



When the Southern Pacific laid its first tracks in the early 1870's and built southward from northern California through the Central Valley then over Tehachapi Pass to southern California, its destination was El Paso, Texas, to build the southernmost transcontinental route identified in the 1855 Pacific Railroad surveys. Once over the Pacific Crest at Tehachapi Pass, the most direct route would have been to build southeastward to Cajon Pass then eastward over San Geronio Pass on the 1855 "Southern Pacific" transcontinental route. However, LA business interests persuaded the SP to build instead a more difficult route southward over Soledad Pass to LA, then east to San Geronio Pass and El Paso. Construction proceeded southward from Tehachapi Pass and also northward 43 miles from near this location in LA through a 7,000-foot tunnel to a point called Lang, where the rails were joined on September 5, 1876, with a golden spike ceremony. Thus LA was connected to the national rail network.

Los Angeles is the most populous city in the Southwest and has the busiest ports. LA is a complex rail center with numerous trunk lines and a complex history of re-alignments, re-uses (e.g. commuter rail), shared tracks, short connectors, re-development of abandoned grades, and many spurs, not to mention the general difficulty of accessing railroads in an urban area, so it is no easy task to georailfan LA. I am working on a larger scale map of LA railroad history, but in the meanwhile this geolink will provide a sampling of LA railroads.

This photo encompasses the most important railroad location in southern California, the southern end of the SP's 1876 line to LA. This southward view at downtown LA features the concrete-lined channel of the Los Angeles River, and the downtown skyscrapers are just to the right (west) of the image. The track on the far (west) side of the river is the SP (now Union Pacific) main line and the bridge in the distance is the start of the SP route to El Paso. These lines have certainly been re-aligned and re-built, but I haven't researched that history.

The track in the foreground is the Los Angeles Terminal Railway, earlier known as the Pasadena Railway and unofficially as the Altadena Railway. The initial line was completed between Altadena and Pasadena in 1888 and this track connected the line to San Pedro by 1891 (the LAT is not shown on the Southwest Railroad History Map).



Closer view of the SP bridge, same location as above, with the LAT in the foreground.



Northward view of the LAT, same location as above.



Northward view a half mile north of previous location, the LAT in the foreground, the Los Angeles River, the SP barely visible on far (west) bank near the crane, and freeways crisscrossing the entire scene. Note the bedrock slopes on either side of the Los Angeles River water gap, which is clearly a transportation corridor.



Westward view of downtown LA, a half mile east of the SP bridge in the first photo. This bolted track is not the SP main line, but rather is part of a huge yard used to assemble container trains.



Westward view of the east end of the SP/UP yard in east LA, 3/4 mile east of the SP bridge in the first photo. The nearest, bolted track is the only remaining siding and continues about one mile east from here, after which the double, welded track of the SP/UP main line continues to points east.



The Los Angeles Junction Railway was built in the 1920's as the switching railroad for the new Central Manufacturing District, located 3 miles south of downtown LA. The LAJ operates in the almost 100 percent industrial cities of Vernon (this location), Maywood, Bell, and Commerce. Today, the LAJ is a subsidiary of the BNSF Railway and provides rail switching service for UP and BNSF trains on 64 miles of track.

The City of Vernon is criss-crossed with spurs and industries that make for some good urban georailfanning. The various spurs originate from this trunk line.



LAJ spur to an industrial classification yard.





LAJ spurs crisscross the streets of Vernon.



LAJ spur with a siding and litter.



Unusable LAJ spur crossing a street in Vernon.



Overgrown and rusty LAJ spur.



Another overgrown and rusty LAJ spur and sidings.



LAJ active line and sidings.