



The town of Phoenix was established in the 1860's on the north bank of the Salt River, whose waters irrigated the rich soils on the river's floodplain; agriculture flourished there under Arizona sunshine. The Hohokam natives had built an extensive canal system to harness the Salt River's waters for crops and by the time the above topo maps were published in 1914-1915, an extensive modern canal system was irrigating cotton and other crops on an industrial scale. Although Phoenix would become the largest city in Arizona, with more people than the rest of the state combined, neither of the two transcontinental railroads through Arizona went through Phoenix. Therefore, the railroad history of Phoenix is a story of branch lines from the south (Southern Pacific's Sunset Route (1881)) and north (Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe's Atlantic & Pacific (1883)).

There is a bit of mystery surrounding Phoenix railroads, particularly which was the first to actually arrive in Phoenix. The above map shows my best interpretation of Phoenix railroad history. We will explore Phoenix railroad chronologically, and the numbered locations on the above map are referenced in the following photos. The base map is made of two topo maps put together from 1914 and 1915, just a few years after the last new railroad construction in the area (Arizona Eastern (1912), which was built in the same year that Arizona became a state). The 1914-1915 map shows all the railroads on it as "Arizona Eastern," i.e. under SP control, except the "Santa Fe Prescott & Phoenix," which was under AT&SF control. Subsequent construction, shown in black, includes minor realignments and the new commuter rail system (which partially follows abandoned railroad grades).

The Maricopa & Phoenix Railroad (1887) was definitely first in the Salt River Valley, but it is unclear whether the M&P ever reached the actual Phoenix townsite on the north bank of the Salt River, or terminated at Tempe on the south bank (as shown on the topo map). Most references imply that the M&P extended to Phoenix. For example, the California State Railroad Museum Library and Archives reports that the M&P was built from the SP's mainline at Maricopa Wells "north through the farming community of Tempe to Phoenix," which seems pretty specific but also reads like a charter with no specifics about actual completion to Phoenix (<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8mc91s1/>). The Maricopa Historical Society writes that the M&P "tracks passed through Tempe" and was the "1st train into Salt River Valley" and that on July 4, 1887, a large crowd assembled "at the terminus in Phoenix" to welcome the first M&P steam engine (<https://www.inmaricopa.com/maricopa-and-phoenix-railroad-1st-train-into-salt-river-valley/>).

While these and other information sources indicate the line extended to Phoenix, I could find no reference that maps the route north of Tempe or a specific location for a depot in Phoenix. The Abandoned Rails website is pretty firm that the M&P did not cross the Salt River: "The exact routing of the M&P is not known ... also caused some dispute about the northern terminus of the M&P; while 'Phoenix' forms part of the name of the railroad, and while most historians agree that the railroad did not reach as far north as Phoenix, there is disagreement on whether or not the railroad reached as far as Tempe, or if it terminated in West Chandler ... evidence that suggests the northern terminus was in Tempe are some of the names that the railroad company went through during its history, namely the Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa Railway, and the Maricopa and Phoenix and Salt River Valley Railway ... So where exactly did the M&P lay its tracks? We may never know for sure." Enusing discussion on the website states "there were TWO railroad bridges built across the Salt River at Tempe around the turn of the 20th century. To the East was the 'Phoenix & Eastern' bridge, which completely washed out during a huge flood - I believe in the early 20s ... The other bridge - in the exact location as the current UP bridge - was the Maricopa & Phoenix bridge. That doesn't definitively prove anything - but SPV's map also shows that the M&P had a railbed paralleling the P&E into Phoenix after the crossing of the Salt River." Additionally, the 1914-1915 topos (above) show only one line between Phoenix and Tempe, and this line is either the Phoenix & Eastern (1904), which is the AT&SF's eastward extension of its SFP&P (1895)(as drawn above), or it is the M&P, in which case the P&E would have had trackage rights over the hypothetical M&P between Phoenix and Tempe and would have started its line in Tempe (for which there is no evidence).

So it is unclear whether the M&P reached Phoenix; it must be known but I couldn't find anything definitive online. I drew the above map with the M&P (1887) terminating at Tempe. By 1895, the M&P definitely extended to the south bank of the Salt River at Tempe in order to connect with its sister railroad, the Phoenix, Tempe & Mesa (1895).





1.

In 1895, the M&P was consolidated with the Phoenix, Tempe & Mesa Railway, which in 1894-1895 built eastward to Mesa from the (presumed) northern terminus of the M&P; the combined roads formed the Maricopa & Phoenix & Salt River Valley Railroad. In January 1908, this company was sold and was taken over by a second Maricopa & Phoenix Railroad, a subsidiary of the SP. In 1910, the second M&P (including the routes of the first M&P and the PT&M, became a part of the Arizona Eastern Railroad, another SP company.

In the middle 1920's, the SP built two new lines – one west and one east of Phoenix (outside the area of the topo map) -- that circumvented the M&P (1887)/AE. The SP abandoned the M&P (1887)/AE alignment around 1945, except for the first 10 miles of track south of Tempe, which became an industrial spur (this location). These remaining rails were upgraded to the current welded rail.

Southward view of the M&P (1887) (now a UP industrial spur) a quarter mile south of the junction with the early 1920's SP re-alignment and 10 miles north of the current end-of-track.





1.

Northward view of the M&P (1887)/PT&M/M&P&SRV/AE/SP/UP, same location as previous. The junction with the early 1920's SP re-alignment is a quarter mile up the line (next photo).





1.

Southeastward view a quarter mile north of the previous photo. The line in the foreground is the (1887) and the track curving to the left (east) is the early 1920's SP re-alignment. The stadium for Arizona State University is in the distance.





1.

Southward view a few steps north of the previous photo. The M&P (1887) is on the right (west) and the early 1920's SP re-alignment is on the left.





1.

Northward view a few steps north of the previous photo. The early 1920's SP re-alignment, which is today's UP mainline through Phoenix, is on the right, and its junction with the M&P (1887), which today is a UP industrial branch line, is on the left. The alignment north of the junction was originally the northern end of the M&P (1887), which extended at least another mile to northwest Tempe (PM&T (1895) junction, as shown in above map) if not all the way to Phoenix.





2.

Now we move to northwest Phoenix to pick up the railroad chronology of Phoenix. In 1895, the AT&SF-controlled Santa Fe, Prescott & Phoenix Railroad was completed to Phoenix from a junction with the AT&SF-controlled Atlantic & Pacific Railroad at Ash Fork via Prescott.

Northwestward view the SFP&P (now BNSF) mainline in northwest Phoenix. The unrusted track in the foreground is the mainline, with a siding and industrial spur to the left (southwest).





2.

Southeastward view of the SFP&P (1895), same location as previous. The track in the foreground is a siding with industrial spurs; note the bolted rails compared to the welded track of the mainline. Barely visible in the distance, the track makes a 45° turn to the right to head due south. That is the point at which, in 1895, the SFP&P reached the outskirts of Phoenix, with its north-south east-west streets that needed to be followed into town. The downtown Phoenix skyline is in the distance.





3-

Westward view of the SFP&P (1895) a quarter mile west of the presumed end-of-track, where it crosses 9th Avenue at the east end of a yard with at least six tracks. The track on the left (south) is a crossover to the AE (1910) (see next photo).





3.

Westward view east of the previous photo; the vehicles crossing the track are on 9th Avenue, shown in close-up on the previous photo. The track visible at the far right is the SFP&P (1895). The track in the foreground and curving left is the AE (1910) and the switch to the right is the crossover to SFP&P.





3.

Eastward view at the same location as the previous photo. The bolted track on the left (north) is the SFP&P (1895)/AT&SF and the welded track on the right is the AE (1910)/SP. The overpass is 7th Avenue and the Phoenix Union Station is in the distance beyond the overpass.





4.

Eastward view of the Phoenix Union Station (with arched windows), about 500 feet east of the previous photo location and just east of the 7th Avenue overpass. The welded track in the foreground is the AE (1910)/SP. The track at the far left is the current end-of-track of the SFP&P (1895) and presumably near the 1895 terminus, when the SFP&P was presumably the first railroad to reach the actual Phoenix townsite. Note in the right distance that the AE (1910) curves left; on the other side of the station it curves right again onto the eastward projection of the SFP&P, i.e. the Phoenix & Eastern (1904) alignment.





4.

Eastward view a few steps north of the previous photo location showing detail of the current end-of-track of the SFP&P (1895) near the starting point of the P&E (1904).





4.

Phoenix Union Station, officially the Union Station of the Southern Pacific and Santa Fe Railroads, was constructed in 1923 by the California, Arizona & Santa Fe Railroad (AT&SF) and the AE (SP). The building is a Mission Revival railroad station with a central two-story waiting room between long, low arcade wings. Three years after the station was completed, the new SP mainline through Phoenix was opened (SP (1926)) with the arrival of the eastbound Californian on November 15, 1926. When rail travel was at its peak during and immediately after World War II, Phoenix Union Station handled up to eighteen trains a day. In 1995, the last full year Amtrak stopped at Union Station, 21,495 passengers boarded here. Since Amtrak left in 1996, the Olympic Torch train has stopped here twice and tourist trains like the GrandLuxe (formerly American Orient Express) occasionally used Union Station.

Northward view of the Phoenix Union Station; a passenger loading platform and the AE/SP track are in the foreground. I'm not sure if the AT&SF had its own loading tracks or if the AT&SF trains used the AE/SP track via the crossover track mentioned above.





4.

Westward view of the Phoenix Union Station, with the AE/SP track in the foreground. In 1904, the AT&SF's SFP&P and its eastward extension the P&E (1904) apparently ran right through the location of station. By the time the station was built in 1923, the P&E was owned by the AE, the AE (1910) line was routed south of the station and the P&E alignment, and the SFP&P/P&E line was terminated at the west end of the station.





4.

Westward view a quarter mile east of Phoenix Union Station, whose arched windows are visible in the distance. The track and siding are on the P&E (1904) where they cross 1st Street.





4.

Eastward view of the P&E (1904) at the same location as previous, with Chase Field, home of the Arizona Diamondbacks, in the distance. The AT&SF chartered the P&E in 1901 to construct a line 185 miles from its SFP&P (1895) terminus at Phoenix to Benson, Arizona, on the SP Sunset Route east of Tucson, via the Gila River. The SP responded by backing the Arizona Eastern and in 1903–1904 a minor railroad war broke out as the two companies struggled over control of the route. Meanwhile, in 1904, the P&E reached its terminus at Winkelman, a mining center on the Gila River, a distance of 95 miles. The AT&SF and the SP eventually agreed that the SP would take control of the P&E in exchange for SP concessions to the AT&SF in northern California, and SP's AE formally leased the P&E on March 1, 1910, including this location.





5.

Now we have moved east to Mesa, Arizona, looking west at the P&E (1904). Note the sidings and trackside grain elevator.





5.

Eastward view of the P&E (1904) at the same location as previous. The welded mainline makes a 90° turn to the right (due south); a siding continues due east.







5.

Southeastward view of the P&E (1904) where it makes a 90° turn to the right. The curve was recently upgraded, with new ballast and concrete ties.





5.

Westward view of the P&E (1904); the southward curve with new ballast is in the distance and an old straight track is in the foreground. The curved track was once the west branch of a wye, with the old track in the foreground as the "mainline." The east branch of the wye, present on the 1914-1915 topo map, has been removed.





5.

Eastward view of the P&E (1904), specifically the eastward continuation of the old track “mainline” just east of the previous location. The east branch of the wye was in this yard, but there is no evidence of it on the ground or in satellite imagery. The track now ends just beyond the part box cars, but once was continued east as a P&E branch line, which made a 90° turn to the left (north,) then another 90° turn to the left (west) to access the Mesa Depot at the terminus of the PT&M (1895).





5.

Northwestward view of the west branch of the P&E (1904) wye, showing the same grain elevator and upgraded ties and ballast as before.





5.

Southward view of the P&E (1904) at the former south tip of the wye. The east branch of the wye, which once converged with this track where the concrete ties meet the wooden ties, is completely gone.





6.

Now we are west of downtown to look at the AE (1910). Eastward view, the Phoenix skyline is in the left distance and Chase Stadium (near the Phoenix Union Station) is just to the right of the skyscrapers. Sidings and spurs serve industrial facilities.





6.

Westward view of the AE (1910), same location as previous, with more sidings and spurs before heading west out of town to connect with the SP (1926) cutoff to Phoenix.