

SYSTEMS FACTFILE

No. 160 Frankfurt (Oder), Germany

After a varied and at times difficult history, the metre-gauge network in the town on Brandenburg's eastern border is looking forward to fleet renewal. Tony Streeter reports.



All places are products of their geography and history, but in the German town of Frankfurt (Oder) this is perhaps more true than for most.

Not to be confused with the much larger Frankfurt am Main further west, Frankfurt sits on the River Oder that since the end of World War Two has marked the border to Poland. Until 1990 this Brandenburg town was part of the German Democratic Republic (GDR); for the last three decades it has been one of the eastern-most population centres in the democratically united Federal Republic. Frankfurt is located approximately 100km (60 miles) east of the nation's capital, Berlin.

Formally recognised in 1253 (its name in the Middle Ages being Vrankenforde), Frankfurt developed over subsequent centuries on both sides of the Oder. The main line railway

to Berlin arrived in 1842, with a connection to the town of Posen (now Poland's Poznań) around 170km (105 miles) further east following in 1870; Frankfurt is now an important stop on the international main line that connects Berlin to Warsaw, as well as wider destinations both west and east.

However, perhaps the greatest single change here came with the formalisation of the post-war division of Europe and the creation of the Oder-Neisse line as Germany's boundary in 1945; the eastern part of Frankfurt known as Dammvorstadt was split off, cleared of German residents and became the Polish town of Ślubice.

Today, Frankfurt is spread along the west bank of the Oder and the two towns are connected across the border by a road bridge that was rebuilt after wartime destruction, then again in 2002. Two other crossings serve the railway and the east-west motorway

▲ **The 25-storey Oderturm dominates Frankfurt's rebuilt town centre as KT4DM 223 curves from the main Heilbronner Straße into Bahnhofstraße with a line 1 service to Neuberesinchen on 16 July 2020.**

Robert Bartkowiak

(designated A12 in Germany, A2 in Poland), which runs to the south of the built-up area.

Like the town it serves, Frankfurt's tramway has also been buffeted by history. Services on the metre-gauge network began over two routes in 1898, followed by expansion, including to the main station, the following year and subsequent growth into a substantial system.

The cross-river line (and services) in what is now Ślubice was lost in 1945.

Despite the setback brought about by post-war realities, growth and reshaping of both Frankfurt and the tramway took place in the GDR era; the town was (and still is) a centre for microelectronics. Prefabricated housing blocks took shape here as in other parts of the GDR, with tramway lines built to serve the newly-developing areas of population. By the end of the 1980s the tramway stretched to seven routes, with the



▲ ABOVE: Frankfurt's low-floor look at the university terminus; GT6M 305 and 307 are on line 3 and 2 services respectively. Bernhard Kußmagk

THE FLEET

Although many have already been withdrawn, the 15 remaining Tatra *KT4DM* trams that occupy fleet numbers (not all now filled) in the series between 205-226 still make up the mainstay of the Frankfurt fleet. These Eastern Bloc vehicles arrived in 1987-90, being modernised during the early/mid-1990s. Some 19m long and 2.2m wide, the high-floor Tatra cars have 34 seats and capacity for 70 standing passengers (at 4/m²).

Until deliveries of new Škoda vehicles begin, the only low-floor trams are the eight *GT6M* vehicles delivered in the early years after unification, which carry the fleet numbers 301-308. The 27m-long AEG/AdTranz trams are 2.3m wide and have capacity for 59 passengers seated and 96 standing.

The current standard livery is a pale green, which took the place of previous variations of red/cream.

In addition to the regular fleet, mention should be made of the historic cars, looked after in the museum workshop that occupies the former depot at Bachgasse. These are in the care of the group Historische Straßenbahn Frankfurt (Oder) eV and include examples from both before World War Two (Wismar motor cars 41 and 60) and afterwards. The group has its own website - www.hist-strab-ffo.de



◀ LEFT: The line to Markendorf opened in 1988 and for much of its route effectively runs overland. On 13 October 2020 *KT4DM* 209 heads for Frankfurt with a line 3 service. Robert Bartkowiak

▼ BELOW: Carrying an advertisement for Frankfurt's municipal energy company, *GT6M* 306 is on Karl-Marx-Straße in 2012. Although the tramway has reserved formation - particularly on lines such as those to Markendorf outside the centre - significant sections are on-street. Bernhard Kußmagk



◀ LEFT: Frankfurt has a long academic tradition, although the current university is relatively recent, having opened in 1991. In July 2020 current-liveried *KT4DM* 221 is on a line 2 service to the university at Gartenstraße stop - near to the historic depot at Bachgasse. Robert Bartkowiak





▲ ABOVE: Tatra *KT4DM* 212 has been given a variant of the traditional red/cream livery; on 13 October 2020 it is just leaving the university terminus with a line 3 service to Markendorf. Robert Bartkowiak



▲ ABOVE: Back in May 2012, *KT4DM* 212 carrying an advertising livery for the Sparkasse financial institution weaves its way through an on-street section of the tramway in the town centre with a line 4 service to Markendorf. Robert Bartkowiak



Despite wartime destruction, Frankfurt retains a number of fine buildings. Tatra *KT4DM* 215 curves into Gartenstraße past part of the university on 13 October 2020. Robert Bartkowiak

prospect of further expansion; however, in the new circumstances that followed Germany's unification, such ideas were abandoned.

The final decade of the GDR had also brought rolling stock development with the arrival of new vehicles – Tatra *KT4D* bogie trams, some of which remain in service today and which started the process of replacing earlier two-axle cars. The low-floor era began only six years after the Tatra's introduction, with the first of new AEG/ADtranz *GT6M* vehicles arriving in 1993. These, however, are the last new vehicles to date.

Itself founded in unification year, 1990, the operator today is the municipally-owned Stadtverkehrsgesellschaft mbH Frankfurt (Oder). Over the last three decades, significant effort has been put into the infrastructure, largely using reconstruction funds.

Currently, the network has five routes making up a total of 37.9km (23.5 miles) of route and a track length (not including the depot) of 43km (26.7 miles); there are 46 stops. According to SVF, the tramway operated just under 900 000 vehicle-km in 2019.

Focused on the town centre with a key junction at the landmark Oderturm 1970s tower block, the system spreads northwards along

the west bank of the Oder, as well as roughly westwards to Messegelände, and southwest over diverging routes, a shorter one to Neuberesinchen and a longer one to Markendorf (Ort). Both of these tangents, which leave the east-west line at a triangle near Zentrum stop, serve the Bahnhof.

The tramway's base service is 30 minutes on core routes, which increases to 20 minutes at peak times. The three core routes, 1 (Neuberesinchen – Bahnhof – Zentrum – Stadion), 2 (Messegelände – Zentrum – Europa-Universität) and 4 (Markendorf Ort – Bahnhof – Zentrum – Lebuser Vorstadt), are supplemented by routes 3 (Markendorf Ort – Bahnhof – Zentrum – Messegelände); these latter routes run primarily on weekdays.

Timetables were revamped in 2017, resulting in a reduced service for Neuberesinchen – a logical consequence of the population decline in the area and the subsequent programme of demolition of GDR-era flats. Like other provincial towns in what was East Germany, Frankfurt has seen an ongoing fall in its numbers of residents over the last 30 years, from more than 86 000 in 1990 to around 58 000 in 2019. Further decline is expected.

Despite Neuberesinchen's faded significance as a traffic generator, it

NETWORK FACTS

- > **Opened:** 1898
- > **Length:** 43km/27 miles (track length)
- > **Lines:** 5
- > **Depots:** 1 (plus historic Bachgasse depot)
- > **Stops:** 46
- > **Approx. weekday hours:** 04.15-23.00 (variations between routes)
- > **Line frequency:** 20 minutes (typical peak)
- > **Gauge:** 1000mm
- > **Power supply:** 600V dc overhead
- > **Operator:** Stadtverkehrsgesellschaft mbH Frankfurt (Oder) - www.svf-ffo.de
- > **Civic information:** www.frankfurt-oder.de

remains important as the site of the network's depot. Since just before the turn of the century the combined bus and tram *Betriebshof* has been the system's only such regular facility, replacing the original and by then century-old depot situated in the Bachgasse. This facility is still used by Historische Straßenbahn Frankfurt eV, the group that maintains the Frankfurt (Oder) heritage tram fleet.

Given its geography and history, it is unsurprising that Frankfurt looks east to its neighbouring town and country as well as west. Its highly-regarded university (the European University Viadrina, founded in



< **GT6M 303** leaves Gärtenstadt with a line 4 service to Markendorf, on a line opened during the 1980s. Robert Bartkowiak

> **BELOW:** Line 4 takes the tramway over the A12 motorway north of Am Technologiepark stop. The current bridge dates from 2018, replacing the original that dated from the 1980s and expansion of the tramway to Markendorf. Robert Bartkowiak





ESSENTIAL FACTS

▲ ABOVE: The GT6M are the only low-floor trams in the SVF fleet. On 16 July 2020, 303 leaves Zentrum on a line 2 service. Robert Bartkowiak



▲ Not in public service... former Berlin T6A2M501, a rail grinder nicknamed 'Schleiff', runs along Karl-Marx-Strasse in October 2020. Robert Bartkowiak



▲ SVF has long sought a solution to bring more low-floor cars to Frankfurt, culminating with the deal with Skoda in 2020. In 2012, high-floor KT4DM 208 and 221 are on Heilbronner Straße. Bernhard Kußmagk

1991, and with over 6000 students) collaborates closely with a counterpart in Poznań, and there is also formal co-operation between the Brandenburg town and its Polish counterpart. Poland also joined the EU in 2004.

It is perhaps natural that ideas have been floated to rebuild the cross-river route that was lost 75 years ago. A proposal for what would today be an international tramline was raised in 2001, but 83% of participating Frankfurt residents voted against the idea of establishing cross-border services in 2006. A direct bus connection has been in operation since 2012.

Fleet renewal has also been a long-running topic, with various options and methods considered over the years; initially it had been planned (in 2014) to order up to 15 new low-floor trams for delivery from 2017 onwards. However, funding to achieve this was not found and eventually, after various possibilities were considered in the meantime, Frankfurt selected Škoda in 2020 as part of a wider order placed together with the town of Brandenburg (Havel) and the city of Cottbus. Financing for this project is to be supported by the Land (State) of Brandenburg, with 13 vehicles delivered to Frankfurt as part of a joint procurement across all three. Although no further formal announcement has yet been made, observers have suggested that the new vehicles will be from the ForCity range, with initial deliveries in 2022. **TAUT**

Local travel: SVF's customer centre is at Heilbronner Straße 26, near the Oderturm (e-mail kundenzentrum@svf-ffo.de). There are various ticketing options - an adult single covering Zones A, B, and C costs (from January 2021) EUR2.90. A 24-hour ticket (*Tageskarte*) for the same zones is to be EUR6.60.

Part of the Verkehrsverbund Berlin-Brandenburg tariff union, Frankfurt is also covered by a range of tickets with wider geographic availability, with options including a mobile app.

What is there to see?

Frankfurt in the 21st Century is a mixture of restored historic buildings and post-war reconstruction. A symbol of the latter is undoubtedly the Oderturm, a 25-storey block finished in 1976. At 90m tall it has some claim to be Brandenburg's tallest building, and boasts a restaurant on the 24th floor.

Among more historic structures is the St-Marienkirche (St Mary's church), badly damaged in 1945 and gradually restored since. It is only in the 21st Century that the leaded windows, removed during World War Two for safe keeping and subsequently taken as reparations to Russia, have been returned.

The old town hall can trace its origins to the Middle Ages, while buildings that attest to Frankfurt's status in the 19th Century as a garrison town also survive.

Cultural life (other than the university) encompasses a variety of theatres and museums, including one commemorating one of Frankfurt's famous sons: the writer Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811). Since 1999 Frankfurt has been known as the 'Kleiststadt'.

Other monuments include the Friedensglocke (peace bell), sited on the banks of the Oder, which dates from 1953 and is traditionally rung on World Peace Day in September.