



This is the starting point of the first railroad in southern California, the Los Angeles & San Pedro Railroad, built in 1868 and 1869. San Pedro makes a natural harbor because of its location on the eastern, leeward side of the rocky Palos Verdes Peninsula. Like all the early railroads, this 21-mile road connected an inland hub, in this case Los Angeles, with a shipping harbor, in this case San Pedro. The LA&SP was the brainchild of Phineas Banning, an entrepreneur and political operator. Banning made some of the first improvements to the harbor, dredging a channel and building a wharf. As a California state senator, Banning sponsored a bill authorizing the City and County of Los Angeles to finance construction of a railroad to the harbor. The city and county obliged and then awarded Banning the contract to construct the line. When it opened on October 26, 1869, a crowd of 1,500, roughly one-quarter of LA's population at the time, converged on the rail depot at Alameda and Commercial in downtown LA to celebrate. The LA&SP was purchased by the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1873 (three years before the SP arrived in LA and with it access to the national rail network). By 1885, commerce in San Pedro had skyrocketed to 500,000 tons of import and export cargo annually.

In 1906, the City of Los Angeles annexed a 16-mile strip of land around San Pedro Bay and the following year founded the Port of Los Angeles. In 1911-12, a breakwater was built, the channel was widened and dredged, and the SP completed its major wharf in San Pedro. In subsequent years, several major railroads were built to the newer, bigger port facilities around San Pedro Bay east of the town of San Pedro. The famous Pacific Electric Railway Red Car system, operated from around 1910 until 1961 over more than 1,000 miles of track throughout the LA area, used these tracks to access San Pedro. By the 1960's, the Red Cars stopped running and the SP's San Pedro facilities fell into disuse as modern intermodal container facilities were built east of San Pedro across the main channel. In July 2003, the Port of Los Angeles used 1.5 miles of track along the San Pedro waterfront to operate a heritage streetcar line, the Waterfront Red Car Line; service ended on September 27, 2015, due to major construction projects, but resumption of service is planned.

The yard sidings in this southward view is the main yard in downtown San Pedro. The cut slope on the right (west) is the rocky Palos Verdes Peninsula on which San Pedro is built, and the flat yard area is a cut grade with harbor fill to the left, where the original San Pedro wharf facilities of the 1800's were located. I suspect the current yard took shape during the SP's 1911-1912 upgrades.





Eastward view of the LA&SP, a few blocks north of previous location. The flat cut-and-fill area was a busy port in the late 1800's. Today, the San Pedro waterfront is a tourist and cultural center, including the home of the USS Iowa, its 16-inch guns and superstructure visible in the distance. The large cranes beyond are part of the Port of Los Angeles' massive intermodal container transfer facilities, where Asian freighters transfer containers to UP and BNSF transcontinental trains.





Now we are back at the north end of the LA&SP/SP yard, same location as the first photo. In this southward view, the single track that enters from the north splits into multiples sidings along the downtown San Pedro waterfront.





Eastward view of the same switch as previous photo. The large cranes in the distance across the main channel are part of the Port of the current intermodal container facilities, which replaced this rail yard.





Southward view of the initial track split, same location as previous.





Southward view of the San Pedro yard.





Northward view of the San Pedro yard, with some sort of abandoned facility in the foreground.





Westward view of San Pedro yard, near same location as previous. The art deco San Pedro Post Office is above the rocky bluff that makes this a natural harbor.





Southward view of the south end of the San Pedro yard. The track splits in two in the distance to access wharf facilities built by the SP south of San Pedro in 1911-1912.





Southward view of the same switch as in previous photo. The track splits in two to access wharf facilities built by the SP south of San Pedro in 1911-1912. I'm not sure what the lights do, especially since nothing runs on this railroad.





Southward view, south of the San Pedro yard. Note the two tracks to access wharf facilities built by the SP south of San Pedro in 1911-1912. There are two major wharfs, built on two peninsulas of artificial fill that I believe were the main products of the SP's 1911-1912 expansion. This is probably south of the south end of the original LA&SP.





Northward view about 1,000 feet south of the previous location. All the track in this view is track, sidings, and spurs for the western of the two major wharfs built by the SP in 1911-1912. The split with the branch for the eastern wharf is just out of site in the distance.





This is the end-of-track of the western of the two major wharfs built by the SP in 1911-1912, about a quarter mile south of the split with the eastern branch. The small depot in disrepair is the last stop on the closed Waterfront Red Car Line.





Northward view at same location as above. The track once extended almost a mile farther south to the end of the artificial-fill wharf.





Now we are over at the eastern of the two major wharfs built by the SP in 1911-1912, about a quarter mile south of the split with the western branch. In this southward view, the single track crosses East 22nd Street before splitting into sidings and spurs for the now-abandoned wharf facilities that line both sides of the track in the distance.





Southward view about 1,000 feet south of previous location, with sidings and spurs for the now-abandoned wharf facilities.





Northward view near previous location, featuring a massive, now-abandoned loading facility. The water and wharf are on the other side of the building. This was replaced in the 1960's by containers and cranes east of San Pedro.





Southward view of the south end-of-track of the eastern of the two major wharfs built by the SP in 1911-1912. This is 4,000 feet south of the split with the western wharf branch line and a mile south of the San Pedro yard.