

REPORT OF
Mayor's Advisory Committee

Consisting of
W. G. McADOO
NATHAN NEWBY
JOSEPH SCOTT

IN THE LOS ANGELES TERMINAL PROBLEM



Los Angeles, February 13, 1926

Los Angeles, California.

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Hon. George E. Cryer, Mayor,
City Hall,
Los Angeles, California.

Dear Mr. Mayor:

BY YOUR letter of December 26, 1924, you appointed the undersigned a committee to "investigate the union station problem; to confer with the railroad companies, and to submit, as promptly as possible, recommendations as to the wisest solution of the matter, not alone in the interest of the public, but in the interest of the carriers themselves."

We have, in conformity with your wishes, made an earnest effort to secure an amicable settlement of the long-standing controversy, but without success. We have also made a careful investigation of the problem, and now desire to submit our conclusions.

Ten years ago (in 1916) certain civic organizations applied to the Railroad Commission of California for an order requiring the railroads to eliminate certain dangerous grade crossings and to erect a union passenger station in the City of Los Angeles. At a later stage of the proceedings the City intervened in the case as an advocate of the union station plan. The railroads resisted the application, and the controversy has been carried successively through the California Railroad Commission, the Supreme Court of the State of California, the Supreme Court of the United States, and the Interstate Commerce Commission at Washington. At the end of ten years of litigation, the position of the matter is as follows:

The Interstate Commerce Commission has held that the plans of the Southern Pacific Railroad should be taken off Alameda Street, except for industrial freight switching; but that the public convenience and necessity require the construction by the Railroads of a union passenger station within the area bounded by Commercial Street, North Main Street, Redondo Street, Alhambra Avenue, and the Los Angeles River. The Interstate Commerce decision was limited to a determination merely of "the public convenience and necessity." The Commission did not order the railroads to construct a union passenger station, because, as stated in its decision, "We are not empowered to require the construction of a Union Passenger Station as sought." The Interstate Commerce Commission, therefore, referred the case back to the California Railroad Commission, so that it might enter such order in the premises as its powers, under the laws of California, permit. Thereupon, the case was reopened and is now pending before the California Railroad Commission.

The railroads are still resisting the union passenger station and are questioning the authority of the California Railroad Commission or of the Interstate Commerce Commission, or both, to compel them to construct it. Legal questions are involved which can be settled conclusively only by the decision of the Supreme Court of California or the Supreme Court of the United States, or both. Therefore, after many years of fighting the City is faced with another long period of litigation, at the end of which it is not certain that the railroads can be compelled to construct a union passenger station in Los Angeles. To say how long this litigation may last would be mere conjecture, but it is certain that several

years must elapse before decisions of the courts of last resort can be obtained.

Meanwhile, the Union Pacific Station at First Street and the Los Angeles River was destroyed by fire, and, by agreement, the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific Railroads are now using jointly the Southern Pacific Station at Central Avenue and Fifth Street; the Santa Fe Railroad is using its station at Santa Fe Avenue and First Street. This status will doubtless continue until the controversy is settled.

Involved in the grade crossing and terminal problem is the question of the Pacific Electric trains, which now cross numerous city streets at grade and operate longitudinally on the surface of some of the most congested streets and avenues in the City. Among the important lines of the Pacific Electric are those to Pasadena and various points northwardly as far as San Bernardino, and those to Long Beach, Orange, Santa Ana, Huntington Beach, and other important points south and east.

Eighteen million passengers are handled per annum, and more than eighteen thousand grade crossings are made daily by Pacific Electric trains on the southern division between Fourteenth Street, and on the northern division between Aliso and Utah Streets, and the Pacific Electric Main Street Station. Manifestly, it is highly desirable to remove, as far as possible, Pacific Electric trains from the principal streets of the City, and to eliminate the great number of grade crossings involved in their operation because they constantly menace life and limb and seriously obstruct the ordinary vehicular and passenger traffic which the streets and avenues of the City are primarily designed to accommodate.

The four railroad companies, recognizing that the continued growth and progress of the City have accentuated the necessity for relief from the prevailing unsatisfactory conditions, and that a purely obstructive policy can not be justified, either in their own interest or in the interest of the community, have submitted a plan which is now under consideration by the California Railroad Commission and by the City authorities. This plan in brief proposes:

First: To continue the use by the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific of the Southern Pacific Station at Fifth Street and Central Avenue, and to construct a viaduct over the private right of way from the east bank of the Los Angeles River to the Central Station, thereby eliminating dangerous grade crossings of steam trains, and permitting the discontinuance of passenger and freight train operation on Alameda Street except for industrial freight switching at night.

Second: To eliminate all crossings at grade of Pacific Electric trains between Fourteenth Street and the Main Street Station by extending the elevated structure of said Pacific Electric Railway over and along its own private right of way to Fourteenth Street.

Third: To connect the Pacific Electric Railroad tracks for its Northern or Pasadena Division with the Union Pacific Railroad at or near Aliso Street bridge, and to operate all its Northern Division trains along the east bank of the Los Angeles River and over the viaduct and elevated structures above mentioned into the Pacific Electric Main Street Station, thereby taking said Pacific Electric trains off of Aliso Street and certain important avenues within the City.

Fourth: To build a new Santa Fe Station on the present site namely, First Street and Santa Fe Avenue, at a cost of not less than \$1,000,000.

From our investigation, we are convinced that a union terminal station located within the area defined by the Interstate Commerce decision is neither essential to the convenience nor necessarily required to meet the present or future needs of the traveling public. There are only three railroad systems entering Los Angeles, and, as hereinbefore stated, two of them, the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific, use one station, and the Santa Fe another. It is true that a union station would force the three roads into one terminal, but the interchange of traffic between them is not large, since Los Angeles is primarily a terminal and not an exchange point in the ordinary sense of that term.

As we understand it, the location now proposed does not adjoin the Plaza but faces Alameda Street, one block east. This is one of the most congested parts of the City, and the streets converging upon it from all directions are not broad avenues that make for an easy approach now or in the future. It is our conviction that the concentration of traffic inevitably involved if a union station is built at this point, will cause serious congestion, intensifying with the growth of the City, which will prove a serious disadvantage. In view of the fact that there is little interchange of traffic between the railroads in question and that many of the streets of Los Angeles are already too narrow for existing traffic demands, and because of the increasing congestion in the business districts, we believe that it is better to distribute traffic between the two existing railroad passenger stations than to concentrate it upon one station at or near the Plaza.

Moreover, since the Plaza site was proposed ten years ago, great changes have occurred. The distribution of population and the development of the City have materially altered the conditions of that time. If a union station is to be built, it is our opinion that a more suitable and advantageous location than the Plaza site can be found.

It is argued that passengers are forced to see the most unattractive parts of the City in reaching the passenger stations as now located. While this is a minor consideration, the same objection can be raised against the proposed union station. The approach to it, like the approach to the existing stations, must be through the industrial and least attractive portions of the City. But, under the proposed plan of maintaining the present Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Stations, an unusual opportunity is presented for beautifying the approaches to these stations. The railroads occupy both banks of the Los Angeles River, and since the bed of that river can easily be improved to prevent flood menace, a public park can be created between First and Seventh Streets and made pleasing to the aesthetic taste of travellers entering or leaving the City, while benefiting greatly the resident population. As a condition of acceptance of the railroad plan, the four railroads, namely, Southern Pacific, Union Pacific, Pacific Electric, and Santa Fe, should be required to contribute \$50,000 toward the landscaping, beautification and parking of the bed of the Los Angeles River between First and Seventh Streets as a part of the cost of the terminal improvement.

The elevation of certain portions of the Pacific Electric Railroad and the operation of trains over its Northern and Southern Divisions into its Main Street Station, will provide

excellent rapid transit service to and from the Central Station and the Santa Fe Station. By a convenient interchange of passengers across a platform at the proposed new elevated station of the Pacific Electric near the Central Station, it will be easy for passengers on both the Northern and Southern Divisions of that company to reach the Central Station, and in like manner to reach the Santa Fe Station by changing cars across a platform and by a walkway from the east bank of the Los Angeles River.

Objection has been raised to the distance which passengers will be required to walk—about 1200 feet between the Pacific Electric and Central Stations, and about 700 feet between the Pacific Electric and Santa Fe Stations. These distances are not serious, as can be seen by a comparison with similar conditions in the metropolitan area of New York.

The distance a passenger must walk between the Hudson Tunnel Station and the Erie Railroad Station in Jersey City is 1080 feet. The traffic at this point is very heavy, the number of passengers exchanged being about 50,000 per day, or 18,000,000 per annum.

The distance between the suburban station of the New York Central Railroad and the Rapid Transit Subway at Lexington Avenue, New York, is more than 800 feet, and the number of passengers exchanged at this point per day is estimated at more than 50,000.

The distance between the Pennsylvania Railroad platforms and the Subway Station at Seventh Avenue and Thirty-third Street, New York City, is 700 feet or more, and the number of passengers exchanged per day is more than 25,000.

Thus it will be seen that the distances in question are neither unusual nor serious so far as interchange of traffic between railroad terminals and rapid transit facilities is concerned.

Objection is also made that passengers from the Hollywood and Santa Monica lines of the Pacific Electric must transfer to get to the Central Avenue and Santa Fe Stations.

It is, of course, desirable to have all Pacific Electric lines reach these stations and it is desirable, also, to have the Yellow Car and Bus lines reach them, without the necessity of transferring passengers. But manifestly this is difficult, if not impossible of attainment under any plan. Only a small percentage of all the passengers handled by the Pacific Electric, Yellow Car and Bus lines go to the railroad stations, and the settlement of the major problem, this point should not be given undue importance.

In New York City there are two great railroad terminals, the Grand Central and the Pennsylvania—separated by more than one mile. These stations are not reached by every subway line in New York. Tedious transfers, involving long walks for passengers, are involved—but the public convenience is served as far as conditions permit. The New York subway systems were laid out and constructed not to serve primarily the traffic to and from railroad terminals, which, though important, constitutes a small percentage of the whole, but to serve the millions of local passengers going about their daily business and pleasure, and whose convenience and comfort receive necessarily first consideration.

Even with the Central Avenue and Santa Fe Stations maintained at their present locations, transfers of passengers

will be made less difficult when a city subway system is built, although some years must necessarily elapse before this can be accomplished.

We regard the removal of Pacific Electric trains from some of the important streets of the City and abolition of more than 18,000 grade crossings per day, and the more efficient and rapid transportation of many thousands of local passengers who must use the Pacific Electric trains daily, as a matter of vital importance to the community. The actual benefits to be gained thereby far outweigh any possible advantages that would come from a union passenger station. The elimination of these grade crossings cannot be had under the proposed union station plan, and they would not be possible in the present instance except by the reciprocal use of essential rights of way and facilities by the Southern Pacific, the Union Pacific, and the Pacific Electric Railways.

The saving in time that will be effected by this operation of Pacific Electric trains will add immensely to the convenience and comfort of the thousands of people who depend upon this service for daily transportation between their homes and places of business. On the two divisions of the Pacific Electric Railroad which will be served by this improvement, 50,000 Los Angeles passengers are carried daily, a total of 18,000,000 passengers per annum. A saving of five minutes on each trip to each of these passengers is a distinct contribution to their comfort and convenience. It represents an aggregate saving of 90,000,000 minutes per annum, which, reduced to years, means an aggregate saving of 171 years in one year to the 18,000,000 passengers who travel annually over these divisions. In other words, that much less time will

spent in transit by 18,000,000 passengers per annum, and can be employed by them in other and perhaps more agreeable and profitable ways.

It is suggested that in order to secure these results, elevated railroad structures must be placed in some of the streets of the City. This is erroneous. We would not approve the construction of elevated tracks longitudinally in any of the public streets. The plans presented confine the elevated structures to the private rights of way of the railroads in the industrial section of the City; and where they cross the intersecting streets, no structures or supports will be erected within the limits of such streets or sidewalks.

On the whole, the plan submitted by the Railroads has decided merit, but we think that the elevated structure of the Pacific Electric should be carried beyond Fourteenth Street; that it should be extended to Jefferson Street. This would eliminate a large number of additional dangerous grade crossings and increase still further the speed and efficiency of the service to Long Beach, Santa Ana, and other important points.

Conclusions

The question to be decided is:

Shall the plans now presented, offering as they do a prompt settlement of the union passenger station controversy, insuring the immediate construction of a new and handsome Santa Fe Railroad Station, the expenditure of several million dollars by the railroads in the execution of the general work, the discontinuance of passenger and freight train operation in Alameda Street, except for industrial freight switching at night, the elimination of more than 18,000 dangerous grade cross-

ings daily, the removal of cumbersome Pacific Electric trains from some of the most congested and important thoroughfares in the City, the provision of more efficient and speedy transportation for millions of local travellers annually and the prompt improvement of the railroad terminal situation in Los Angeles, be adopted:

or

Shall the litigation over the Plaza site, already of ten years' duration, be continued for an indeterminable time, without any assurance that the Plaza station can be secured after the courts and the commissions render final decisions because the decisions may be adverse,—no improvement in existing conditions being obtainable meanwhile.

Our opinion is that the best interests of the public will be served by acceptance of the plans submitted by the four railroads, provided:

1. That, in consideration of the granting by the City of Los Angeles of the necessary authority and franchises so far as the City is concerned, they will pay to the City of Los Angeles the sum of \$250,000 to be expended by the City solely and exclusively for the purpose of improving the bed of the Los Angeles River, as well as the banks thereof, between First and Seventh Streets, so as to prevent flood menace and convert the same into a public park through appropriate landscape gardening, planting of trees, shrubbery, etc. (The City of Los Angeles on its part, should agree that any sum in excess of \$250,000 that may be necessary to complete said work shall be provided by the City and that the City will maintain the same for park purposes.)

2. That the Pacific Electric Railroad will extend its proposed elevated structure from Fourteenth Street over and along its private right of way to the south side of Jefferson Street and eliminate all grade crossings between said points.

3. That the Santa Fe Railroad will expend not less than \$1,000,000 in the construction of a suitable station and facilities in place of its present station at First Street and Santa Fe Avenue.

4. That the Railroads will carry out, in all respects, the plans submitted by them to the California Railroad Commission and the City of Los Angeles, including any changes therein or modifications thereof that may be made by lawful authority.

5. That they will begin work and prosecute the same vigorously to completion within the shortest possible time after the necessary consents have been obtained from the California Railroad Commission, the Interstate Commerce Commission and the City of Los Angeles.

Respectfully,

W. G. McADOO.

NATHAN NEWBY.

JOSEPH SCOTT.