The More the Rail the Faster the Mail Colin Tabeart, APR, FSPH

A study of the impact of major railway systems on speeding the ocean mails between the UK and the rest of the world in the 19th and early 20th centuries.



Rail within England

London to Liverpool.

Completed 17 Sep 1838 via Birmingham. Allowed Liverpool to be used as the transatlantic terminus for the 1840 Cunard service. (Hamilton Ellis)

London to Southampton.

Final section completed on 11 May 1840. (Railways of Southern Region, Geoffrey Body). In Nov 1843 the steam packets to the Mediterranean and West Indies were transferred from Falmouth to Southampton, saving about a day and a half over the 2 day road journey London-Falmouth. [Sailing packets remained at Falmouth].

London to Plymouth.

Completed 12 May 1876. From now on many of the Transatlantic, African, and long sea route Indian & Australian lines loaded/landed the London mails at Plymouth, saving several hours. Often special trains would be laid on at Plymouth to speed the mails to London.

1870s train at Guildford



THE RAILWAY IN MID-VICTORIAN ENGLAND Guildford, South Western Railway, in the early eighteen-seventies. The engine is Joseph Beattie's Conqueror (1856-1876)

Trans Europe

Purpose: to accelerate the mails to/from the Mediterranean, Middle and Far East and Australasia.

> Routes: via Marseilles to 1870 (RN then P&O) Via Brindisi 1870 onwards (P&O) Via Naples 1880s onwards (Orient, later also NDL) Via Marseilles 1883 onwards (Messageries Maritimes) Via Genoa (NDL occasionally)

> > Gain in time to/from UK: About 4 or 5 days

> > > **Postage:**

Extra (and expensive) until 1880, when all UK outbound mails routed via Europe.





Oh S**t!

Montparnasse circa 1890

The Mont Cenis Tunnel

Fantastic engineering achievement.

8 miles 832 yards long. Planned to take 25 years to build – they thought big then.

Runs from Modane in France to Bardonneche in Italy.

Height at French end 3,801 feet, at Italian end 4,236 feet.

Built 1857-71. Until the new pneumatic drilling machines were invented progress at times was only 9 inches a day.

Drilled from both ends, the juncture of the two was made on 26 Dec 1870, the misalignment being about 1 foot horizontally and 2 feet vertically.



HE AFFUSTO AND PERFORATOES.

Across Egypt

Initially by canal/camel/donkey etc – about 3 or 4 days

Alexandria-Cairo railway completed 1853, Cairo-Suez in 1859. Contract crossing time 24 hours by rail.

Canal opened 1867 – not used for mails initially as faster by rail & canal subject to blockages/groundings etc that could take a week to clear. Rail contract time now 16 hours.

1888 mail contracts with P&O and Orient Lines – all mails now via the Suez Canal.

1855 Sydney-UK "p Madras via Marseilles"

Mathen ' Va Martilly agher D lena gland.

P&O ss *Madras* &c to Marseilles 29 Mar – mails in London 31 Mar.

Mails via Southampton arrived 5 Apr – saving of 5 days via Marseilles.

Last P&O mail before the Crimean War scuppered the contract.

1860 Geelong to Glasgow "p overland mail via Marseilles"

Willand Mail

For a short time Geelong stamped a red "M" to emphasise the routeing via Marseilles.

P&O steamers to Marseilles – mails in London 12 June. Mails via Southampton in London 16 June. Saving 4 days via Marseilles.

Sydney-England by Orient Line via Brindisi

Per John E r Haillie Keet

Mail by rail Sydney-Melbourne.

156 bags of mail landed at Suez, on to Brindisi per P&O ss *Nizam*. Mails in London 12 Apr.

John Elder arrived Plymouth on 18 Apr, so 6 days saved via Brindisi.

Panama to Aspinwall Railroad



Previously traversed by canoe/mule/foot.

Built 1850-55, 50 miles long, cost \$7 million.

Between 5,000 and 10,000 died in construction. Bodies sold to medical science.

Time saved – about 7 days.

1866-69 used by the Panama New Zealand & Australian SS Co.



Early Panama RR Loco

1866 NZ to England – 49 days via Panama. [Via P&O & Suez about 65 days]

The Heart Wills

Cover from New Plymouth on the opening voyage via Panama.

Per ss *Kaikoura* to Panama, across to Aspinwall (Colon), and thence by RMSPCo ss *Tyne* and *Tasmanian* to Southampton.

Valparaiso-Paris "voie de Panama & Angleterre"





Pacific Steam Navigation Co Valparaiso-Panama. Royal Mail Steam Packet Co from Aspinwall to Southampton.

Transit by the Panama railroad cost money, covers marked as above to explain higher charges. BUT 7 days saved using the railroad vs canoe, mule &c

1869. San Francisco-New York Railroad

Highest point 7017 feet. Length: 3,500 miles Journey Time: about 5 days summer, 7 days winter. Opened: built between 1866 and 1869. Completed 10 May 1869.[1]

http://www.linecamp.com/museums/americanwest/western_clubs/transcontinental_railroad/transcontinental_railroad.html



Some views



Compresed by GEO. T. EVANS Iterated Director of the northernet term. San FRANCISCO, CAL, PUBLISHED BY M.GRAY, 6092613 CLAYS. With Lithugraph 50 C?

Plain Title, 30 C.S.







Left: typical loco

Below left: Golden Spike ceremony at Summit, 10 May 1869

Below right: building the railroad





Viaduct



Mail Contracts ANZ – UK via San Francisco

Commenced in March 1870 – NSW and NZ always in partnership
Route was Sydney-Auckland-Honolulu-San Francisco
Mails across USA to NY and thence by first available steamer to UK
Full details in ANZUK Mails Vols 1 and 2

•Significant advantage for NZ – at least 10 & often 15 days better than via Melbourne & P&O.

•NSW advantage less obvious but a few days & avoided patronising the P&O service favoured by Victoria

•Early contracts very soon went bankrupt until steady 10-year contract by Pacific Mail SS Co commenced in 1875

•With some very small gaps service continued well beyond end of 19th century

Pacific Mail SS Co Sydney-Paris via SF



1877 – 45 day sea passage to UK [54 days by P&O].

8d rate to France introduced 19 Dec 1876.

> 1¹/₂d due to France

1882 Edinburgh – NZ 39 days "via San Francisco"

Via Sau Francisc Adviel Iray a Canterbury Man Zealand

The next P&O sailing took 39 days to Melbourne and a further 6 days to Timaru.

14 Royal Terrace,

Edinburgh.

Within Australia



Sydney-Melbourne partly by road until 1881, but used for mail from 1876.

Melbourne-Adelaide

used for mail from 1887 (not Sundays).

Brisbane-Sydney

required gauge change at border.

Albany-Perth mails until 1900, after which landed at Fremantle.

Impact within Australia



Sydney-Melbourne. P&O ships frequently stayed several days at Melbourne, so rail accelerated delivery Sydney by 3 or 4 days. Homebound Sydney correspondents had 2 or more days longer to answer letters, & supplementary mails could be and were sent.

Melbourne-Adelaide. Not so great, but could save up to a day in either direction. Sunday trains not allowed by S Australia. TPO established as soon as railroad opened.

Perth-Albany. The railway converted a road journey of up to a week into 2 days at most. From 1900 the mails were landed at Fremantle, but mails to the S coast of WA still benefitted.

Brisbane-Sydney. Not always used for main mails – these usually by coastal steamer to Sydney.

Supplementary mails certainly were sent by rail.

The Adelaide-Melbourne TPO

LETTER. REGISTERED THIS LETTER MUST BE GIVEN TO AN OFFICER OF THE ROST OFFICE TO BE REGISTERED. AND A RECEIPT OBTAINED FOR IT. THE ADDRESS MUST BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE Mr. Howard Davis 256 Swan St 56 Gove of Richmond FEE PAID. australia Inland Registration. Compensation for loss or damage is given in respect of Inland Registered Letters and Packets kinds, subject to the limitations and conditions not fied in the Most Office Guide under the head of "Registration and Compensation."



• P&O Marmora arrived Adelaide 18 Jun – special train laid on leaving Adelaide at 1835 same day.

1882 Sydney-UK by P&O

Kaisez-i- Hind R Jun 16/83 Ari. Jan. 25 -4. Deane bag. It. Marije Jerrace / W. K. Colchestez England.

Per P&O ss Kaiser-i-Hind.

The ship left Sydney on 1 Dec and Melbourne on 7 Dec. The letter left Sydney on 5 Dec by rail to Melbourne, 4 days gained for the writer to answer his letters.

1911 India to Papua via NSW TPO

The Manager Union Bank of Australia Port Moresby Papua

Missent (MALDIRIGE) on the Bombay-Aden Sea Post.

Collected at Aden by P&O *Moldavia*, arrived Adelaide 8 Jul. Then by trains to Brisbane, with ENGLISH MAIL NSW TPO. Steamer from Brisbane to Papua.

4 days rail Adelaide to Brisbane cf about 6 days by coastal steamer.

Steam Engine at Fremantle



Smyrna to Albany via Fremantle & Perth

PALE UNIVERSE man alban Western Australia

Orient liner *Omrah* left Suez 14 Oct, arrived Fremantle 3 Sep at 1455.

Arrive Fremantle Railway Station 3 Sep.

Arrive Perth same day.

Arrive Albany 2 days later by rail [versus 7 days by road].

Canadian Pacific Railroad

Built 1881-1885 Built by 12,000 men, 5,000 horses, and 300 dog-sled teams

First trans-continental train left Montreal on 28 June 1886 & arrived at Port Moody on 4 July. Comprised: 2 baggage cars, a mail car, a second-class coach, 2 sleepers, 2 first class coaches, and a dining car.



Extensions

- 1884. Toronto linked to Perth and Ontario
- 1890. New Brunswick Railway acquired giving a link Montreal to Saint John, New Brunswick. This important extension allowed a transcontinental link throughout the year even when the St Lawrence froze over in winter, thus connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific.
- 1895. Linked from Toronto to Hamilton, Buffalo, and New York



Funeral Train for the Canadian Prime Minister John Macdonald, whose political backing enabled the railroad to be built

Serious gradients

Gradients through the mountain passes were 4% at times, more than double that normally considered acceptable for steam trains. Note double locomotive. Downhill speeds limited to 5 mph to prevent runaway.



Early Mail Contracts

- Initial contract for monthly service Sydney-Vancouver, subsidised by Canada and NSW
 - First voyage left Sydney 18 May 1893
 - Indifferent timekeeping
- Queensland, NZ, and Fiji in and out of the contract
- Outbound from UK only if endorsed "via Vancouver"
- Time saving to Europe dubious versus San Francisco Route

Maritime Route



Contracting Parties 1893-1900

Throughout – NSW & Canada

1897-98 – New Zealand 1897 – Fiji 1899 – Queensland

Full details in ANZUK Mails 1881-1900, Chapter 10

1895 Auckland to London "via Fiji & Vancouver"

Via Fiji & Vancouve Mr J.C. Kussel Woburn House Store Sheel London we

NZ not party to contract ...but... ran monthly service to Fiji to connect with the line to Vancouver. Carried by ss Warrimoo from Fiji. Arrived London 28 Aug = 41days. Next mail via Frisco left 10 Aug & arrived London 11 Sep = 32 day passage but 2weeks later in London.

1898 Melbourne – NY via Vancouver

"The Harbinger of Light." miled AUSTRAL BUILDINGS, COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE 243 alespundo

Victoria not a party to the contract. Carried by *Aorangi* from Sydney 23 Apr, to Vancouver 19 May.

> **Backstamps** Vancouver 19 May New York 24 May Rochester 26 May.

Melbourne to New York in 32 days.

Next mail via San Francisco arrived NY 6 June, (30 days from Melbourne) so 13 days saved, but only because of sailings dates rather than advantage of one railroad over another.

1899 Torquay to Auckland – 39 days

Via Vancomons J. W. Binman Soft. ngamaraha Warkato anchland hin Zealand

UK PO required route endorsement otherwise sent via San Francisco.

NZ again non contractor so sent via Sydney, arriving Auckland on 24 Jul.

Next NZ mail via San Francisco left London 2 weeks later, arriving Auckland 1 Aug, so the writer saved 8 days by this unusual routeing.

The Trans-Siberian Railroad

Vital Statistics

Route: St Petersburgh, Moscow, Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, Chita, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok Length: 5,753 miles (9300 km) spanning 7 time zones. Journey Time: about 8 to 15 days. Opened: built between 1891 and 1905. Gauge: 4 ft 11½ inches – very broad.



Some views









Trans-Siberian Railway



Advantages

•Trains left daily compared with P&O fortnightly service from Shanghai

•Hong Kong-UK via Vladivostok circa 20 days (4 or 5 days to Vladivostok by ship + 15 days via Siberia).

•Compare P&O 30 plus days via Brindisi – and only every 2 weeks.

•Japan to UK probably even more favourable.

•Same price either route

•No contest!

1912 Hong Kong – UK "via Siberia"

Ma Siberia Hors Stalkartt. South Sok House. 75 Victoria Road South Southara

From HMS *Minotaur* at Hong Kong. Transit time unknown.

Writer says: "There are 2 ways of mails from here: via Siberia, and via sea.
Former is much shorter in time but a little uncertain I'm told. When ships are at HK or N part of the station via Siberia is the quickest route."

Japan to England – 21 days

Via Silveria Union Postale Universelle. 書端合聯 Hiole



1933 to England – a fantastic 14 days in all

ha SIBERIA 2123 RECEIVEDFR -H.M.S. In Sesmond Infull Hatch Paul Hauts

From HMS *Kent*, 8 inch gun cruiser, flagship of the China Station.

The writer, Lt Cdr Tuffnell, was a Japanese Interpreter on the staff of the C-in-C, Admiral Sir FC Dreyer.

21 days from London "via Siberia"

ha Sibena King 20 July Sinc. Typell S. King Conde Sinc. Typell S. Royal a It.m.s. Itormes Chura: Station Jo.G. P. O. Andon.

Outbound cover to HMS *Hermes*, received at Wei-Hai-Wei 21 days after posting – see pencil endorsement by recipient.

Tuffnell was a Japanese interpreter, and served in this appointment as Staff Officer (Intelligence) to the C-in-C. His DSC was won in WW1 fighting in the trenches in France.

Southern Africa



Dec 1903. Salisbury – UK via Cape Town



Salisbury 18 Dec 03.

4 days to do about 2000 miles to Cape Town. Approx time by stage coach 20 days. Left Cape Town in the Dunvegan Castle on 23 Dec, arrived Southampton 0540 on 9 Jan. Train to Liverpool where stamped with very late use of the LIVERPOOL COL PACKET.

Another way to do it!



British South African Police camels.

Back of the card shown on last slide. Note endorsement "run mails to Fort Charter".

Perhaps the Ultimate? Airmail "Forwarded by/train to avoid delay"

Miss & Earle 1001 Joannine Denner Colo. Cupt. Bealeschki 3708 Nations ave. El Paso Jeyas Formarded by train to avoid delay.

Summary

Figures very approx, but rail always faster and always advantageous to use where possible.

1840s. Steamship speed 6-8 knots (7-9 mph). Railways 20-30 mph. Atlantic crossing Liverpool-NY 14 to 18 days.

1880s. Steamships 14-17 knots. Railways 40-50 mph. Atlantic crossing Liverpool-NY 6 or 7 days.

1900s. Steamships 20-22 knots. Railways 50-80 mph. Atlantic crossing Liverpool-NY 5 or 6 days.

Speed was, and still is, **VERY** expensive: *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse* in 1905 flat out at 23 knots burnt 530 tons of coal a day! More than *Great Western* burnt on the whole crossing in 1838.

The End

Thank you for your patience.

Any Questions?

Then "Time for a Little Something"

