



The coolest thing about Turlock, California, is that there are people with rail switches in their yards! Let's start at the beginning. The town was established in the early 1870's as one of many agricultural centers along the newly constructed Southern Pacific Railroad, but this geolink does not focus on the SP line in Turlock; the focus instead is on the end-of-track of the Tidewater Southern Railway. The TS was incorporated in 1910 to build an interurban system, connecting to the Central California Traction Company, Western Pacific Railroad (1909), Southern Pacific Railroad, and Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway. Construction of the TS southward from Stockton began in 1911, and service to Modesto, 13 miles northwest of this location, began in 1912 with steam locomotive-hauled passenger service. Electrification using an overhead system was completed in 1913 and regular electric car service began on a 2-hour schedule; the TS also operated extensive freight service. In 1916, the railway was extended 8 miles south from Modesto to a curve in the track known as Hatch, where the line turned due east 6 miles to Turlock (this location). In 1917, the TS built an 8-mile branch southeast from Hatch to the agricultural center of Hilmar. The TS south of Modesto was never electrified and never operated passenger service. The Western Pacific Railroad (1909) began influencing TS actions as early as 1913 and purchased most of the TS stock by 1917, after which the TS was operated as a WP subsidiary.

Passenger service on the TS ended in 1932 and the railway operated solely as a freight line, but carried some passengers in the cabooses. The electrification north of Modesto was dismantled in the 1960's, after which the TS became increasingly operated by WP locomotives and crews. The TS's traffic, however, expanded with the construction of several grain silos near Turlock, used to supply animal feed, and eventually required long unit trains, such as the one in this photo, to bring in the Midwestern grain. By the late 1970's, these trains were the main traffic on the TS and led to much anger from the city of Modesto, where the main line occupied the middle of 9th Street, the major north-south roadway. The end for the TS as a company came in 1983 when the Union Pacific absorbed the WP and in 1986 the TS corporate structure was dismantled. Since 1983, the TS trackage has been the Tidewater Subdivision of the UP. In 2001, the line north of Modesto through 9th Street was abandoned, severing the railroad in the middle, but still, of all the former interurban railroads in California, the former TS retains the highest percentage of still-operating trackage.

Westward view of the TS (1917), now Tidewater Subdivision of the UP, with a long grain train discharging its grain in the silos. When this train leaves to carry its empties back to the Midwest for refill, the engine seen here will be at the back of the train because there is nowhere to go or to turn around if it heads east, as we shall see. This location is in west Turlock, 2 miles west of the SP (1876) and the TS end-of-track, and it is those 2 miles we'll explore in this geolink.



Westward view of the TS (1917), the light in the distance is same train as in the previous photo. Sidings and spurs provide rail access to various agricultural facilities in west Turlock.



Westward view of the TS (1917), same train as in the previous photo, barely visible by its light, and a quarter mile east of the sidings in the previous photo (between here and the train). Note that the trackside development here is becoming residential.



Eastward view of the TS (1917), same location as in the previous photo. Note the trackside residential development. The grain trains do not come this far east and I could find no evidence that any trains run this far east anymore; I saw no rolling stock east of here and saw none in satellite photos, and the track is rusty.



Westward view of the TS (1917), a quarter mile east of the previous location and one mile east of the grain train. The track has entered Castor Street and the residential area of central Turlock. The track splits in two and will split more as we head east into the old industrial TS end-of-track. Again, it doesn't look like trains come this far east anymore.



Eastward view of the same switch as in the previous photo. A non-residential building at the end of the street is the beginning of the old industrial TS end-of-track in Turlock.



Eastward view at the end of Castor Street and of the Turlock residential area. The two TS (1917) tracks have a crossover and split into spurs at the beginning of the old industrial TS end-of-track in Turlock. Note the switch in the residential yard to the right. I want that!



Same location as previous, with a better view of the residential switch!





Westward view at the end of the Turlock residential area, where the two tracks become four. The switch in the residential yard next to the telephone pole is the same one as in the previous photo.



One of several spurs in the old industrial area of Turlock, any one of which could claim the honor of being the TS (1917) end-of-track.



Another TS spur in the old industrial area of Turlock.



Yet another spur in the old industrial area of Turlock.



Back at the end of Castor Street, where the two TS tracks split into industrial spurs, the northernmost of the spurs headed northwest up B Street a quarter mile to the the curved track in the foreground. The track on B Street has been removed except for the very end, seen in this northwestward view. The straight trackage in the distance is the SP (1876), the closer and lower of the two tracks is a siding. The TS track in the foreground once continued to the right as a second siding, which still has track on it farther to the right (next photo). The TS was always controlled by the UP, the SP's arch rival, and I am not sure when or how this former connection between the SP and TS/UP worked.



Northwestward view of the SP (1876) at Turlock, a third of a mile southeast of the previous location. The SP (now UP) mainline and siding split just past the road crossing, and the siding splits into a second siding visible in front of the cylinders on the left (west) of the siding. That second siding once connected to the TS (1917), but the tracks are now partially removed (previous photo).