Robert Peskin’s enormous collection of transportation-themed books all started with one hardcover: *Chicago Surface Lines* by Alan R. Lind. A fellow graduate student gave it to him during Peskin’s days in civil engineering at McCormick.

“It documents the history of Chicago’s railway street system and is considered a classic in the field,” says Peskin. “Little did I know it would evolve into a huge collection.”

Now Peskin’s compendium includes 1,750 books about public transportation systems, transit and railroad architecture, vintage posters, and graphic design. He plans to donate them all to Northwestern’s Transportation Library, one of the world’s largest transportation information centers.

**A life-long journey**

Peskin’s interest in transportation was sparked when he was a small child, watching the engineers of Pennsylvania Railroad GG-1 electric locomotives from the platform of Washington’s Union Station. His time at McCormick, however, solidified his love for transportation and secured a long career in the field.

“In my first year of grad school, we took a field trip to tour most of the Chicago Transit Authority rail system,” Peskin says. “I was amazed to watch the transformation of urban landscape right before my eyes. That really fired me up.”

Of the items in his collection, Peskin identifies a few as having special significance. One, Philip Ashforth Coppola’s self-published, multi-volume series, *Silver Connections: A Fresh Perspective on the New York Area Subway System*, took the author three decades to complete. Coppola considers the hand-illustrated volumes describing the interior décors of the New York subway stations his life’s work.

Peskin also plans to donate *Regional Rapid Transit: A Report to the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission*, a rare, oversized four-color document presented to Bay Area stakeholders in the 1950s. The document outlines the vision for “space-age” rapid transit as a solution for the then-growing, post-war traffic congestion facing the region.

“This limited edition volume was formerly part of the MIT Transportation Library,” Peskin says. “It somehow found its way to a rare book seller in Cleveland, where I purchased it.”

**Coming home to Northwestern**

When looking for a new home for his collection, Peskin immediately settled on Northwestern. “My interest in transportation books started here, and in a sense, my career has always centered around Northwestern,” he says. “Encouraging intellectual discovery is at the heart of the library’s mission. I have learned so much from these books and hope that future students of public transportation will, as well.”

Peskin’s life intertwined with Northwestern many times before and after he attended McCormick. The connections were so plentiful that Peskin felt “pre-ordained” to come to McCormick. Two of his undergraduate professors at the University of Maryland earned PhDs from McCormick’s civil engineering department. And after Peskin earned his PhD, he joined the transportation consulting practice of Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co., where three partners were McCormick alumni. AECOM acquired the practice in 2000 and, over the years, has hired dozens of Northwestern transportation graduates.

Having been with the same practice for 37 years, Peskin currently serves as a senior consulting manager to transportation systems in North America. Although he lives in Bethesda, Maryland, he stays strongly connected to his alma mater.

Peskin has served as a member of the McCormick Advisory Council since 2003 and co-director of the Washington, DC-area Northwestern University Alumni Admission Council since 1987. As co-director, he manages more than 300 alumni volunteers to provide outreach to applicants and their families on academic programs, campus life, and financial aid. The council conducts alumni interviews, which Peskin prefers to call “conversations,” with DC-area high school applicants.

“The best interviews are fluid and two-sided;” Peskin says. “We both ask each other questions and work together to see if Northwestern is the right fit. Having a meaningful role in this process is motivating. It’s rare for alumni to be able to support a line function of the University.”

**AMANDA MORRIS**