



In October 1902, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad incorporated the Eastern Railway of New Mexico and began construction of the “Belen Cutoff” the next January. The entire line was completed to the Atlantic & Pacific route at Dalies, New Mexico, in July 1908, allowing through freight trains to bypass the original AT&SF-A&P route via Raton Pass. The ERNM Belen Cutoff shortened the distance from Chicago to Belen by only six miles, however it decreased the average grade from 158 feet per mile through Raton Pass to 66 feet per mile. Today, the combined California Southern-Southern Pacific Mojave Branch-A&P-ERNM line is the western part of the “Southern Transcon” and is the premiere transcontinental route in the Southwest.

About 25 miles southeast of Belen, a mile-long container train is lost on the alluvial fan on the east side of the Rio Grande Rift Valley. The 10,000-foot Manzano Mountains are a normal fault bounding the eastern side of the rift valley.



About 5 miles east of the previous photo, a BNSF container train climbs out of the Rio Grande Rift Valley to a low point between the Manzano Mountains north of the ERNM line and the Los Pinos Mountains to the south. Note double track and all concrete ties. Once past these mountains, the line has clear sailing across the Great Plains.