



On May 19, 1881, Southern Pacific was the first railroad to reach El Paso, Texas, beating the rival Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, whose subsidiary railroads were building south from Raton Pass.

This southeast view shows the double SP tracks at Anapra, New Mexico, about 6 miles west of El Paso. The double tracks northwest of Anapra split east of Anapra and are up to 1,000 feet apart before they converge approaching El Paso. I believe the upper, more distant grade is the El Paso & Southwestern grade, which SP leased in 1924 and purchased in 1955.



In 1878, the AT&SF built from Colorado to Raton Pass and was the first railroad in New Mexico. Building to the south and west from Raton Pass was performed under other names as affiliates, subsidiaries, joint ventures, or other railroads. Affiliate New Mexico & Southern Pacific completed the line from Raton Pass to Albuquerque in 1880 and in 1881 the NM&SP and AT&SF subsidiary Rio Grande, Mexico & Pacific Railroad completed a line from Albuquerque to the new Southern Pacific connection at Deming, New Mexico, forming a new transcontinental main line. Also in 1881, the RGM&P (in New Mexico) and the AT&SF subsidiary Rio Grande & El Paso (in Texas) completed a line from a branch of the new Deming route at Rincon, New Mexico, down the Rio Grande to El Paso. The AT&SF/RG&EP arrived in El Paso only a month and half after the SP.

The AT&SF/RG&EP tracks are in the foreground and the Rio Grande is to the left in this northwest view 4 miles northwest of downtown El Paso. The two bridges are the SP (now Union Pacific); the northern bridge is or more likely replaced the original 1881 SP crossing and the southern (closer) bridge is or more likely replaced the original 1902 EP&SW crossing. Note the hills on the opposite bank of the Rio Grande (in Mexico) and the base of a slope to the right (in the U.S.); this is the narrow pass ("el paso") through the Franklin Mountains – a water gap – that made El Paso and Ciudad Juarez across the river centers of transportation.



Another view of three of the four railroads to service El Paso (the forth being the El Paso & Northeastern). The AT&SF/RG&EP is in the foreground on the Rio Grande floodplain, the SP on the distant bridge, and the EP&SW on the near bridge. Southeastward, these three lines merge and become parallel along the U.S. side of the Rio Grande. In El Paso, the AT&SF/RG&EP (now BNSF) line is closest to the Rio Grande and connects across the Rio Grande with the 1884 Mexican Central Railroad (now Ferromex), the EP&SW ends in a maze of SP lines that connect to the EP&NE, and the SP mainline continues southeast out of El Paso to points east.



The motivations for a railroad north of El Paso included access to coal deposits for fuel for the city of El Paso and timber in the Sacramento Mountains. The first attempt to build a railroad north from El Paso and into the Tularosa Valley came in 1885 when the El Paso, St. Louis & Chicago Railway & Telegraph Company prepared a 5 mile roadbed. In 1888, some of the partially prepared right-of-way was incorporated into the Kansas City, El Paso & Mexico Railroad, which built 10 miles of track, graded another 21 miles, and operated a few excursion trains before lawsuits were filed by the Texas & Pacific Railway for unpaid bills for delivery of the KCEP&M's construction materials. In 1892, the T&P purchased the stalled KCEP&M, but did not resume construction.

A Mr. Charles Eddy had been in contact with the leadership of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad -- which was evaluating possible routes in New Mexico -- but he was unsuccessful in his pitch to connect their railroad to El Paso. In early 1897, Eddy led potential investors from Pennsylvania on a camping trip in the Tularosa Valley and received financial backing. In October 1897, Eddy incorporated the El Paso & Northeastern Railroad and in 1898, using part of the KCEP&M's grade, the EP&NE completed an 85-mile line north to a ranch owned by Eddy, where the town of Alamogordo was being platted in anticipation of the railroad. In 1899, the EP&NE reached Carrozo and opened a 21 mile branch from Carrizozo east to Capitan. With an operational railroad in place, Eddy was gained the attentions of the CRI&P leadership, which agreed in December 1900 that the EP&NE would meet the CRI&P in Santa Rosa, New Mexico. Eddy incorporated the El Paso & Rock Island Railway to build the 128 miles from Carrizozo to Santa Rosa, which was completed in February 1902 and met the CRI&P, which completed its line to Santa Rosa in the same year under the name Chicago, Rock & El Paso Railway. The joining of rails in Santa Rosa marked the opening of a new transcontinental route that gave the CRI&P "the shortest line from Chicago and Kansas City to El Paso and Mexico, and by way of the Southern Pacific to Los Angeles." The coal deposits on the route proved to be a disappointment, so in 1903 the EP&NE-controlled Dawson Railway was completed from a junction with the CRI&P at Tucumcari (east of map area) northwest to the Dawson coalfields. The El Paso & Southwestern purchased all EP&NE holdings in July 1905, which in turn merged into the SP in 1924 via lease and later sale.

Northward view of the southern end of the EP&NE in downtown El Paso. The initial roadbed here was graded by the El Paso, St. Louis & Chicago Railway & Telegraph Company in 1885.



Southward view of EP&NE wye in downtown El Paso, same location as previous. The elevated highway is I-10, which parallels the SP in the Southwest, and the SP (now Union Pacific) mainline is just beyond the I-10.



An eastbound UP train switches onto the EP&NE (now UP) line at the El Paso wye; the second leg of the wye is in the foreground.



Three miles north of downtown El Paso, the EP&NE has a branch that heads southeast and joins the SP mainline 2 miles east of downtown. There is not a wye, just one switch onto the SP mainline in the eastbound direction, shown in this southeastward view with a train on the SP (now UP) mainline. This branch was likely built by SP after 1924 and essentially replaced the eastern leg of the original EP&NE wye (in the foreground of the previous photo).



Northward view, at the same location as above, of the SP branch from the former EP&NE line in north El Paso to the SP eastbound mainline. There are short spurs to the refinery in the distance.