



Oakland, California, is the point on the east side of San Francisco Bay directly east of the Golden Gate (the entrance to San Francisco Bay). In the 1860's, this made Oakland the ideal location for the west coast port of the transcontinental railroad. The alternative was San Francisco, which is 3 miles across the bay and about 50 miles by rail west of Oakland. The first railroad to connect Oakland to the transcontinental railroad was the Western Pacific, which was formed in December 1862 by a group associated with the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad (1864); their goal was to build a railroad connecting San Jose to Sacramento with the plan that the first transcontinental railroad would follow the WP from Sacramento to San Jose, where passengers and freight would continue to San Francisco on the SF&SJ (1864). In October 1864, the Central Pacific Railroad assigned all its rights under the Pacific Railway Act to the WP for the route between Sacramento and San Jose. In 1866, the first 20 miles from San Jose had been completed when funding problems halted construction. Part of the difficulty was that federal land grants were not available where Mexican land grants had previously been made.

By 1867 the CP finally realized that the route via San Jose to San Francisco was too long and that it would be better to change to a route to Oakland and from there use ferries to access San Francisco. The CP bought the WP and construction started again in the spring of 1867. The railroad reached San Leandro in 1869, where it joined the local San Francisco & Alameda Railroad (not shown separately on the map) and used its tracks for 4 miles to Alameda on the San Francisco Bay just south of Oakland. The first transcontinental train to reach Pacific tidewater arrived at the SF&A's Alameda Pier on September 6, 1869, four months after completion of the transcontinental railroad. Two months later the rail connection to the local San Francisco & Oakland Railroad (not shown separately on the map) was in place and the CP's transcontinental trains now ran through Oakland. In 1870, the WP was absorbed into the CP.

Other railroads followed. In 1878, the Southern Pacific completed its San Pablo & Tulare Railroad to Oakland via the north San Francisco Bay. In 1900, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe's San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley Railroad completed a line from Stockton to its new port at Richmond, 9 miles north of Oakland. In 1909, the Union Pacific accessed Oakland when its Western Pacific Railroad (the second by that name) was completed between Oakland and Salt Lake City, Utah. The part of the WP (1909) route from Sacramento to Oakland with a branch to San Jose closely parallels and in a few places crosses the original WP (1869) alignment.

Eastward view of the UP's yard at the Port of Oakland, the Oakland skyline in the distance. The UP took over all railroads serving the Port, including all former WP (1869), SP&T (1878), and WP (1909) trackage. The tracks in this view approach Oakland from the south and represent the two WP's.





Northwestward view of the UP's yard at the Port of Oakland, same location as previous. The giant cranes that transfer containers between ship and railroad are visible in the left distance. Although the yard trackage has been expanded and re-aligned, the tracks in the foreground represent the two WP's and connect with tracks from the north that represent the SP&T (1878).



Eastward view of abandon trackage at the westernmost point of land at the Port. These tracks only hint at the history of railroad realignments at the Port of Oakland, especially following the conversion from direct loading of ships, as these bayside tracks attest, to container loading, as the cranes and containers in the distance attest.



Now we are one mile southeast of the Port, on the waterfront at downtown Oakland. The tracks running on Embarcadero Street are on the WP (1909) alignment. The tracks are now part of the Capitol Corridor, a passenger rail line that opened in 1991 to connect California's first state capitol, San Jose, with the current capitol, Sacramento. The 168-mile route is operated by Amtrak, but in Oakland is apparently maintained by UP; I don't know how much if any freight traffic still uses this track. I think most of not all Oakland freight heads north via the SP&T (1878) route.

