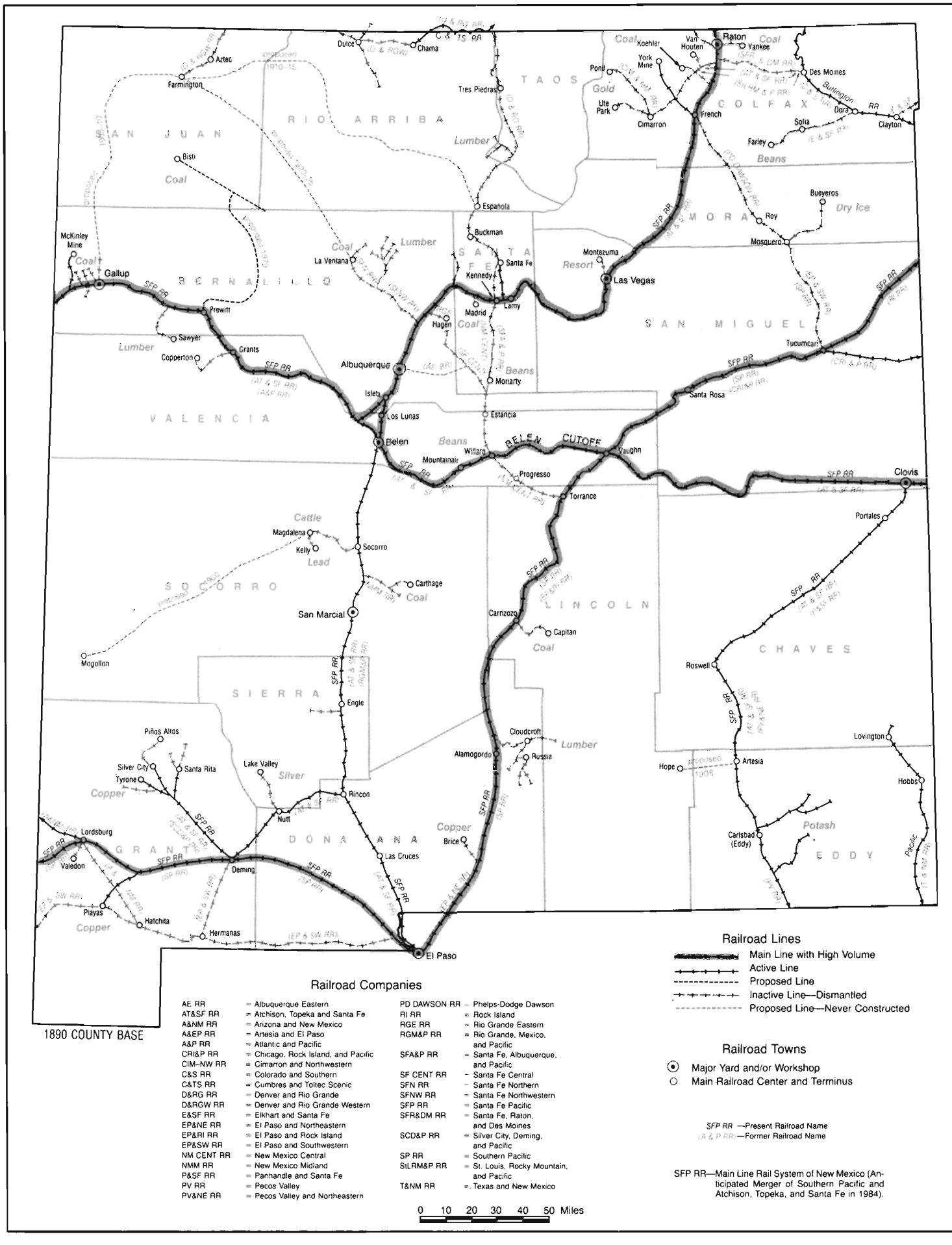
# Railroad Development



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The history of railroading in New Mexico can be viewed as the story of the growth of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad (henceforth called the Santa Fe) and the reaction of its competitors to this expansion. The Santa Fe linked New Mexico to the Pacific and the Midwest and was the only rail system to completely traverse the state in both north-south and east-west directions. Its routing also determined the eventual routes of the Southern Pacific and the Denver and Rio Grande, its two major competitors within the state. Acquisitions of small lines by companies seeking to gain new rights-of-way and alliances formed between competing companies were often attempts to develop a system within New Mexico capable of competing with the Santa Fe.

The original intent was to construct the Santa Fe rail line along the main route of the famous Santa Fe Trail, from Kansas to Santa Fe via Trinidad, Colorado, and then southward to Mexico City. As construction of the railroad proceeded in segments from the western terminus of the Kansas Pacific, the Santa Fe Trail shrank in length and in economic importance to New Mexico. The final eastern terminus of the stage and freight service on the trail was Las Vegas until 1880, when the railroad was extended to Lamy.

The entry of the Santa Fe Railroad into the New Mexico territory was not easy. The physical barrier of the Raton Pass imposed severe construction difficulties on the financially strained company. At the same time the Santa Fe had to wage a small railroad war with the Denver and Rio Grande (D&RG) for right-of-way through the pass. The D&RG withdrew from the conflict and shifted its narrow gauge track farther west, entering New Mexico along the headwaters of the Rio Grande. The Santa Fe also ran into an unreceptive territorial legislature that demanded a financial construction guarantee beyond the capability of the company. This political barrier was circumvented only by locating a previous railroad bill that enabled the railroad to enter the territory under the name of a New Mexico corporation.

In 1878 the first Santa Fe locomotive entered New Mexico under the charter of the "New Mexico and Southern Pacific Company." By September 1879 the Raton tunnel was completed and the rail line advanced rapidly southward, reaching Lamy by February 1880. The first workshops and switching yards of the railroad in New Mexico were located at Las Vegas. The city of Santa Fe, which gave its name to the railroad company, is located in a basin that is undesirable terrain for through-line railroad construction. So the territorial capital, and the largest city in the Southwest in 1880, was an 18–mile branch line away from the main route of the Santa Fe at Lamy. In 1880 the railroad reached Albuquerque (April) and San Marcial (October), where additional workshops and switching yards were constructed. San Marcial was completely destroyed by floods in 1929; little evidence remains of the former railroad center. By 1881 the Santa Fe junctioned at Rincon and extended to Deming (March) and El Paso (June).

Major railroad construction occurred in 1880 in New Mexico as the Southern Pacific, the second railroad to enter the territory, proceeded southeastward from San Francisco through southern Arizona to El Paso, where connection was made with the Texas and Pacific Railroad. In 1880 the Southern Pacific reached Lordsburg (October) and Deming (December) and entered El Paso a month before the Santa Fe did (May 1881). The Denver and Rio Grande entered New Mexico in 1880 by two routes: one from Alamosa, Colorado, to Española (the "Chili Line"), and the other from Antonito, Colorado, to Chama across the Cumbres Pass. The route that reached Española in 1880 was extended only to Buckman, on the western bank of the Rio Grande River, and did not cover the 15–mile difference to Santa Fe until 1886, the year the capitol became a main-line terminal. Also in 1880 the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company began construction from Isleta to Arizona after acquiring the massive land rights granted by the U.S. Congress to the bankrupt Atlantic and Pacific Railroad. The St. Louis and San Francisco was completed from the Rio Grande to Gallup and reached the Colorado River before the company went bankrupt. The line was acquired by the Santa Fe Railroad in 1897.

In 1890 the Pecos Valley Railroad completed a route along the Pecos River from a junction with the Texas and Pacific at Pecos, Texas, to the town of Eddy (Carlsbad). This service was extended to Roswell in 1894. The Pecos Valley Company was reorganized as the Pecos Valley and Northeastern and, combined with the Panhandle and Santa Fe Company, opened service through Clovis to Amarillo, Texas, in 1899. The Pecos River railroad system was acquired by the Santa Fe Railroad in 1901. Shortly after this acquisition the Santa Fe constructed the Belen Cutoff, connecting Clovis to Belen, a more direct route to Kansas than the mountainous northern route. The connection provided the Santa Fe with a complete east-west axis across the state, which is the most traveled line in New Mexico today, and made Belen the logical site for the Santa Fe Railway center of New Mexico. The importance of Clovis as a gateway to the east (as is Gallup on the west) made this small plains town a railway center and the location of the now abandoned Santa Fe technical training school.

Around 1900 the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad was constructed by the Phelps-Dodge Mining Corporation from its smelters in Arizona to the main line at El Paso. This company later connected to (and acquired) the El Paso and Rock Island that joined with the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific (henceforth called the Rock Island) at Santa Rosa in 1902. When good coking coal was discovered in 1901 at Dawson, near Cimarron, the Phelps-Dodge company constructed a railroad from Tucumcari to the coal fields, connecting with the Santa Fe at the main junction town of French. By 1908, all Phelps-Dodge railway holdings were incorporated under the name of El Paso and Southwestern. In 1924, the Southern Pacific acquired the El Paso and Southwestern and the Arizona and New Mexico railroads. The last main line to be constructed in New Mexico was the Texas and Northwestern, built to the oil-

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Main Line Rail Mileage* in New Mexico

| Year | Mileage | Year | Mileage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1880 | 643 | 1945 | 2583 |
| 1890 | 1284 | 1950 | 2464 |
| 1912 | 3002 | 1963 | 2164 |
| 1914 | 3124 | 1970 | 2046 |
| 1926 | 3096 | 1975 | 1984 |
| 1930 | 2981 | | |

*excluding sidings and switching yards

field centers of Lea County in 1928.

Numerous short feeder lines were built from the two major systems to places of varying economic importance. The Carthage branch (1906), La Ventana route (1933), Capitan route (1899), Russia and Cloudcroft Railway (1898), and several spurs around Raton and Gallup were built for the coal and timber used by the railroads and mining industries. Agricultural railroads, like the New Mexico Central (the "Pinto Line") and the Elkhart and Santa Fe, were main line feeder routes that opened the Estancia Valley and northeastern plains, respectively, to large-scale bean production.

Total main-line rail mileage in New Mexico appears to have peaked around 1914. After 1925 the abandonment and dismantling of unprofitable routes continued at a fairly steady rate (25 miles per year) until 1970. Extensive line abandonment occurred during the Depression years of the 1930s, when the Southern Pacific discontinued service on all connections between the former El Paso and Southwestern route and its existing main line through Deming. The Santa Fe abandoned service to Cimarron and Des Moines, and the aforementioned "beanfield" railroads went out of business. When oil replaced coal as engine fuel after World War II, most of the rail lines to coal fields were abandoned, including the extension from Tucumcari to Dawson. The Denver and Rio Grande discontinued service from Alamosa to Santa Fe in the 1940s and completely closed its operations throughout northern New Mexico during the 1950s and 1960s.

Although railroads continue to close uneconomical branch services in the state, construction of new routes continues. At present, the Santa Fe has petitioned to construct the longest rail spur ever built in the state: from Prewitt (near Grants) to the strippable coal deposits near Bisti in the Chaco Basin. As coal attains new importance as an energy fuel following the 1970s oil shortage, there may be more railroad interest in the coal-rich area of northwestern New Mexico.

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