

Transcontinental Railroad

When did Construction of the Railroad begin & where did it go?

Construction started in earnest in 1866 with the Union Pacific Railroad building west from Omaha, Nebraska and the Central Pacific Railroad, later known as the Southern Pacific Railroad, building east from Sacramento, California. In 1869, the railroads met at Promontory Point in Utah, and the country was united by the first continuous railroad line.



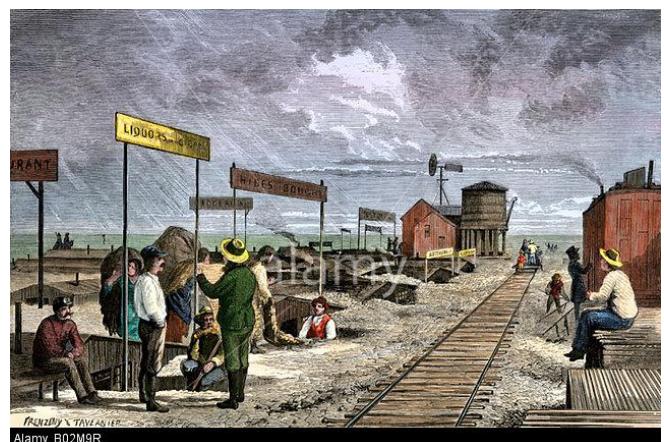
How did the Transcontinental Railroads change Population in the west?

The transcontinental railroad crossed more than 2,300 miles of mostly undeveloped land that the railroads wanted to populate in order to generate additional business. They initiated an extensive advertising program in the poorer areas of Europe, focusing in particular on Scandinavia, Ireland, and Italy, to bring immigrants to the empty land at very little cost. The immigrant movement that resulted generated the largest population boom in American history as millions poured into the country to claim free land along the railroad route, helping to settle the Prairie States and the West in the process.



How did the Transcontinental Railroad expand into an important network for business and people?

The congressional land grant that encouraged the building of the transcontinental railroad continued to be available to other Western railroad builders, resulting in six more railroads being built across the continent. By the end of the 19th century, people and freight could go almost anywhere in the country by train. Fruits and vegetables went from the farms to the cities, manufactured goods from cities to the farming areas. Even hogs, cattle, and oranges traveled long distances to reach new markets. The addition of sleeping and dining cars provided by such companies as the Pullman Palace Car Company allowed people to travel in comfort and sometimes even in luxury.



How did the Transcontinental Railroad create business growth and transform the U.S.?

It was the new industries spawned by the Industrial Revolution that gained the most from the railroads, however. Trains hauled everything for them: coal to fuel their electric power generation needs, steel and concrete to build their factories, raw materials to create their products, mass transit to bring their workers to work, freight cars to ship their products to market, and even trains to haul their waste to disposal sites. Without railroads, the Industrial Revolution would have fizzled, and America would still be an **agrarian** (Farming society) country.

Who help pay to the expensive network of railroads and did they help?

Despite these advances, the never-ending need for more capital to fund the growth of the railroads created excessive strains on America's financial markets, which in the financial panics of 1873 and 1893 led to railroad bankruptcies. Financial tycoons like Cornelius Vanderbilt, J.P. Morgan, and James J. Hill purchased the failing railroads and consolidated them with healthy railroads, building strong regional carriers that lasted through much of the 20th century, also accumulating massive financial wealth for themselves in the process.