

SYSTEMS FACTFILE



No. 52 Potsdam, Germany

In a small city with a dramatic history and attractions to match, Potsdam's long-established tramway owes much to the changes of recent years.

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Immediately south-west of Berlin, Potsdam looks an insubstantial entity when the two are considered on a map. History tells a different story however: fortune and grandeur rising with Prussian power; favoured home of Frederick the Great; a cradle of the film industry and witness to bracketing events for the Third Reich, the 1933 'Day of Potsdam' and the post-World War Two conference.

In the former East Germany (GDR), it also has an emblematic Cold War location. Punctuated by large areas of greenery, the city extends around south-western inlets of the picturesque Wannsee lake and Havel river. Potsdam kreis city district population in December 2010 was 156 906; its concentration in the southern districts is very apparent when using public transport.

Despite sharing a common boundary and with substantial commuting between the two, Potsdam looks and feels very different from its giant neighbour. Both cities are in the Verkehrsverbund Berlin Brandenburg (VBB) tariff

union and Potsdam is a Berlin *S-Bahn* terminus. Potsdam's tramway is however physically separate, developed specifically to serve this city's layout from horse-drawn beginnings in 1880 and electrification from 1907.

Even with about 90% of resources destroyed by bombing that peaked late in World War Two, by 1946 the network had been reinstated, largely with today's basic configuration. There have been closures, but Potsdam does not fit the familiar pattern of a network cut back due to road competition. In 1990, year of German reunification, Potsdam became capital of the newly-founded Brandenburg state. The city has since changed significantly, with some stark Communist-era buildings demolished or restyled, new businesses drawn in and with its multiple attractions accessible to many more visitors.

Another 1990 change was adopting a name for public transport which, when abbreviated, alludes to customer importance, Verkehrsbetrieb in Potsdam (ViP), part of

Above: In use for driver training, Stadler Variobahn 422 draws away from Potsdam Hbf on 4 October 2011.



Far left: *Combino* 405 at the network's western limit Bhf Pirschheide on 21 May 2011.

Left: *Variobahn* fitted with ViP's new-style ticket machine and dual information screens.

Right: Delivered in 1987 for Berlin's tramway, rebuilt CKD *KT4D* 151/252 near Am Schragen on the modern north-western extension.



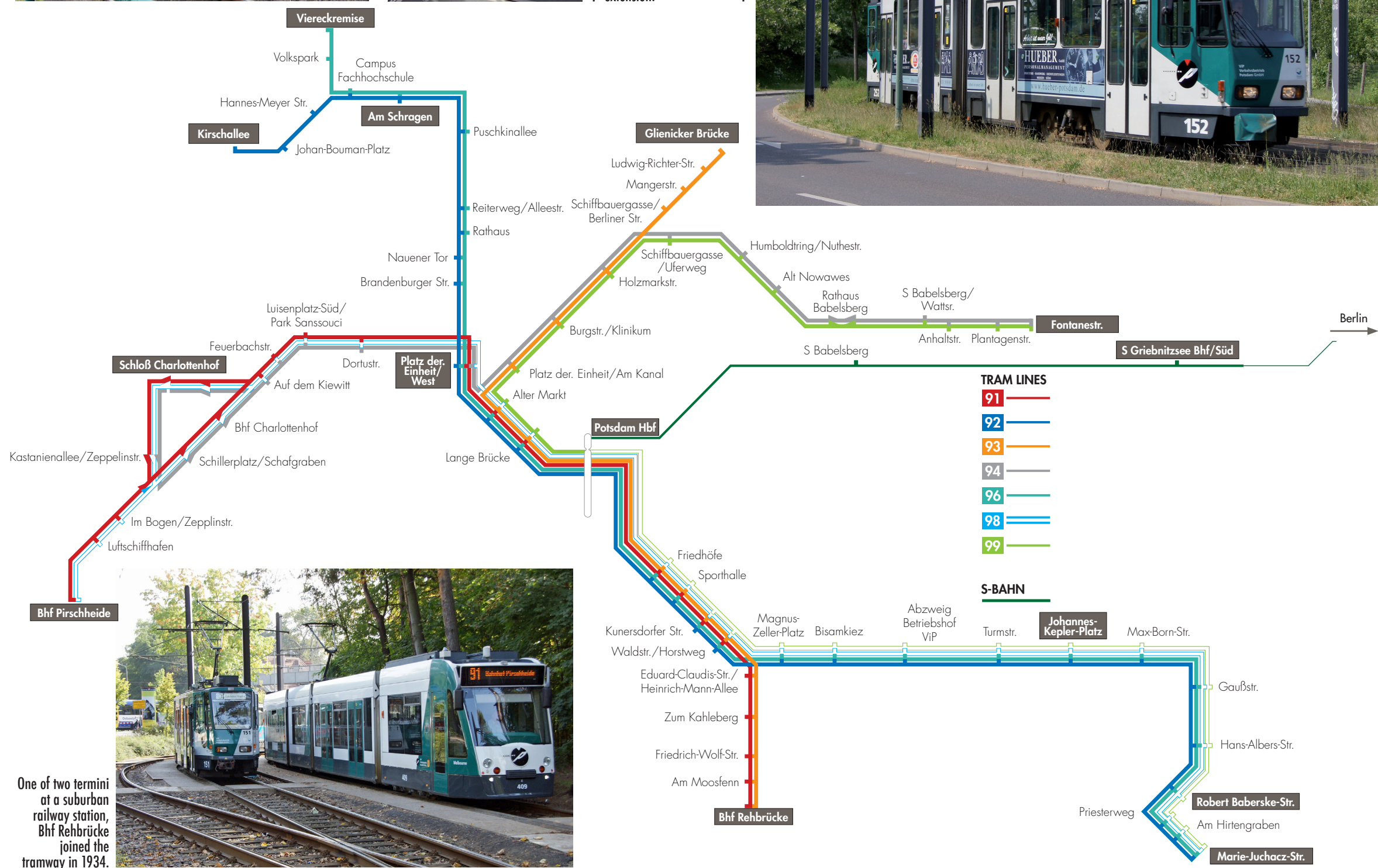
Above: On the long south-eastern stretch of sleepers track used by four lines, 411 approaches Johannes-Kepler-Platz.

civic utilities body Stadtwerke Potsdam. In a contested redevelopment, the historic station site south-east of the city centre became Potsdam Hbf (previously Potsdam Stadt) in 1999. Shortly afterwards improved tram access opened as part of the new interchange. Like many former Eastern Bloc cities, Potsdam had entered the new political era with a fleet of Prague-built CKD Tatra trams.

This continuing association began with *KT4D* prototypes 8001 (now in Potsdam's museum fleet as 001) and 8002 being assessed in service from 1975. The newer much-modified successors acquired from Berlin should remain in regular use for a few more years. Joining ViP's Siemens *Combinos*, a *cause célèbre* in modern light rail history first played out in Potsdam (see 'The Fleet'), current orders for 14 Stadler *Variobahn* are due for completion by 2014, by which time Potsdam should have an entirely low-floor fleet.

The seven routes use three branching arms that converge at Platz der Einheit. Most of the network operates in dedicated space with much on sleepers track. Looking incongruous in the setting, some is installed up to Platz der Einheit/West, the principal city centre interchange. Street running is however the norm in most central and suburban shopping areas. It is a uni-directional system with turning loops, some at intermediate points, with separate arrival and departure platforms at termini. A surviving exception is Glienicker Brücke's small triangle with an arrival stub. From here trams reverse to position the driving end for return through the city centre.

In spite of Potsdam being studded with palatial splendours, tram tracks are mainly edged by buildings with a human scale or shielded by trees. Featuring a short



One of two termini at a suburban railway station, Bhf Rehbrücke joined the tramway in 1934.

NETWORK FACTS	
• Opened:	1880, electrification from 1907
• Routes:	7
• Track distance:	Approx. 29km (18 miles)
• Stops:	62
• Depots:	1
• Approximate weekday hours:	04.30-21.00
• Standard line frequency:	20 minutes
• Gauge:	1435mm
• Power:	600V dc
• Tram fleet:	Approx. 55
• Transport authority:	Verkehrsverbund Berlin-Brandenburg (VBB)
• Operator:	ViP Verkehrsbetrieb Potsdam GmbH (Stadtwerke Potsdam)
• INFORMATION:	
• Regional transport authority:	www.vbbonline.de
• Network:	www.swp-potsdam.de/swp/de/verkehr
• Civic information:	www.potsdam.de
• Tourist information:	www.potsdam-tourism.com

THE FLEET

Modified high-floor CKD K74D trams acquired from Berlin in 1989-90 remain the most numerous type. Their working life became extended by problems and ensuing disputes afflicting their intended replacement, the 100% low-floor Siemens *Combino*.

Only 17 (including the shorter 1996-built prototype, later joining the operational fleet) of the 48 ordered were eventually delivered. With Potsdam the launch customer, the first of the five-section 30.5m, 2.3m-wide production models was delivered in 1998. Structural defects saw them all withdrawn during 2004; they were rebuilt and restored to service by 2007-8. With some irony given the circumstances, many carry names of other cities using *Combino*s.

Transition to low-floor vehicles restarted with an initial order for ten Stadler *Variobahns* in January 2009. The first, 421, named *Opole* after Potsdam's oldest partnercity, was delivered in May 2011 and with much less green than ViP's current livery. From September it ran heavily publicised normal services. Introducing air-conditioning and a multi-screen passenger information system, the 30m *Variobahns* have a capacity for 175. Some of the 57 seats are in 2+2 layout which gives cosy proximity with fellow travellers, a point now raised in otherwise positive feedback.



Above: The first ViP *Variobahn* into revenue service, 421 enters Potsdam's Dutch Quarter from the landmark Nauener Tor.

Below: Potsdam's typically leafy surroundings, here at the Glienicker Brücke arrival platform; trams reverse to a departure platform on the Berlin road.

Right: Luisenplatz, the closest stop for Sanssouci palace and gardens; 415's *Mödling* name commemorates the Austrian city's pioneering electric tramway.



section of signalled interlaced tram track, the Nauener Tor city gateway owes its visual impact mainly to the nearby modestly proportioned Dutch Quarter. An important extension to underpin zoned population growth in the south-east began in GDR days. This high-speed line with few traffic conflicts, now carrying four routes, opened to the present Marie Juchacz Strasse terminus in May 1998.

The system's sparse northern presence grew in December 1999 beyond long-standing Kapellenberg terminus to Kirschallee. This was joined in 2001 by the Viereckremise branch (the latest extension) serving Potsdam's hosting of the BUGA national flower show in that year.

Requiring temporary closures, parts of the network have been upgraded and track re-positioned over the last decade. Potsdam has frequently changed line routings and designations, most recently dropping limited stop X98. Plans for extension including more in the north-west have been considered, but no substantial development is in hand. Depot, works and control functions were centralised in 2001 on a newly-developed site, Wetzlarer Street in the Babelsberg district. In spite of suitably named Abzweig Betriebshof ViP stop, but for the access track, the depot is not apparent from service trams. **TAUT**

POTSDAM: ESSENTIAL FACTS

How do I get there?

By rail: Several route and connection options offer journeys of around 12 hours from London. Berlin Hbf to Potsdam Hbf by *Regional Express* or *S-Bahn S7* takes 26 and 38 minutes

By air: Berlin Tegel (closing in 2012) or Schönefeld airports with onward travel, mostly needing transfers, via the Berlin network.

Schönefeld and Potsdam Hbf have a direct hourly DB service on line RB22. Both airports and Potsdam are covered by the Berlin ABC day ticket for EUR6.80, with Potsdam including ViP trams in zone C.

Local travel: Potsdam ViP has its own zones ABC (see above for Berlin coverage and overlap). The tramway is wholly in Potsdam zones A and B: single tickets EUR1.30 (six

stops) and EUR1.80 (60 minutes); equivalent coverage for one day is EUR3.90. Travel information points at Potsdam Hbf and near the Platz der Einheit/West stop.

What is there to see?

UNESCO World Heritage-listed Sanssouci palace and gardens: immediately west of the centre near Luisenplatz stop. Walk beyond

the tram stop to reach Glienicker Brücke, the bridge on the former East/West frontier (geographical and political terminology were reversed here) famed for Cold War spy exchanges. Nearby is the 1945 summit conference venue, Schloss Cecilienhof. Filmpark Babelsberg and Potsdam Film Museum celebrate the area's contribution to the medium.