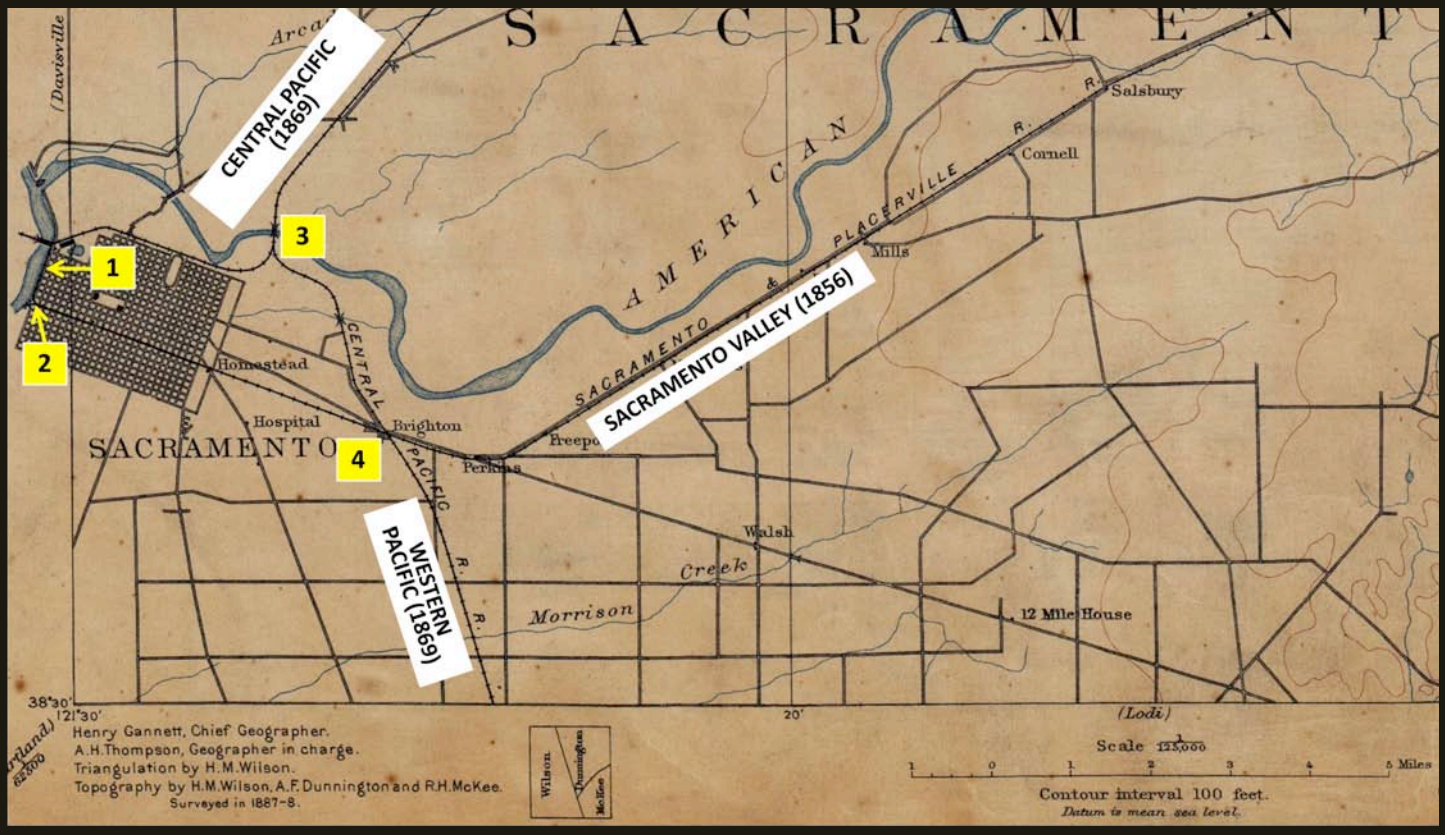


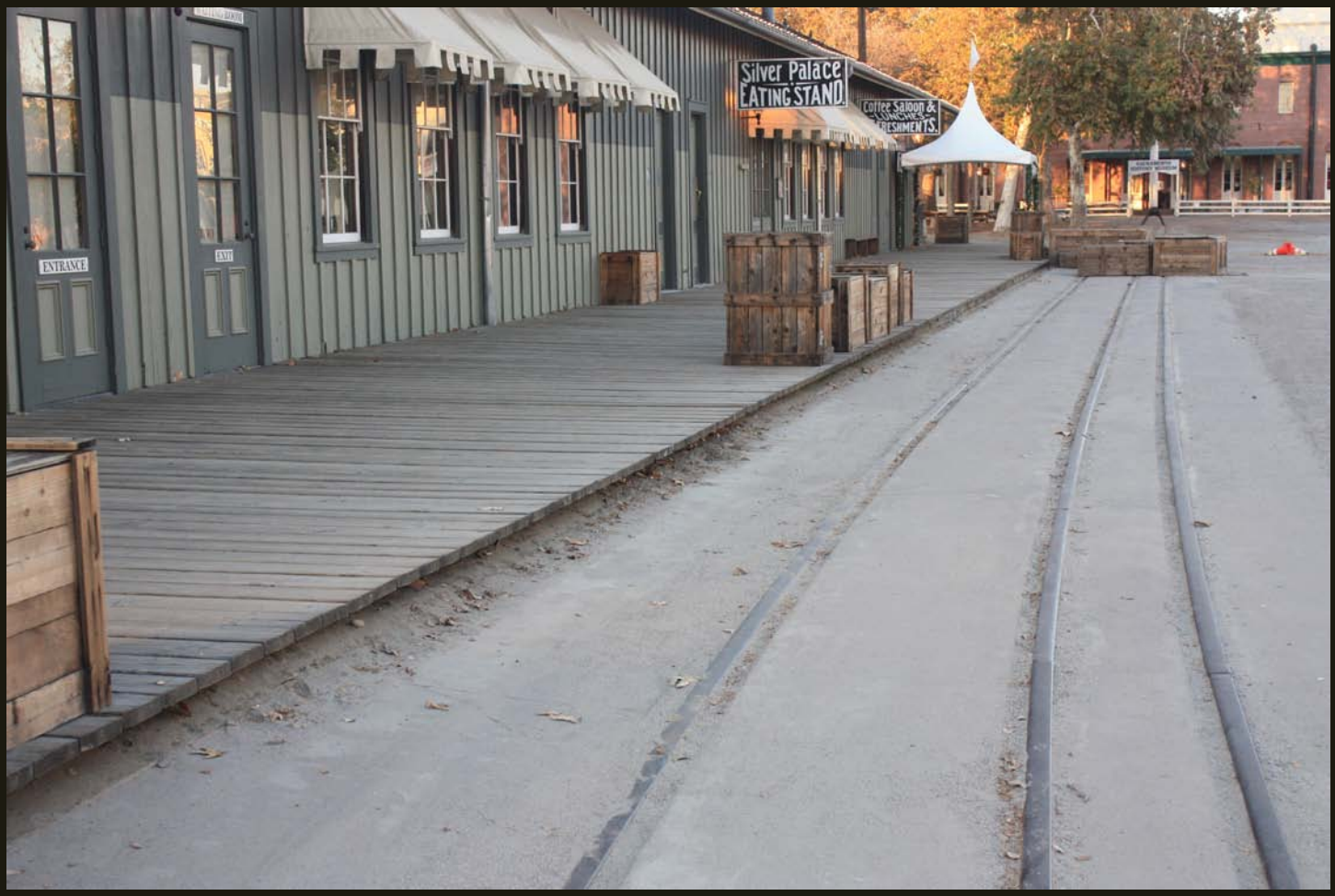
Sacramento is the center of railroading in the Southwest. The California capital boasts the first railroad in the Southwest, the western terminus of the first transcontinental railroad, and the California State Railroad Museum. Sacramento was and is served by many more railroads than the much larger city of Los Angeles and many many more than San Francisco. In addition to the sheer number of railroads running to and through Sacramento, those railroads have a long history of re-alignments and are intertwined with a network of commuter railroads and street cars to challenge the georailfan. Because there is so much in Sacramento, the scope of this geolink will focus on the three railroads that have the greatest historical significance: the Sacramento Valley Railroad (1856), which was the first railroad in the Southwest (see tab "Southwest Railroad Framework"); the Central Pacific Railroad (1869), for which Sacramento was the western terminus of the first transcontinental railroad; and the Western Pacific Railroad (1869), which was the railroad that actually connected the first transcontinental railroad with the Pacific Ocean.

The above topo map from 1888 shows the historical railroads. The starting point is location #1, where the SV (1856) commenced construction on the east bank of the Sacramento River at the corner of Front and L streets, alongside Sutter's Embarcadero at today's Old Sacramento, which was the original riverside commercial center that became the City of Sacramento. The SV built 2,300 feet south-southwestward along the Sacramento River, then turned west-southwestward down R Street at location #2, then turned east-northeastward at Perkins to follow the American River to Folsom (east of the topo map area). By 1888 (this map), the SV had been extended east from Folsom to Placerville and the name changed to the Sacramento & Placerville Railroad. At location #3, the WP (1869) joins the CP (1869), and the CP continues west to the "navigable waters of the Sacramento River" as specified in the Pacific Railway Act of 1862, and turns 90 degrees due south along the east bank to Old Sacramento (location #1). At the 90-degree turn, a branch continues west across the Sacramento River; this is the California Pacific (1870), which the CP acquired in 1876. The CP acquired the SV in 1865 and probably connected to the SV at that time. The WP (1869) is labeled on the topo map as "Central Pacific R.R." because the CP purchased the WP in 1867, built most of the line, and by 1888 had applied its moniker to the WP route. North of location #3, the CP (1869) heads northwest, crossing the American River on its way to Donner Pass and the East. The WP (1869) crossed the SV (1856) tracks at location #4, which in 1888 was called Brighton.

Old Sacramento (location #1) will be the starting point for our exploration of Sacramento railroads.

Northwestward view of the reconstructed, 1870's-vintage CP passenger station at Old Sacramento. The tracks and the Sacramento River are on the other side. Note the dual gauge tracks that end at the stack of boxes in front of the depot.

The starting point of the SV (1856) is 2 blocks (800 feet) south of this location, but there is no evidence of it I could find in Old Sac.



Northwestward view of the dual gauge tracks in front of the reconstructed CP station. The dual gauge track veers left (not visible in this view) and connects to the standard gauge CP mainline, but the significance of the dual gauge track is unclear. I found no record of narrow gauge in or around Sacramento. Perhaps narrow gauge was used at a time around the depot, or maybe there were narrow gauge street cars, or maybe the track is a recent construct of the California State Railroad Museum to handle narrow gauge rolling stock. Contact SWRRH if you have the answer!

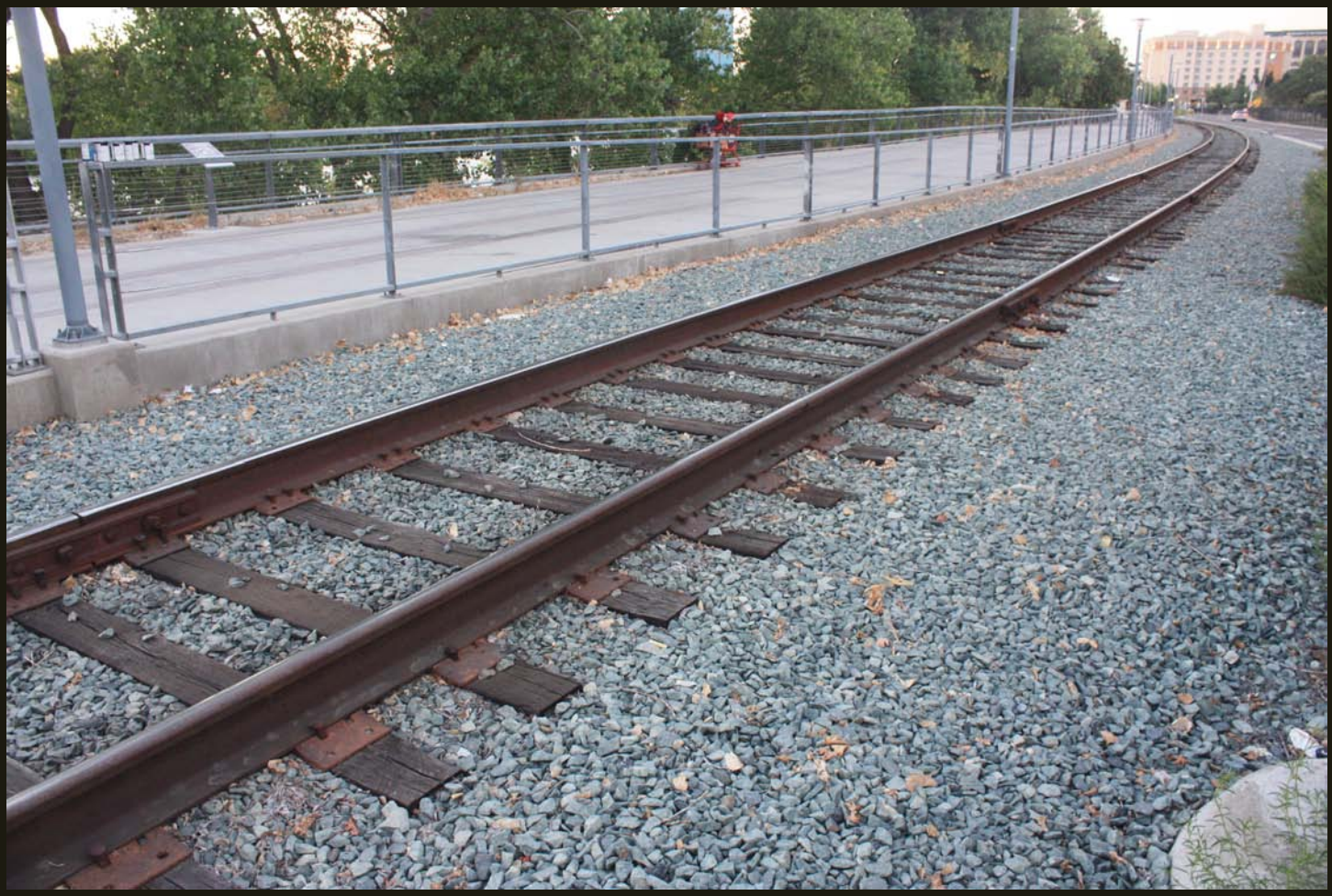
The Big Four House was originally three separate buildings constructed 1851-1852. The lower floors were occupied by merchants, three of whom later became three of the Big Four of the CP and later the Southern Pacific (Collis Huntington, Mark Hopkins, Jr., and Leland Stanford). The second floor served as the offices of the CP from the CP's founding in 1862 until 1873. By 1878, the structures were enlarged into one building, which over the years housed shops, a bar and cafe, and a hotel on the second floor.

Northwestward view of the CP on the west side of the depot, where sidings display some of the California State Railroad Museum's rolling stock such as this Western Pacific EMD F7 diesel locomotive. (Note that this "Western Pacific" refers to the second Western Pacific Railroad, which was built in 1909.)

Southern Pacific #6051 on display at the California State Railroad Museum.

Northeastward view a quarter mile northeast of Old Sacramento. The CP alignment and sidings in the foreground have turned eastward just north of Old Sacramento, where the Sacramento Locomotive Works stands as a monument to the Industrial Revolution. The Sacramento Locomotive Works, often known as "the Shops," originated in 1867 to support the CP's transcontinental race with the UP. The Shops and the whole CP became SP in the late 19th century and has undergone numerous expansions over more than a century. Within the Shops are the only remaining American railroad structures that were actually standing when the CP and UP met in 1869. This facility is currently actively used by the California State Railroad Museum to house a lare collection of locomotives (both steam and diesel), carriages, wagons, cabooses, and large machine tools.

Now we have moved back to Old Sac, 2 blocks south of the CP station, where stands the Theodore Judah Monument. After working on a number of railroads in the Northeast, Judah was hired as the Chief Engineer for the SV. Throughout the 1850's, he was known as "Crazy Judah" for his idea to build a railroad across the Sierra Nevada. But he surveyed the route over the Sierra Nevada and succeeded in signing up four Sacramento merchants, the future Big Four, to build the CP, just before he died in 1863 and did not live to see his vision completed.



Northward view of the SV (1856) at location #2, 2,300 feet south of its starting point. The trees are on the bank of the Sacramento River. Let's review the history of the SV, which we'll explore in the remainder of this geolink, then get back to this photo.

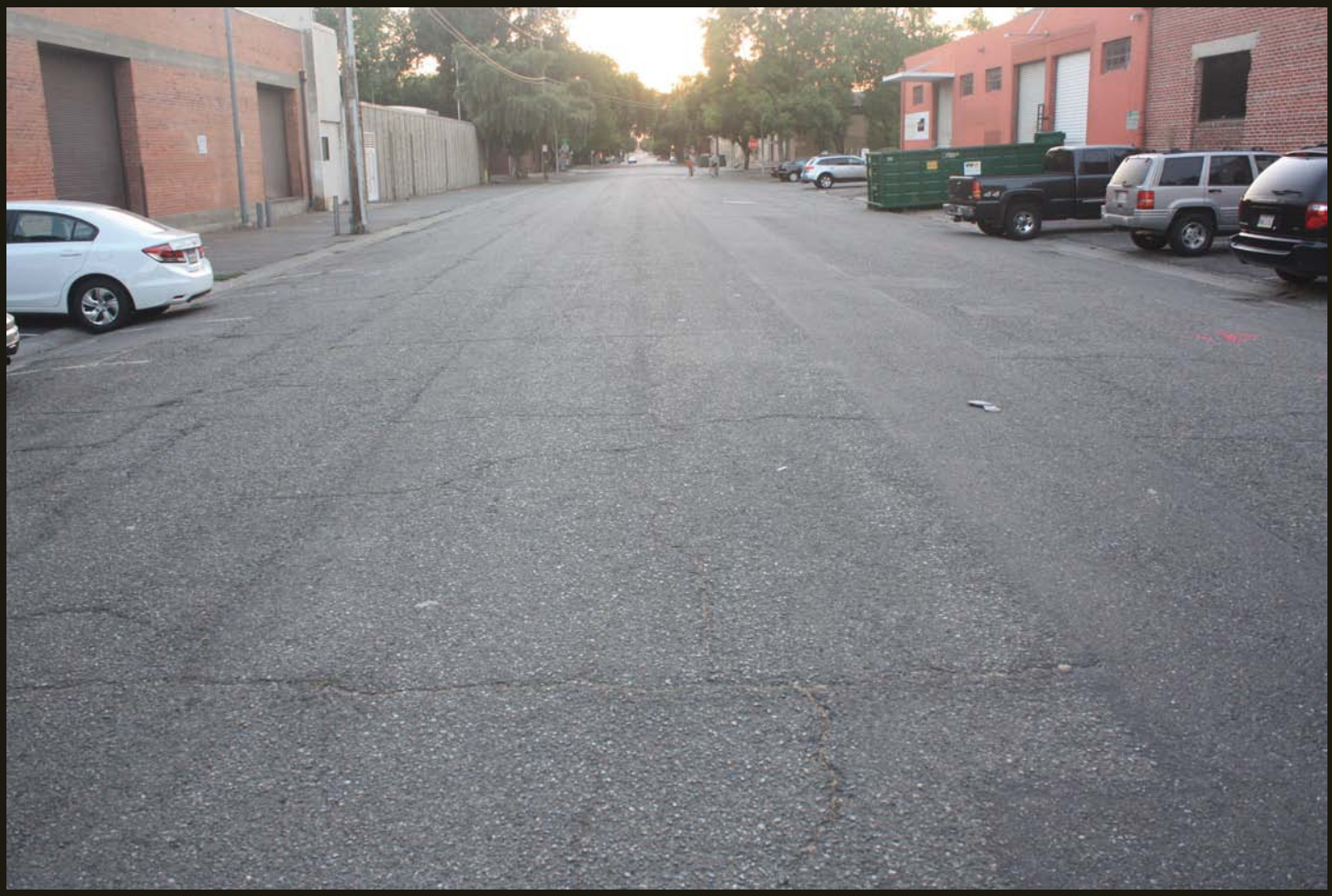
The SV was incorporated on August 4, 1852. The line's first president was future Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman and its Chief Engineer was Theodore Judah. The route survey, completed in 1854, ran 30 miles northeastward parallel to and south of the American River to Folsom. Grading began on February 12, 1855, on the levee at Front and L streets in Old Sacramento (2,300 feet north of this location) and track laying began August 9, 1855, using a broad gauge of 5 feet 3 ½ inches. The first train arrived in Folsom on February 22, 1856. The SV came under CP control (but not name) in 1865 and was consolidated into the Sacramento & Placerville Railroad in 1877. The S&P came under the control of the SP in 1888 and became known as the Placerville Branch of the SP. Today the SV right-of-way is used by the Union Pacific Railroad (SP successor) and the Sacramento Regional Transit District for its Gold Line between Sacramento and Folsom.

In this northward view at location #2, the straight track in the distance is on the SV (1856) alignment. South of the beginning of the curve, the SV alignment turned eastward (to the right), as seen in the 1888 topo map and later topo maps, but the tracks have been removed from this location east to 10th Street (see below). The continuation of the curved track toward the viewer is the Sacramento Southern Railroad (1912), which once extended 30 miles south of town and later became the SP Walnut Grove Branch. The Walnut Grove Branch was cut back to about 5 miles south of location #2 and is used exclusively(?) for excursions on the California State Railroad Museum's modern-day Sacramento Southern Railroad.

Southeastward view of the SV (1856)/SS (1912) alignment at the same location as previous. The curved bike path in the center distance is the SV (1856) curve at location #2.

Northwestward view of the SV (1856) alignment, now a bike path. This is the middle of the curve where the SV left the Sacramento River and turned east-southeastward down R Street. This is a former railroad bridge over Interstate 5, which carried trains until about 2000.

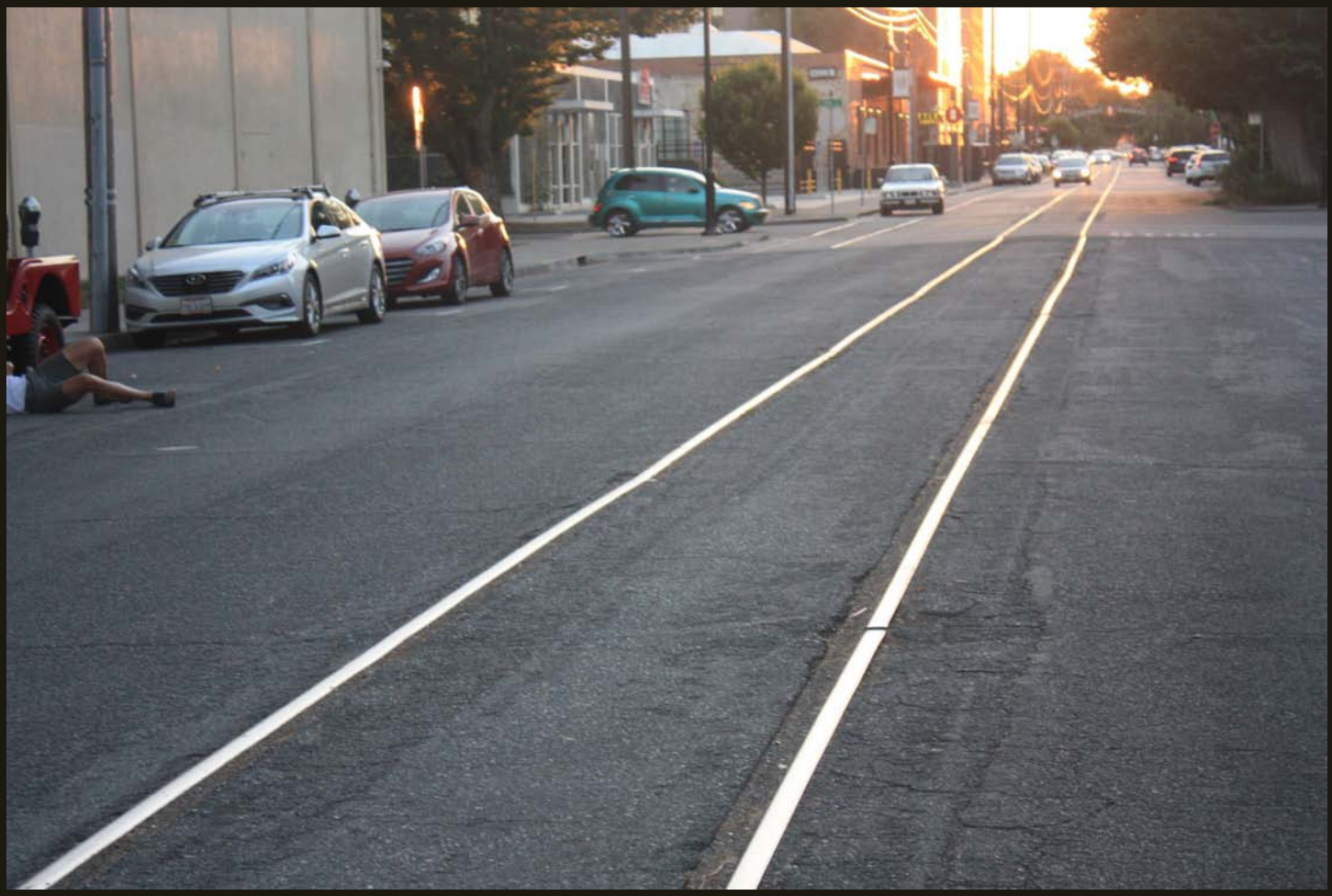
Eastward view of R Street at 2nd Street, at the east end of the curve at location #2 where the SV (1856) ran straight down R Street.



West-northwestward view of R Street at 10th Street; the SV (1856) once ran down R Street through this location.

Eastward view of R Street at 10th Street, same location as previous. We have tracks! This location is 3,600 feet from the curve at location #2 and a little more than one rail mile from the SV starting point in Old Sac. The SV is honored by the trendy R Street Historic District and its gateway arch, which commemorates the SV's construction along R Street in 1855. Note the switch where the car is driving.

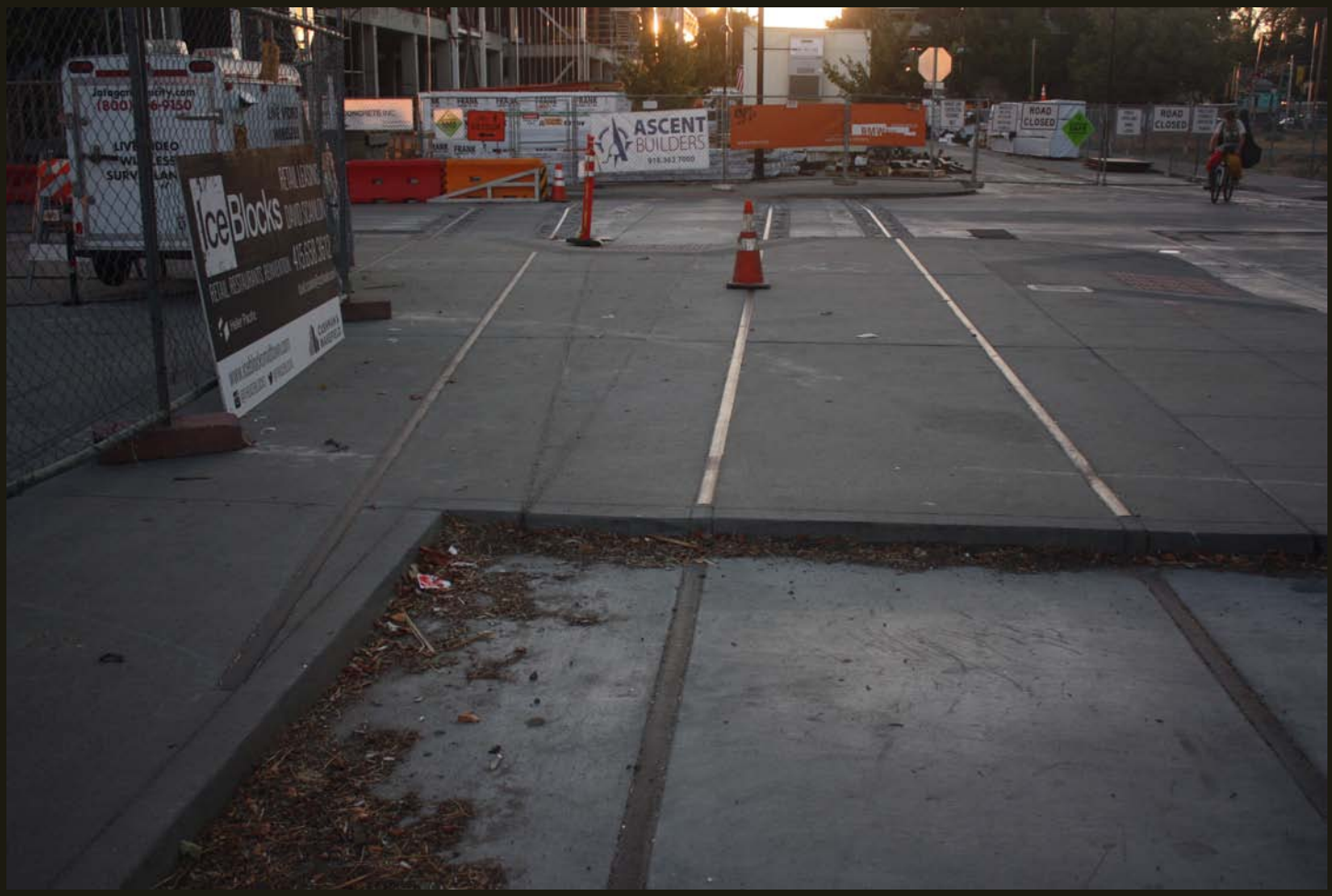
Westward view of R Street at 10th Street showing the switch. These tracks are not operable -- there is no place for the flange of a wheel to run and the switch cannot be switched. I think these tracks are original tracks, i.e. the most recent trackage left by the SP, but paved in to make a nice surface. Similar trackage is at the other end of the SV at Folsom and I think it's really cool that the historical tracks were left in place to preserve the railroad history.



Westward view of the SV/S&P/SP/UP trackage on R Street, just west of 14th Street. These tracks are as the SP left them -- note there is a place for the flange of a wheel.

Eastward view of the SV/S&P/SP/UP trackage on R Street at 14th Street. Note the brick pavement under the asphalt, hinting at the long history of the railroad and of R Street.

Northeastward view of the SV/S&P/SP/UP trackage on R Street at 17th Street, one and a quarter miles east-southeast of #2. There are numerous spurs and switches preserved in the paved-in historic trackage; note two more tracks across the street. This must once have been an industrial area with numerous rail customers. The bricks look the same as those in the previous photo; my guess is they are re-used bricks that were recently placed into their current positions as part of the track preservation project because there is no place for the wheel flange.



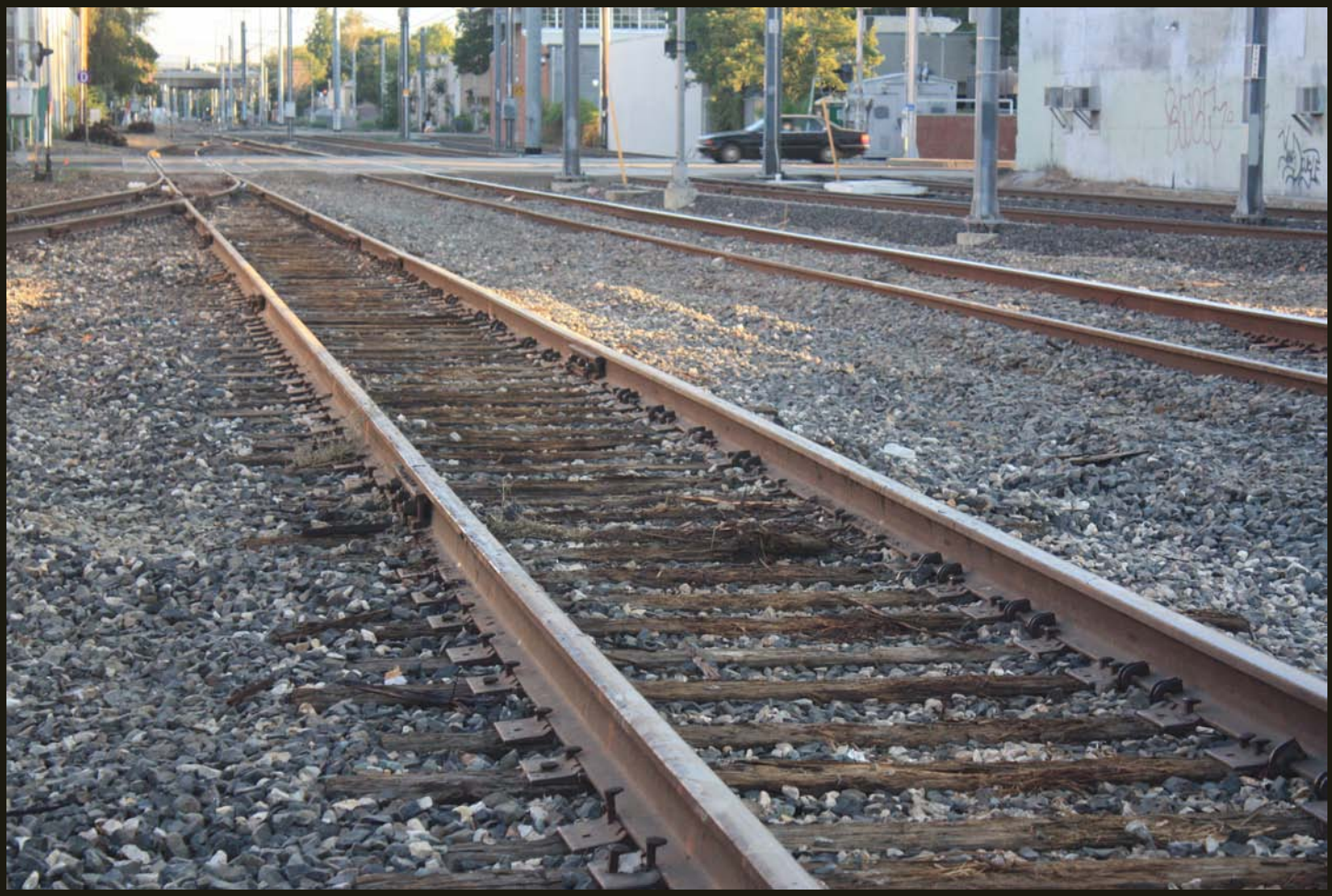
Westward view on R Street at 17th Street, showing detail of how the historical tracks are bring reused to decorate streets and sidewalks and preserve railroad history.

Northward view of R Street at 17th Street, showing numerous old tracks. The speeding train crossing 17th Street is the Sacramento Regional Transit District Gold Line, a modern commuter railroad that runs parallel to the SV (1856) alignment here, but to the east, as we shall see, runs on the SV alignment in some places.

Westward view on R Street, just east of 17th Street, showing detail of an old switch. Note the red brick building in the distance; it is on 18th Street and the tracks and R Street end there, removed for retail development.

Westward view of the SV alignment, 1,300 feet east of the previous location between 19th and 20th Streets; note the same red brick building as in the previous photo. The SV/S&P/SP/UP tracks are gone. The tracks in the foreground are the Western Pacific (1909) (the second WP), where once a grade crossing existed. The overpass is the Gold Line commuter line, which curves to the right (north) to leave the SV alignment and parallel it to the west (as seen on the photo before the previous photo).

Northward view of the WP (1909) converging to a single track, same location as previous.

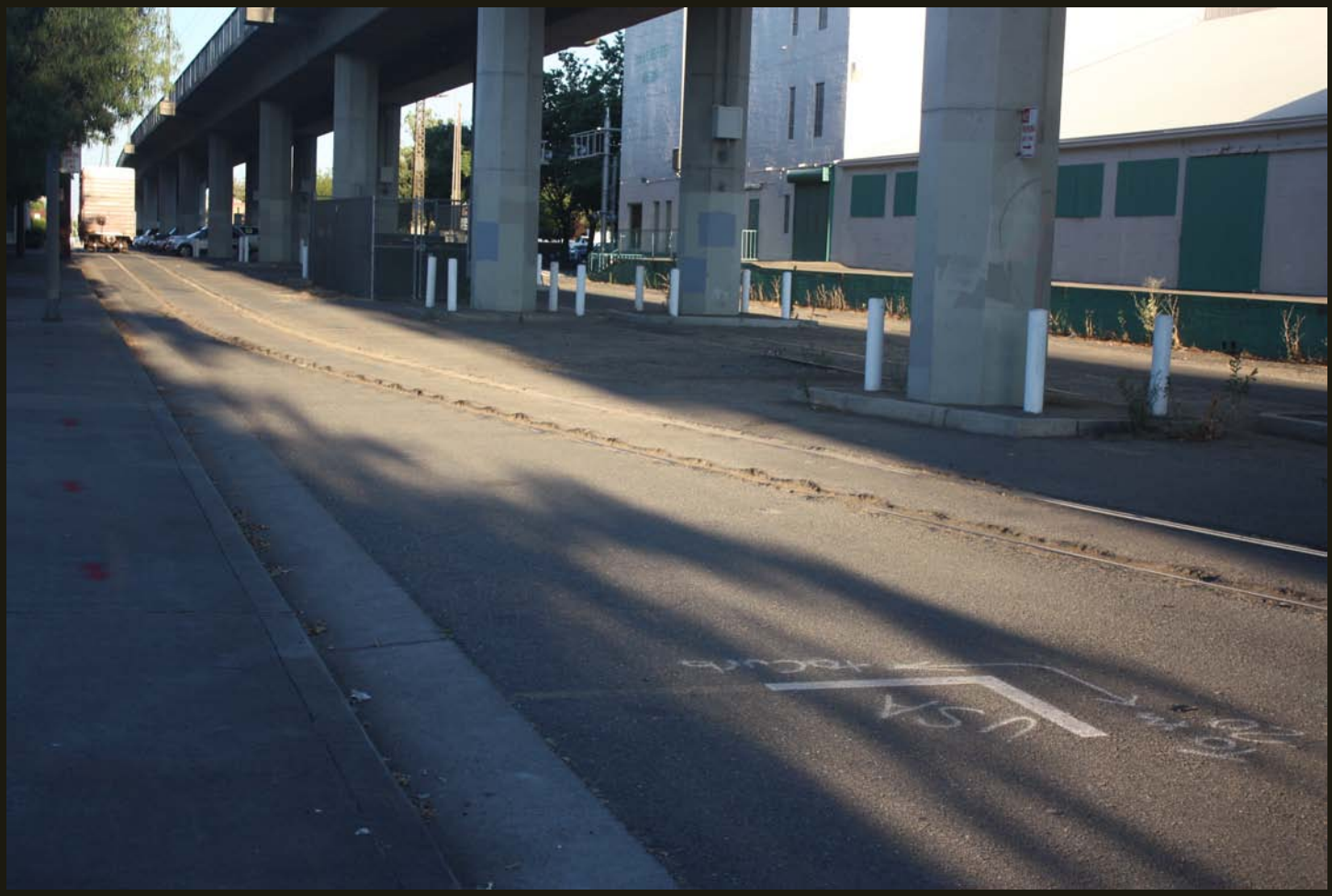


Southward view of the WP (1909), same location as previous. The tracks on the far right are a light rail branch line that connects to the Gold Line. The track in the foreground is a siding of the WP (1909) and the mainline is the track to its right. The branch on the far left is the only connection between the WP (1909) and SV (1856).

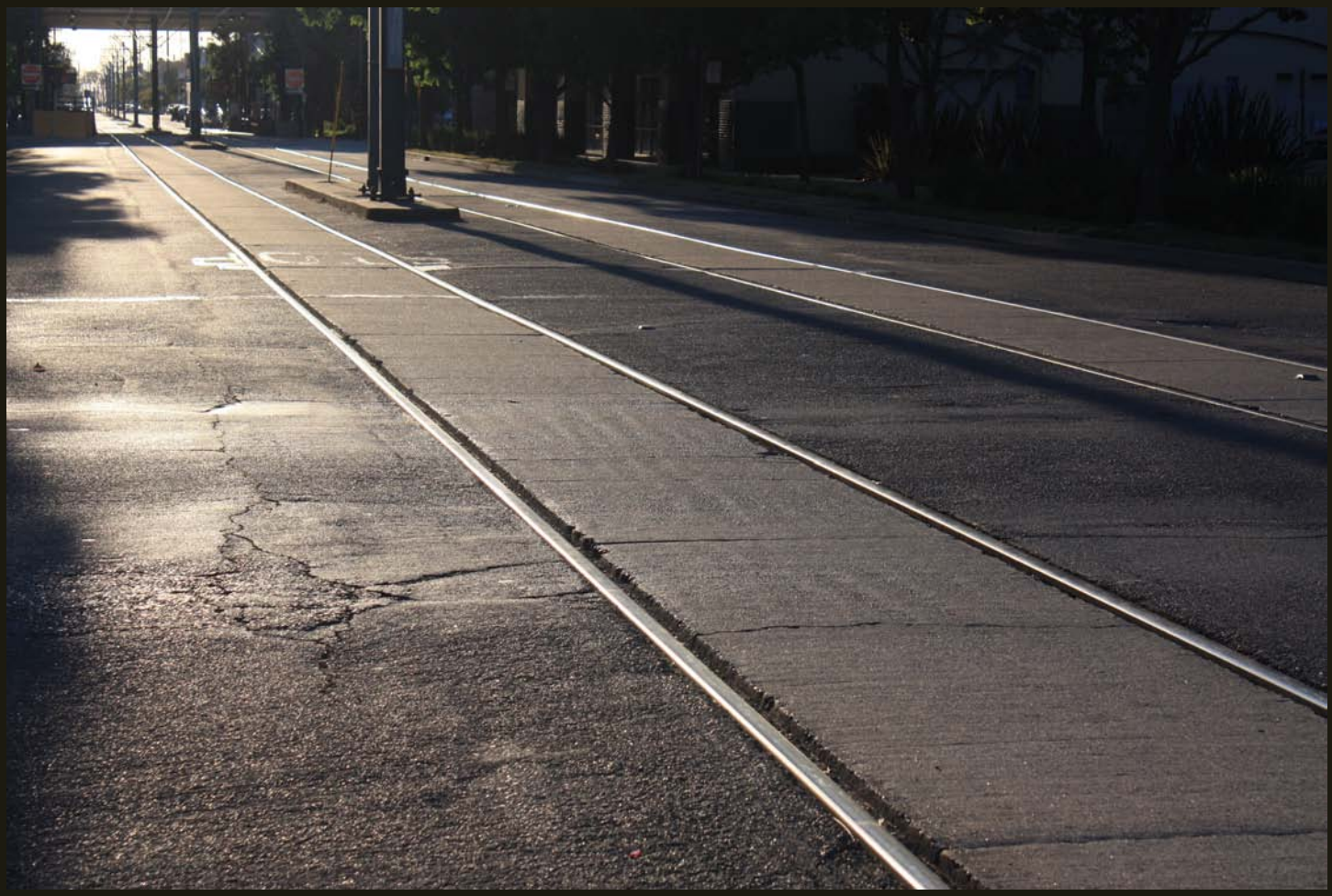
Southwestward view a few steps from the previous location showing the connection between the WP (1909), which is the straight track in the distance, and the SV alignment, which is behind the viewer.

Northeastward view from the same location as previous, showing the connection between the WP (1909), which is behind the viewer, and the SV/S&P/SP/UP alignment. The concrete pillars support the Gold Line and are built right on the SV/S&P/SP/UP mainline alignment; an old siding is to the right (south) of the mainline and an active siding is to the left. The pavement is R Street.

Eastward view 200 feet east of the previous location and there it is: the SV/S&P/SP/UP mainline track disappearing under the concrete pillars of the Gold Line.



Southeastward view a few steps north of the previous location, showing the active siding with a stored box car, the SV/S&P/SP/UP mainline under the concrete pillars of the Gold Line, and an old siding along a loading platform on the other side of the pillars. The box car is at 21st Street and the siding it's on continues to 23rd Street, where a current or recent customer is located.



Westward view of R Street at Alhambra Boulevard (which could have been called 31st Street), showing Gold Line tracks on the SV alignment. This is the easternmost location where the SV alignment is in R Street.

Eastward view at same location as previous. I am not sure if either or both of these tracks predate the Gold Line, but the track on the left has more rust and is more likely to be original (SP) trackage.

Now we are at location #4, where the WP (1869) crosses the SV (1856) and the nearest numbered street is 69th Street. The grade crossing is called Brighton on the 1888 topo map and is now gone. We are looking southeastward at a connection between the SV alignment, which is behind the viewer where the tracks end in a few hundred feet, and the WP (1869), which is in the left distance (where a signal marks the junction). There are several sidings for old industrial facilities along this now-disconnected connector.

Northward view of the WP (1869), now UP, under U.S. Highway 50. The line that comes in from the right (east) connects to the SV alignment and is the UP's current access point to its former SP trackage to Folsom. The original SV grade crossing was in the foreground of this view.

Westward view of the SV (1856) alignment, 500 feet east of the previous location. The curve in the distance is the same connection to the WP (1869) that comes in from the east in the previous photo, and the straight-ish track in the foreground is the original SV alignment, which projects to the former grade crossing in the shadows under U.S. 50. The concrete pillar in the left foreground supports the Gold Line overpass.

Westward view of the SV (1856) alignment, 500 feet east of the previous location. The track in the foreground is the original SV/S&P/SP/UP alignment. The two tracks on the right are the Gold Line overpass, which is today's representation of the SV-WP grade crossing at Brighton (location #4).

Eastward view of the SV (1856) alignment, same location as previous. The UP tracks are on the right and continue to the Aerojet facility just west of Folsom, and the Gold Line tracks are on the left and continue to Folsom at the original SV (1856) end-of-track.