

Werner von Siemens on Electric Trolleys in Berlin-Lichterfelde (May 12, 1881)

Abstract

Werner von Siemens (1816–1892), an inventor and entrepreneur in the field of electrical engineering, was one of Imperial Germany's foremost industrial innovators and the cofounder of today's Siemens Corporation. In this letter from 1881, he describes the opening of the first electric tramway in Berlin-Lichterfelde, an event that sparked the start of other local public transportation projects across Germany.

Source

[...] Today the small electric trolley in Lichterfelde was officially tested and approved at last. The only problem was, and still is, that the speed of the trolley cars has to be reduced in keeping with the regulations. The inspectors would only permit 20 km/h, whereas the cars, fully loaded with 20 passengers, reached 30 to 40 km/h even uphill! However, I think that people will get accustomed to the higher speed!

Source: Werner von Siemens, letter of May 12, 1881, to Professor Wiedemann of Leipzig, in Conrad Matschoß, ed., *Werner von Siemens. Ein kurzgefaßtes Lebensbild nebst einer Auswahl seiner Briefe*. Berlin, 1916, p. 691; reprinted in Gerhard A. Ritter and Jürgen Kocka, eds., *Deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1870–1914. Dokumente und Skizzen*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1982, p. 53.

Translation: Erwin Fink

Recommended Citation: Werner von Siemens on Electric Trolleys in Berlin-Lichterfelde (May 12, 1881), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/forging-an-empire-bismarckian-germany-1866-1890/ghdi:document-477>> [March 10, 2026].