



In 1853, the Congress authorized the War Department to conduct surveys of five different potential transcontinental railroad routes and in 1855 submitted a twelve volume report to Congress. No route was agreed upon for actual construction until the Southern states' secession. The Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, officially titled "An Act to Aid in the Construction of a Railroad and Telegraph Line From the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean, and to Secure to the Government the Use of the Same for Postal, Military, and Other Purposes," promoted the construction of the "Pacific Railroad" by offering land grants and 30-year government bonds to the Union Pacific Railroad and Central Pacific Railroad.

The UP line started in Council Bluffs, Iowa, where initially trains crossed the Missouri River by ferry to get to the start-of-track at Omaha, Nebraska. By December 1865, the UP had only completed 40 miles of track in eastern Nebraska. The pace picked up when UP converted several railroad cars to portable bunkhouses for the construction crews; the bunkhouses included a galley and the new system provided for a herd of cattle that moved with the rail head for fresh meat. The U.S. Army instituted cavalry patrols that grew larger as the Indian push back against the railroad incursion grew more aggressive. Temporary end-of-track "hell-on-wheels" towns accompanied the railroad as construction headed west; most faded away but some became permanent settlements.

The route followed the Platte River Valley, which provided a gradual grade up the Western Plains from the Missouri River to the Continental Divide. The UP reached North Platte, Nebraska, at the confluence of the North and South Platte rivers, in December 1866. In 1867, the UP continued up the South Platte River to a tributary, Lodgepole Creek, which the UP route followed into the Southwest map area and what is now the state of Wyoming.

The UP entered the Southwest map area in 1867 near Kimball, Nebraska, on the floodplain of Lodgepole Creek. Kimball is one of the end-of-track "hell-on-wheels" towns that survived as a permanent, albeit small town. The line was double-tracked around 1918. Note the flat topography in this eastward view from the Highway 71 overpass at Kimball.