna Nurhajarini, Indra Fibiona, Suwarno. "Kota Pelabuhan Semarang Dalam Kuasa Kolonial: Implikasi Sosial Budaya Kebijakan Maritim, Tahun 1800an-1940an". *Fibiona*, (2019), p. 116.

⁵⁴Ratri Septina Saraswati, LMF Purwanto. Jejak Sejarah Trem Kota Semarang 1881-1840. *Jurnal Arsitektur Kolaborasi*, 2(1), (2022), p. 14.

⁵⁵N. J. Utama, & J. F. Lusianto. "Jejak Historis Dan Peranan Sungai di Kota Semarang Pada Awal Abad 20". *Journal of Indonesian History*, 8(2), (2019). p. 137.

⁵⁶Rapport Der Commissie tot Onderzoek der Spoor-en Tramwegtoestanden In en om Semarang, Ingesteld bij Gouvernementsbesluit van 26 October 1918 No. 68

⁵⁷Totok Roesmanto, Lansekap Semarang yang Hilang. *Riptek*, 6(1), (2012), p.13.

Although trams have practically disappeared from the cityscape, their physical legacy can still be traced in the form of old tracks embedded in several old roads, as well as in the names of areas that were once traversed by these routes.

From an epistemological perspective, this research deepens urban and transportation historiography by demonstrating how tram networks functioned as a structural force shaping the spatial organization, mobility patterns, and socioeconomic dynamics of Semarang's urban development. By situating trams within the broader framework of city growth, decentralization, and infrastructural integration, this study moves beyond a purely technological narrative and positions transportation as a key agent in the transformation of urban space. From an axiological perspective, the findings provide practical value by offering historical insights that are relevant to contemporary urban planning and transportation policy, particularly in understanding how transportation systems influence settlement patterns, economic corridors, environmental management, and social interaction. This research also supports efforts to preserve urban heritage by highlighting the lasting imprint of tram infrastructure on Semarang's spatial structure and collective memory, despite its physical disappearance from the modern cityscape.

CONCLUSION

The development of trams in Semarang from 1881 to 1940 left an important legacy in the city's history. As the first integrated transportation system, the tram successfully created unprecedented connectivity between the city center and the hinterland. This success was achieved due to several key factors: a route network that touched strategic economic centers, affordable services for various segments of society, and integration with trade and industrial activities.

The presence of trams had a significant impact on the development of Semarang. Economically, trams became the backbone of the city's distribution system, transporting important commodities from the hinterland to the port. Socially, trams facilitated interaction between previously isolated groups within the community. In terms of spatial planning, trams shaped the city's development pattern, with activity concentrated along the tram corridors. Although eventually replaced by more modern modes of transportation, the existence of trams in Semarang City remains a relevant reference. A good public transportation system should not only prioritize technological advances, but also consider aspects of affordability, extensive networks, and integration with urban activities. This is the important legacy left by the Semarang tram for the development of transportation today.

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