



In September 1868, while the Central Pacific was building its part of the first transcontinental railroad in Nevada and Utah, the CP owners (known as the Big Four: Charles Crocker, Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, and C. P. Huntington) purchased the Southern Pacific Railroad (which was only a charter, no construction had started). However, to build the southernmost of the Pacific Railroad surveys from southern California to El Paso, Texas, the SP under the Big Four did not bring supplies to southern California by ship and build the line east from there as the CP was doing for the central transcontinental survey. Instead, the SP first built the Tehachapi Pass route to southern California. On December 31, 1869, the SP commenced its first construction project at a new junction with the newly completed Western Pacific Railroad (1869); the junction was dubbed Lathrop, and the SP built southward through this location at Modesto and completed the line to Los Angeles in 1876. From LA the SP kept going to El Paso and points east, thus dominating Southwest railroading for more than a century. In this northward view at Modesto, California, the container train is speeding southeastward on the SP (1876), 20 miles southwest of Lathrop.

The track that winds toward the viewer is the Tidewater Southern Railway. The TS was incorporated in 1910 to build an interurban system, connecting to the Central California Traction Company, Western Pacific Railroad (1909), Southern Pacific Railroad, and Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway. Construction southward from Stockton began in 1911, and service to Modesto – to a point 1 mile northwest of this location -- began in 1912 with steam locomotive-hauled passenger service. Electrification using an overhead system was completed in 1913 and regular electric car service began on a 2-hour schedule; the TS also operated extensive freight service. In 1916, the railway was extended 8 miles south from this location to a curve in the track known as Hatch, then turned due east 6 miles to Turlock, California, on the SP (1876). In 1917, the TS built an 8-mile branch southeast from Hatch to the agricultural center of Hilmar. The TS south of Modesto was never electrified and never operated passenger service. The Western Pacific Railroad (1909) began influencing TS actions as early as 1913 and purchased most of the TS stock by 1917, after which the TS was operated as a WP subsidiary.

Passenger service on the TS ended in 1932 and the railway operated solely as a freight line, but carried some passengers in the cabooses. The electrification north of Modesto was dismantled in the 1960's, after which the TS became increasingly operated by WP locomotives and crews. The TS's traffic, however, expanded with the construction of several grain silos near Turlock, used to supply animal feed, eventually required long unit trains to bring in the volume of Midwestern grain required to fill them. By the late 1970's, these trains were the main traffic on the line and led to much anger from the city of Modesto, where the mainline occupied the middle of 9th Street, the major north-south roadway. The end for the TS as a company came in 1983 when the Union Pacific absorbed the WP and in 1986 the TS corporate structure was dismantled. Since 1983, the TS trackage has been the Tidewater Subdivision of the UP. In 2001, the line north of Modesto through 9th Street was abandoned, severing the railroad in the middle, but still, of all the former interurban railroads in California, the former TS retains the highest percentage of still-operating trackage.

Northward view of the SP (1876), now UP, with a speeding container train, at its junction with the TS, winding toward the viewer, at the south end of Modesto. This junction was likely constructed in 2001, when the TS north of this junction was abandoned. The closest curve brings the TS into north-northwest alignment just to the right of the photo. That alignment projects northward and crosses the SP (1876) just to the left of the photo. The Turlock-bound grain trains now bypass the north end of the TS (1917) and enter the former TS rails from the SP (1876) at this location.



Closer view of the junction of the TS (1917) and SP (1876). Prior to 2001, the TS crossed the SP at the location of the overpass for California Highway 99. Beyond the overpass is a short (1,000-foot) spur on the TS alignment, north of which the TS was abandoned in 2001 to the northern outskirts of Modesto.





South-southeastward view of the TS, a few steps south of previous photos.



Eastward view at the same location as previous photo, the TS (1917) passes a feed lot.





Southeastward view at central Modesto, 1 mile north of the previous location. The SP (1876) main line is in the foreground with sidings to the left. In the next photo, we will take a closer look at the branch line in the center distance.



Westward view of the branch line seen in the previous photo. The SP (1876) mainline is on the other side of the propane tanks. This branch runs northeastward along B Street in Modesto, then turns due west for 5 miles to the Empire, California, on the San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley Railroad (1896)(now BNSF), with many industrial spurs along the way (this branch is too short to show separately on the map). I do not know who built this branch or when.



Same view as previous photo, but from a few steps back (note location propane tanks for reference). The remnants of old rails in the gravel lot in the foreground appear to be old spurs.





Northeastward view of the branch line seen in the previous photo, just where it comes out of the curve and heads northeast up B Street. The traffic light is 9th Street. The TS (1917) ran on 9th Street until the track was removed in 2001. Presumably, prior to 2001, there was a grade crossing within the intersection of B and 9th streets, but there is no evidence on the ground of the former TS tracks as 9th Street was apparently completely repaved.