

SP's Commute Centennial 1864-1964



A Century of Service
on the Peninsula



A pioneer commute train at San Jose in 1866 is pulled by the "San Mateo," typical of the ornate woodburners of its day.

To Our Friendly Commuters:



It takes many skilled railroaders like those shown on this page to produce Southern Pacific's Peninsula service.

All of us are proud of this service and of the contribution it has made and is continuing to make to the phenomenal growth of the Peninsula.

We have been told that SP has the finest commute service in the country. We assure you we intend to keep it that way, just as long as you—our commuters—continue to need and use it.

Sincerely,
Bob Gilmore

*General Passenger
Traffic Manager*

It Started January 16, 1864

A gala celebration marked the completion of the first commute line in the West.



The era of the western commuter was born on January 16, 1864, when over two thousand men and women crowded aboard a special train on the inaugural trip from San Francisco to San Jose to celebrate the completion of the first railroad between those two cities.

On that day a hundred years ago the jubilant citizens of San Jose treated their San Francisco visitors to a barbecued beef feast, and toasts of champagne were drunk to the new San Francisco & San Jose Railroad (now SP). The train returned to San Francisco late that afternoon, but the celebration in San Jose continued for

days. They had a railroad! The San Francisco & San Jose Railroad, nearly 14 years in the planning and construction, was completed at a time when San Francisco's only linkage to the east was still by stage coach and sailing ship. It was not until five years later that the first transcontinental railroad was completed. Shortly after its initial run, the SF&SJ Railroad had two trains daily in operation, each way; the genesis of today's modern commute fleet. In those days the tracks from San Jose north to San Bruno ran along the present level route, but at San Bruno veered inland away from the bay to climb the San Bruno hills, ending at

Typical commuters of the 1880's wait on the platform at Redwood City for their daily train to San Francisco.



Peninsulans were rail commuters when stage coaches and sailing ships were still the only ways East.



Left: A Peninsula passenger train in 1884 near Oak Park (Burlingame).

SP's station at 4th and Townsend Streets, San Francisco, as it looked in 1879. This building was abandoned in 1889 and the station was moved to its present site.

the original San Francisco terminal, located at 18th and Valencia Streets.

When the railroad was opened, the area it served was sparsely populated, and towns like Millbrae, San Mateo, Belmont, Menlo Park and Mountain View, for example, were scarcely more than station stops. Palo Alto, today a thriving metropolis, home of Stanford University, wasn't founded until 1889 and didn't have a railroad station until 1896.

In 1870 the commute line, now boasting a roster of 20 locomotives, was absorbed by Southern Pacific. A few years later the San Francisco terminal was moved from Valencia Street to the Third and Townsend Streets area, where the present mission-style station (built to handle visitors to the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition) now stands.

At the turn of the century construction was started on a new water-level line into San Francisco from San Bruno, following the curve of the bay shore, and eliminating the steep grade over the San Bruno hills.



The new line, called "Bayshore Cut-off," was nearly ten miles long and cost more than \$9 million to construct. It was the most expensive railroad construction in history, per mile, but it brought the Peninsula ten minutes closer to San Francisco.

Construction of the line was halted temporarily in 1906 by the San Francisco earthquake and fire. During this emergency, Southern Pacific hauled in more than 1,400 cars of food and supplies to the beleaguered city and carried more than 224,000 passengers out of the area, all at no charge.

Time brought growth and expansion to the Peninsula. To accommodate the increasing number of commuters, SP's fleet grew larger, coaches were improved, and more powerful locomotives were brought

On the day of the San Francisco fire and earthquake of 1906, passengers wait at Valencia St., San Francisco, for trains to take them out of the area. SP evacuated thousands of people during the crisis.

into commute service. In 1940, commuters numbered 8,000; during World War II the figure rose to 13,000, and in 1954 SP trains carried 16,000 daily into the city, an all-time high.



Today, with competition of freeway improvements, and the growth of local shopping centers, present patronage is about 11,500.



Congratulations, SP!

" The entire Southern Pacific family of employees may well be proud . . . The service has been very dependable, the schedules maintained with precision, and the extra bonus for your passengers has been comfort, safety and convenience . . . As you embark on a second century of service, may I pass on to you our sincere appreciation for services rendered to the citizens of Santa Clara County."

Ralph H. Mehrkens, Chairman,
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

" From the beginning, this public convenience has been a major factor in the growth and development of our county, and today its importance is a vital part of the lives of thousands of our residents. May its success continue for the mutual benefit of everyone."

James V. Fitzgerald, Chairman,
San Mateo County Board of Supervisors

" No city in the country is more fortunate than San Francisco in the fine quality of commute service that links it with its two neighboring counties to the south . . . The rail commute service has been, continuously, a major factor in the progress of San Francisco and the entire Peninsula . . ."

William C. Blake, Supervisor,
City and County of San Francisco

" The Peninsula commute service of the Southern Pacific is one of the very few in the nation that has not appealed for city, county, state or federal subsidy. It is a tribute to the administration of your free enterprise organization that this service has been maintained and constantly improved . . ."

J. Arthur Younger, Member of Congress,
11th District (San Mateo County)

" Sincere congratulations. January 16, 1864, 100 years ago, was a landmark for San Mateo County residents. The Southern Pacific has been providing efficient mass transportation for us ever since . . ."

Richard J. Dolwig, State Senator,
21st District (San Mateo County)

" Certainly the Peninsula Commute service played a key role in the early development of San Mateo County. Today, a century later, it continues to be a very important factor in the county's rapid development. It is excellent service, and Southern Pacific is to be warmly congratulated on maintaining this consistently high standard . . ."

Carl A. Britschgi, Assemblyman,
26th District (San Mateo County)

Commute Service: 1964 Model



The Peninsula rail commuter is a special kind of person who values the time he spends in daily travel. He may spend it playing bridge, reading, dozing or merely indulging in errant thoughts. Which-ever of these ways he chooses to spend it, he figures he's put it to good and productive use—something he couldn't do while fighting traffic on the Bayshore Freeway.

Southern Pacific recognizes its commuters are special, and it consistently tries to produce a special kind of service for them. This philosophy has sparked a number of innovations, some of them since adopted by other railroads. Some of them are still SP exclusives. For example:

- Peak hour commute trains leave San Francisco on 3-minute headway, the first departures running non-stop to farthest stations, the next running non-stop to intermediate stations, and so forth, so that everyone gets home at just about the same time.

- Commuters had a hand in designing the double-deck cars. In addition to air-conditioning and tinted glass, they even have electric shaver outlets for late risers. Incidentally, these 31 cars cost about \$5 million.

- On-time performance is maintained 98% of the time, but when it's not, commuters are told why.





Left: SP's champion commuter is Milton Roller of Palo Alto who has been commuting by rail to San Francisco the past 64 years.

- Peninsula fares are the lowest per mile for all commuting in the country, averaging less than 2 cents for all classes of tickets, as against 2.56 cents to 3.17 cents in the Chicago and New York areas. (Monthly commute ticket from San Jose was \$20 in 1879. Today it's \$30.50, only 52% higher, while costs of everything else have increased many times over.)

- Ticket-by-mail plan has eased the rush at ticket windows. Colored tickets to indicate fare zones have simplified the conductor's job, with less disturbance to passengers.

We think we have the friendliest bunch of commuters anywhere in the country. Maybe it's just that they feel fortunate to live on the beautiful San Francisco Peninsula. We hope it's partly because they like our commute service.

In any event, they can be sure that Southern Pacific will continue its efforts to warrant their patronage.▲



Above: Articles left on commute trains end up in Lost and Found Department where SP makes heroic effort to locate owners. Below: Evening fleet at San Francisco readies for Peninsula run.

