



San Francisco was established in 1776 when Spain built a mission and a military fort, the Presidio of San Francisco. In 1846, during the Mexican–American War, US Navy Commodore John Sloat claimed California for the United States, and in 1848 San Francisco and the rest of California officially became American by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Gold was discovered in the same year followed by the Comstock Lode silver discovery in Nevada in 1859, both of which brought commerce to San Francisco and its port. San Francisco quickly became the largest city west of the Mississippi River (until it was surpassed in 1920 by Los Angeles). But San Francisco is still known in California as “*The City*,” although it was never an important railroad city, being surpassed by Oakland and Richmond as the major Bay Area railheads. San Francisco was served by one of California’s earliest railroads, the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad (1864), but to date that is still the only railroad to connect San Francisco with the outside rail network. San Francisco was never an important railroad town because it is at the north tip of a peninsula and the only viable railroad approach is along the bay side of the peninsula. The Ocean Shore Railroad tried building along the Pacific coastline between Santa Cruz and The City, but that enterprise ended in 1908 before completing the line across the most rugged part of the coast.

Plans for a railroad to San Francisco go back to the gold rush, starting with the creation of the Pacific & Atlantic Railroad Company in 1851. The route along the bay was surveyed, but the P&A was unable to raise funds for construction. The San Francisco & San Jose Railroad Company was incorporated in 1859 and then again in 1860 with Timothy Dame as president. Grading and construction south from San Francisco began on July 15, 1861, and the SF&SJ opened for service to Menlo Park in 1863 (about 30 miles). The first train included 400 passengers in six passenger cars along with two baggage cars and one freight car pulled by two locomotives. Among the passengers enjoying that day’s excursion was Governor Leland Stanford (one of the “Big Four” of the fledgling Central Pacific Railroad). The SF&SJ was completed to San Jose on January 16, 1864. In February 1864, the SF&SJ advertised regular passenger service on four trains per day, with the trip scheduled to take two hours and twenty minutes. The Southern Pacific Railroad acquired the SF&SJ in March 1868, which together with the SP’s acquisition of the Western Pacific (1869) connected San Francisco with the transcontinental railroad at Sacramento (CP [1869]). The SF&SJ alignment became known as the SP Monterey Line, which the SP upgraded in 1907 with a second track and a re-alignment of the line between San Francisco and San Bruno to the east of San Bruno Mountain (Bayshore Cutoff; not shown separately on the SWRRH Map). Today’s BART follows the original SF&SJ alignment west of San Bruno Mountain.

The SP discontinued passenger service in 1977 and the State of California took over financial responsibility in 1980. The SP eventually sold the entire right-of-way to the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board in 1991, which currently operates the commuter rail service known as Caltrain over the route. The Union Pacific Railroad (SP successor) maintains trackage rights over the line for freight traffic.

Northward view of the current end-of-track of the SF&SJ (1864) alignment. This is the Caltrain end-of-the-line at its 4th & King Street Station. The first SF&SJ terminal was 3 miles southwest of this location at 18th and Valencia Streets, but soon after opening the line was extended northeastward to this location. In 1875, a larger terminal was built at Townsend Street (which is the street just north of the Caltrain yard; in this view it is the street with parked cars and buildings beyond the fence line) between 4th and 5th Streets (the tracks in the Caltrain yard end at 4th Street, and 5th Street T’s into Townsend at the far left of the photo where cars are parked). In 1914, a new Mission Revival style station was built at Fourth and Townsend to handle the anticipated Panama Pacific Exposition traffic (at the far corner of the yard in above view). All these stations are now gone.



Southward view of the SP Monterey Line at South San Francisco, 8 miles south of the previous location. This location is 2 miles north of the southern end of the 1907 Bayshore Cutoff, so the mainline here is new 1907 construction and the SF&SJ (1864) alignment is one mile to the west. The mainline is double track with concrete ties (the closer of the two mainline tracks is visible to the right) and there are two closer sidings with wooden ties. A rusty industrial spur connects to the closest siding via a single switch (no wye). This industrial spur is one of several that branch off of the 1907 realignment, but I am not sure how much UP freight traffic, if any, currently exists this far north.



Southwestward view of the same rusty industrial spur off of the SP Monterey Line Bayshore Cutoff, a few steps east of the previous location. The spur once extended 1.5 miles east to San Bruno Point (on San Francisco Bay) but has been cut back about to about half that distance.



Northeastward view of the same rusty industrial spur at the same location as previous. The alignment curves due east toward San Bruno Point. Note the old parallel track to the left of the spur in the distance, and the ties of this abandoned siding still in place in the foreground.



Eastward view of the same industrial spur, 600 feet east of the previous location. The track ends in the distance, and one of any sub-spurs branches off the main spur to serve now-gone industrial customers. The area is being re-developed as modern commercial space, little if any of which uses rail transport.



Remnants of track that only hint at the network of spurs that once served industries in South San Francisco.



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Now we're back in San Francisco at Fisherman's Wharf to explore a bit of the Belt Railroad (not shown on the SWRRH Map). The San Francisco Belt Railroad was a short-line railroad along the Embarcadero in San Francisco. It began in 1889 and operated for 80 years as the State Belt Railroad; the line was renamed when the City bought the Port of San Francisco in 1969. The railroad connected the Port of San Francisco to many waterfront docks and to industries and warehouses that were adjacent to the waterfront. In its early years the railroad operated dual-gauged track to accommodate railcars from two narrow gauge railroads, the North Pacific Coast (1886n) and South Pacific Coast (1880n), as well as standard gauge railroads. It would eventually have 67 miles of trackage within the City used to switch railroad cars from other railroads to points along its system within The City and vice versa. At its southern end the line connected with the Southern Pacific (former SF&SJ [1864]), at the location of the first photo in this geolink. Today's San Francisco Municipal Railway's "E" Embarcadero line now traverses this route. At the northern end, a train ferry slip at Pier 43 (this location) allowed interchange with the Northwestern Pacific (originally the San Francisco & North Pacific [1879] and connecting lines), the Western Pacific (1909), and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (originally the San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley [1900]) railroads. With a dwindling market for local freight service by rail, the San Francisco Belt Railroad ceased operation in 1993 and later abandoned.

Northwestward view of the Pier 43 train ferry slip for the San Francisco Belt Railroad's connections to North Bay and East Bay railroads. The Ferry Arch is a decorated hoisting tower for loading and unloading rail cars on and off ferries. The arch was built in 1914 and the wood pier was replaced in 1996. The rails are left in place and preserve a bit of railroad history. The rail spacing is not dual gauge, but presumably were originally dual gauge to accommodate rolling stock from the North Pacific Coast Railroad (1886n). These are three standard gauge tracks, but obviously are too close to the center track accommodate three cars at once. I'm not sure exactly how these close-packed tracks were used.





Closer view of the Pier 43 Ferry Arch and the northern terminus of the Belt Railroad.



An even closer view of the three standard gauge, close-packed tracks.