

UP's CN Freight Trains - Final Report

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To all:

It's time to write up a final report (for now) on the UP's CN trains, so here goes:

Train: UP's CN (Not a full train, but a block of reefers on the front of another train.)

Direction: Eastbound only. (There was no westbound version.)

Description: "Colton Fruit" - a high-priority block of mostly PFE reefers included in another train. Perhaps CN was a PFE code for Colton blocks for the UP.

The CN was one of UP's designated perishable train symbols, which meant that it was given a number each day that indicated it was handling a PFE reefer block. It appears that UP's traffic volume for eastbound perishables was decent in the 1940s & before, but that it dropped off to only (something like) a 10-20 car daily average by the 1950s (varied day to day and seasonally). So those symbol "trains" weren't really trains at all, more like groups of cars in most cases.

Origin: Colton thru San Bernardino.

Destination: Salt Lake City and points east.

Railroads Represented: Mostly PFE in the CN block. In the rest of the train carrying the CN block, proportionally more cars in UP trains came from connecting roads like the MILW, IC, Wabash, and, especially, the C&NW.

Products: Perishable fruit in the CN block, plus other miscellaneous freight in the rest of the train.

Car Types: Reefers in the CN block, plus other types of freight cars to fill the train length.

Train Length and Weight: Typically 60-80 cars total, with the first 20 or so being the CN block of reefers. Typical weights were 3000 tons (in the total train).

Typical Schedule: DS sheets in 1945 & 46 show a UP train stopping at Colton for reefers in the late afternoon-evening and another later near midnight. The CN blocks tended to leave Colton somewhere between early afternoon up to midnight. Most of the perishable carloads departed on the later of the available eastbound trains, normally leaving in the late evening.

1947: CU-CN - leave San Bernardino at 1:00 am, arrive Yermo at 5:45 am.

"CN Fruit Block Schedule leave Colton not later than 11.59PM. day following loading and billing, arrive Salt Lake 2.10PM., Ogden 5.40PM. third day."

"CU will be clean-up train to handle all traffic loaded and billed previous day, and will protect from Colton all perishables due to depart on 11.59PM. schedule. When perishables are available Colton earlier, train, of course, may be operated OT."

Road Power: Early Challengers into 1947, then Alco FAs, sometimes EMD F3s. It was probably GP9 sets that took over the trains in 1954 from the FA and F3 sets.

Helper Power: There were steam helpers into 1947 (2-10-2s, 2-8-2s, 4-8-2s, 4-10-2s), but the FM H20-44s took over from 1947-1950. Then we had the return of the same steam helpers during 1950-1951, until being replaced by TR5s and GP7s in 1951. In 1954 the TR5s were replaced by GP9 helpers (with the GP7s still in the helper pool too).

Operations Details: This block of reefers was switched onto the front any high-priority train from LA in Colton and ran thru SB on the EB passenger tracks.

Colton had a large PFE facility where perishables for the SP and UP were iced like at the Santa Fe's precooler. Reefers for the SP were made up into Colton Blocks and cars for the UP were picked up at Colton.

The UP served packing houses along its own main line and branches across the LA Basin, and its local pickup trains brought loaded reefers to the PFE yard in Colton for icing, precooling, and classification. Power was sometimes dispatched caboose light from East LA to pick up a CN train at Colton.

At times when there wasn't sufficient traffic for a separate train, CN would be combined with another symbol which would originate from East LA and pick up the CN block at Colton. Tom Baxter's 1947 "Trains" article, "Fast freight on the UP," describes the latter operation exactly -- a combined CN-CKC train starting out of East LA with only 30 or so cars of dry freight behind a CSA-class locomotive, and then stopping at Colton to pick up a block of reefers.

The "CN" symbol was basically any block/group of cars containing perishable products that gathered ("concentrated" is the word UP used) at Colton to move east on the UP. The cars may have been loaded in Colton but could also have been loaded elsewhere in the area (even on a different RR such as SP) then taken to Colton for UP to take east.

When cars had been gathered / accumulated into blocks/groups, iced & were ready to go, PFE would assign a block number for accounting / tracking purposes. Those blocks of cars were usually somewhere in the range of 10-25 cars each, but were rarely (if ever?) full perishable trains.

With each block that was sent out getting its own number, it was normal to have multiple block numbers assigned daily - in nearly all cases the number of blocks assigned daily to be either 2, 3 or 4 (varying by season; 2 off-peak, usually 3 sometimes 4 in peak months as of the late '30s / early '40s).

It appears that the perishable cars that were formed into "Colton blocks" would accumulate (a few here, a few there) almost randomly throughout the day from a variety of loading points - not at any specific time each day. The records from the late 1930s - early 1950s show, for example, a day at Colton might look something like this: 25 cars ready to go at 7am; 20 ready at noon, 15 ready at 9pm. Let's say those blocks were numbered CN551, CN552 & CN 553 by PFE just to help illustrate things.

Once the "Colton blocks" were ready to go, UP would have their next available eastward manifest train (out of the E. LA yard) pick them up & head east toward Las Vegas & SLC/Ogden. What that meant is that the CN "trains" were most often (always?) combined with another UP schedule/symbol in that era. The 1941 schedule, for example, showed these trains leaving ELA yard for LV along with their remarks from the operating plan:

- * UX 6am "protects basic CN fruit block schedule from Colton",
- * CUX 2pm "handles traffic that misses UX train",

* MS 1145pm "protects last fruit block from Colton, if it misses UX and CUX".

So using the example times/blocks from above, the 25 cars ready at Colton at 7am would have moved east on UX, the mid-day group of 20 moved on train CUX and the last "cut-off" group from 9pm went east on the "Merchandise Special" at the end of the day. You can see photo evidence of this pattern by looking at Cajon, Cima, etc pics from that era where many eastward trains have 10-20 or so reefers on the headend, manifest behind.

Perishable blocks were assembled at locations east of UP's ELA yard, so the CN symbol was not used out of ELA yard; only at Colton & points east. So a typical 1950s operation would be that the UTX train would depart LA with (let's say) 50 cars and would stop at Colton and pick up a perishable block. At that point, the train would be known as CN-UTX and it would continue east toward Salt Lake City.

Schedules varied for the CN trains over the years, but they were normally to leave Colton between 8 pm and midnight. The train symbol used over Cajon on any particular day depended upon the UP train out of ELA that stopped at Colton to pick up the perishable block(s). There are examples of "CN-UTX", "CN-CUX", "CU-CN" trains operating on the LA&SL

On July 11, 1947, X 1502 (CUX train) was at Colton 10:55-11:35 pm At Riverside Jct it had 3 loads/11 empties, but after Colton it had 50 loads/ 11 empties. (It picked up 47 loads at Colton, probably including a CN block of reefers.)

On July 12, 1947, X 3802 picked up 6 loads at 10:10-10:25 am and X 1400 (CUX train) picked up 20 cars at 11:35 pm-12:05 am.

The train symbol "CN" at that time was hot / expedited, so it likely didn't handle any empty stock cars (regularly at least). That train was downgraded over the years, but as of the 1945-55 timeframe it was a hotshot and wouldn't have handled this type of empty traffic.

Eastward UP freights were assembled in the UP's East Los Angeles Yard and did no work at San Bernardino except to service their engines and cut in helpers. UP freight crews ran through from East LA to Yermo, so their cabooses weren't changed at San Bernardino.

By the 1970s almost all the perishable traffic was gone, and the train became mostly empties (such as stock cars) going back east. Eastbound the UP cars ran at the back of the evening CN train (basically an empties east train) that ran through Colton about 9 PM most nights. The CLS UP stock cars ran as a group, not intermixed with other cars, usually about 10 to 15 cars in a group (which is about the same number that came west).

Modeling the Train: Use PFE reefers in the CN block at the front of the train (about the first 1/4 to 1/3 of the train), plus some miscellaneous freight cars to fill out the train, from UP, MILW, IC, Wabash, and the C&NW. Run two trains per day with CN blocks, with the larger CN block on the later train.

That's it for now, until we learn more, including more about the various other EB trains that carried the CN block of reefers on the front (such as the CU, CUX, and UTX trains).

Thanks for your help,
John Thompson