

UP's Merchandise Special Freight Train - Final Report

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To all:

I don't have a lot to add to the interim report from two days ago, but here is where we are now, when the final report

Train: UP's MS (thru 1948) / MSF (in 1949-1951) / MDSE SPL (in 1953-1957) / MDSE (in 1959 and later).

There was no Merchandise Special train listed in 1952.

Direction: Eastbound only. (In 1953 and later, the FAP may have been the westbound equivalent.)

Description: Merchandise Special / Merchandise Forwarder.

MS will handle all expedited merchandise, also available manifest and perishables for Salt Lake - Ogden and north, filling out with other traffic. Called "The Merchandise." A short train when it left LA, but sometimes combined with a reefer block at Colton.

Origin: Los Angeles.

Destination: Salt Lake City and points east and north, including Idaho.

Railroads Represented: UP and many eastern railroads.

Products: Priority Merchandise (LCL products).

Car Types: Boxcars, plus TOFC cars in 1953 and later.

Train Length and Weight: The train normally operated with 25 cars or less. In Colton a block of Colton Fruit reefers (symbol CN) might be added on the front.

Typical Schedule: The train was scheduled to leave LA at 2am in the late '40s, then it was moved forward to an early-evening departure in the 1950s (varied from 6:15pm to 9:30pm leaving LA).

1946:

MS Merchandise Special - Dep LA East Yard 2:00 Am, Colton 5:30 AM.

1947:

MS - leave San Bernardino at 7:00 am, arrive Yermo at 12:30 pm.

1948:

MS - dep SB 5:30 AM

1949:

MSF Merchandise Forwarder LA-Salt Lake,
Dep LA 8:30 PM, Dep Colton 10:45 PM, Dep SB 11:00 PM.

1955

MDSE SPL - dep LA 7:00 pm, SB 10:45 PM

1957:

MDSE. SPL - Merchandise Special LA - Salt Lake
Dep LA 7:00 PM, SB 11:00 PM.

1964:

Mdse - Merchandise Operates Mon-Fri,
Dep LA 9:30 pm, Colton 11:15 pm, Berdoo 11:35 pm, Yermo 1:45 am.

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:

Handled eastbound merchandise traffic on an expedited schedule to SLC/Ogden where it would make connections north & east. In all years the train handled merchandise in boxcars (brought over to the East LA yard from the freight house at 8th & Alameda) and in 1953 they added TOFC service, with the vans loaded at UP's "Trailer Dock".

In LA as of 1946, there were connections from the SP.

The hotshot "Trailer Freight Service" trains were experimental services that ran only in certain years, phased-in during 1953 and disappearing by 1957. This service was designed to handle LCL (boxcar) shipments, the "new" TOFC service, as well as other priority traffic moving in the PNW-SLC-LV-LA corridor.

The MDSE train (of 1955) was LCL freight loaded out of the U.P. Freight House at 8th and Alameda. It would have been loaded into eastern railroad boxcars. A switch engine would bring the cut the 5 or 6 miles from the Freight House to the east end of the yard.

Someone would notify the yard office and a clerk would walk across to the main line and get a rollby of the cut. The cut at that time was about 15 or 20 cars. It would have gone down the main line out to the ELA depot and shoved in the east end of the yard. One of the Wash Tracks, which had been cleared by then, may have been used to build the train. The on duty time may have been around 6 PM in 1955.

There may not have been any other freight on the train out of Los Angeles. There may have been some trailers on the train. The MDSE left Los Angeles as a short but 'hot' train.

LCL freight was always listed as merchandise, whether the car was partly or completely loaded with LCL freight, or whether it was loaded by the railroad or a forwarder company.

On May 4, 1953, UP restarted its LCL service out of LA. Its new, fast MDSE SPL (Merchandise Special) hauled the high-speed, roller-bearing boxcars. Beginning with two boxcars daily, by June it took eight cars to handle the business.

In Aug. 1953 the UP began its first-ever piggyback service, limiting its "Trailer Freight Service" to LCL. The UP loaded its trailers circus-style onto converted 42' and 52' flatcars and blocked the flats into the Merchandise Special at East LA.

By the mid-1960s UP's LCL business had dwindled to practically nothing, and they gave up on it in 1965.

See p175 of Hemphill's excellent Salt Lake Route book for more on this service.

Modeling the Train: Have a block of boxcars from UP and many eastern railroads, and in 1953 or later, add a group of UP TOFC cars. The prototype block was only 15-25 cars long, so the block in a model train might be only 5 or 10 cars long. East of Colton, add a block of reefers on the front (see the Colton Fruit train for details).

Let us know if you have any more info or any corrections for this.

Thanks,
John Thompson