

UP's Eastbound Drag Freights - Final Report

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To all:

It's time to put together a final report on these trains, using all the notes we have, so here goes:

Train: UP's Eastbound Drag Freights.

Direction: Eastbound only. (We'll cover the WB drag freights another time.)

Description: Drag freight from LA (mostly empty freight cars, low priority).

Origin: Los Angeles

Destination: Salt Lake City and points east.

Railroads Represented: UP and connecting roads like the MILW, IC, Wabash, and especially the C&NW. Also foreign-road cars from the northeastern and midwestern industrial belt, especially PRR, NYC, and B&O, and from GTW, PM, DT&I, AC&Y, and NH.

The coal cars would have been a mix of UP and DRGW cars, while the ore cars would have been mostly supplied by UP.

Products: Mostly empties. Not many loads and no priority empties (such as auto cars).

Train Length and Weight: Typical postwar train lengths were 70 to 90 cars, average weight was about 3000 to 4000 tons. (Longer and heavier in the 1950s than the 1940s.)

As an example, on Nov 1, 1950, the 3 drags listed had: 3 loads / 75 empties; 5 loads / 41 empties; and 6 loads / 57 empties. So mostly empty cars with some "local freight" loads also on the trains.

Car Types: The eastward drags consisted of mostly empty boxcars, plus some empty stock cars, plus some drop-bottom gondolas and ore cars that had handled coal or ore west.

Typical Schedule: About 2-4 EB drags operated daily, without any schedules.

Road Power: Early Challengers into 1947, then 4-unit Alco FAs and sometimes 4-unit EMD F3s. It was 4-unit 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 there was 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:

A "Drag" was a low-priority freight train. Usually these trains had fewer horsepower per ton because speed / acceleration is not a priority. They were often very long trains (same horsepower but more tons). These were run as Extras.

Foreign-road empties (i.e., non-UP empties) were given priority for loading, so they can be moved with a load in them (at which point they're no longer empties). If a suitable load cannot be found, then they must be returned to the railroad that owns them. Depending on the era and type of car, they may return via reverse route (they go back the way they came), or they may return via the most direct routing.

Empty stock cars heading back east moved on various trains during this time. Most of these trains were known simply as "Drag" freights (UP designation for freight trains that handled empty cars and/or low-priority loads).

Dispatcher's reports show two or three eastbound Drag freights operating each day, handling mostly empty cars.

UP operated their drag freights across the RR without having published schedules in the Manifest Freight Schedules documents. So they weren't scheduled in that regard either. A Drag freight running extra was an unscheduled train from any/all perspectives.

If an EB train didn't have a hotshot symbol, it received a symbol such as XE or Drag. They all meant the same thing: a track full of mine run (mixed) tonnage to be moved out of town to become a headache for the next terminal's yardmaster to sort out.

Westbound loads greatly outnumbered eastbound loads, so a lot of foreign-road cars were returned empty to the north and east.

Drag freight trains were loaded down to the maximum tonnage rating of their locomotive. In the steam engine days, that meant less than 10 mph eastward on Cajon Pass between San Bernardino. With the diesels, this meant 11 mph, the minimum allowable speed for the EMD F3, F7, and GP7 types.

It can be determined that it would take a 1950s drag about two hours to go from San Bernardino to Summit, while a hotshot could do it in about one hour and 40 minutes or a little less. The running time from there to Victorville was about 30 minutes, with about an hour from there to Barstow. That results in a running time between San Bernardino and Barstow of about three hours for hotshots and three and a half hours for drags.

Eastward trains ran out of the B Yard in San Bernardino. The departure time at San Bernardino was from the B Yard, with 10 or 20 minutes required to get from there to the depot at San Bernardino, which was where the Cajon Pass running time began.

All of those trains entered the Las Vegas yard, most changed power, and they were consolidated and left with roughly 100 cars. Eastbound drags arrived at LV throughout the day, not at any particular time, although it seems they bunched up in many cases. For example, one sheet shows drags arriving LV at 6, 7 & 8pm; on another day three arrived during the night, at midnight, 2am and 4am.

In some cases, drag freights were listed as "Local Drags". These were most likely conventional drag freights (mostly empty cars returning east) but were given local freight work en-route, such as setting out and picking up cars at on-line stations, handling an LCL car with "way freight", etc.

Sometimes a drag freight carried a bad order to the next terminal behind the caboose, as it would have a drawbar pulled out.

Modeling the Train: Use a mix of UP cars and cars from all over the country, especially C&NW, MILW, IC, and Wabash, and cars from the Northeast and Midwest, mostly boxcars, and some empty stock cars and open cars (drop-bottom gons and ore cars), but cars of any types could be in the train.

Comments and corrections are welcome.

Thanks,
John Thompson