



There were two Western Pacific railroads, both of which are in this view of the western approach to Altamont Pass, California, the high point between Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay. The first WP was formed in December 1862 by a group associated with the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad (1864) to build a railroad connecting San Jose to Sacramento with the plan that the first transcontinental railroad would follow the WP from Sacramento to San Jose, where passengers and freight would continue to San Francisco on the SF&SJ. In October 1864, the Central Pacific Railroad assigned all its rights under the Pacific Railway Act to the WP for the route between Sacramento and San Jose, including land grants. In 1866, the first 20 miles from San Jose had been completed when funding problems halted construction. Part of the difficulty was that federal land grants were not available where Mexican land grants had previously been made.

By 1867 the CP determined that the route via San Jose to San Francisco was too long and that it would be better to change to a route to Oakland and from there use ferries from the CP's Oakland Pier to San Francisco. The CP bought the WP and construction started again in the spring of 1867. The railroad was completed through this location and in 1869 arrived at San Leandro, where it joined the local San Francisco & Alameda Railroad (not shown separately on the map). The first transcontinental train to reach San Francisco Bay arrived at the SF&A's Alameda Pier on September 6, 1869, and the passengers took the SF&A ferry to San Francisco. Two months later the rail connection to the local San Francisco & Oakland Railroad (not shown separately on the map) was in place and the transcontinental trains now ran through Oakland instead of Alameda. In 1870, the WP was absorbed into the CP. By 1879, the CP had built shorter routes from Sacramento to the north San Francisco Bay and the WP's route via Altamont Pass (including this location) became a secondary route between the East Bay and the San Joaquin Valley.

In 1903, a new Western Pacific Railroad was formed to build a line between Oakland and Salt Lake City, which was completed in 1909. The WP (1909) route from Sacramento to Oakland with a branch to San Jose closely parallels the original WP (1869), including this eastward view 5 miles west of Altamont Pass. In 1979, the Southern Pacific Railroad (successor to the CP) obtained trackage rights over the WP (1909) and then abandoned its WP (1869) track over Altamont Pass, including this location. As of 2016, the abandoned section of the WP (1869) grade extends eastward from Verona, California (2 miles west of Pleasanton), through Pleasanton, Livermore, and Altamont Pass (near this location), to a location about 6 miles east of the pass. Other sections of the WP (1869) route, to Stockton and Sacramento, to Oakland, and to San Jose, remained as part of the SP (now UP) system.

Eastward view 5 miles west of Altamont Pass. The steel bridge is the WP (1909) and the abandoned grade passing under the right-hand side of the bridge is the WP (1869). The road is the old U.S. Highway over Altamont Pass, which was replaced with I-580 (out of view to the right). We'll explore both WP's on their western approach to Altamont Pass.



Westward view of the same WP (1909) bridge as the previous photo. The abandoned WP (1869) grade is steeper and so passes under the bridge on its approach to Altamont Pass.



Southwestward view 3 miles west of Altamont Pass. The abandoned WP (1869) grade is the gravel ballast in the foreground and the WP (1909) tracks are to the right.



Southwestward view a few steps up the grade from the previous photo. The abandoned WP (1869) grade and the WP (1909) tracks appear to merge. The bend in the WP (1909) tracks suggest that it was re-aligned to utilize the abandoned WP (1869) grade.



Northeastward view at the same location as the previous photo. The abandoned WP (1869) grade is the gravel foreground and the WP (1909) tracks are to the left.



Northwestward view 2 miles west of Altamont Pass. The abandoned WP (1869) grade is lower and closer with a small culvert; the WP (1909) tracks are on a higher fill grade.



Northward view at Altamont Pass. The abandoned WP (1869) grade is the gravel road in the middle distance and the WP (1909) tracks are on the distant slope with an old water tower from the steam days.



This building is the main feature at Altamont Pass. The abandoned WP (1869) grade is the gravel road in the foreground and the WP (1909) tracks and old water tower are visible behind the building.





Same building as previous at Altamont Pass, showing close-up of ties still present in the abandoned WP (1869) grade.



Eastward view one-half mile east of Altamont Pass. The abandoned WP (1869) grade again passes under the WP (1909) tracks to follow a steeper grade down to the valley.