

Santa Fe's NCX Freight Train - Final Report, Revised

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To all:

Stuart Forsyth has revised my final report on the NCX to remove some confusions about Train 134 vs. the NCX, and here is his revised version (thanks, Stuart!), with some tiny edits by me:

Train: ATSF's NCX

Direction: Eastbound only. (The westbound version was the SCX.) It changed directions in Barstow and ran west from Barstow up to Richmond.

Description: Northern California Express, a general manifest train. (Also "North Coast Express," according to the Santa Fe in 1944.) Handled general merchandise.

In the period of time that both the NCX-SCX and SWG-GWS were operating, the NCX-SCX would mostly handle freight between northern and southern California plus connections with other railroads.

The symbol for the train was NCX. (It was not 134.) NCX trains bore the NCX symbol across the entire Los Angeles Division from Los Angeles to Barstow.

Confusion sometimes arises about the correct symbol because the NCX was listed as "134—NCX" in the systemwide Red Ball Schedules—and No. 134 also was the number of a second class Eastward freight train in the Los Angeles Division's Employee's Time Table.

While 2/134 and 3/134 ran on the same published schedule as the NCX, they were not NCX trains. They terminated in San Bernardino. Santa Fe just took advantage of the No. 134 schedule to expedite high priority blocks of freight cars between Los Angeles and San Bernardino. Santa Fe did not call 2/134 and 3/134 "NCX trains" because their function was not to get cars from LA to Richmond and the Pacific Northwest—it was to get cars from LA to San Bernardino as quickly as possible.

Origin: Los Angeles. The NCX originated at the First St. Yard in Los Angeles.

Destination: Richmond via Barstow and Bakersfield and Stockton (connected to the WP at Stockton).

Railroads Represented: ATSF, Great Northern, Western Pacific, Northern Pacific, SP&S, Milwaukee, Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, Illinois Central, CN&W, SP, Missouri Pacific, and others.

Products: NCX carried high class freight to Northern California, mainly in boxcars, and a few flat cars (not lumber, not stock, not hoppers or gons). The NCX consisted mostly of LCL traffic out of several freight forwarders in the 1st St. and Hobart areas, and off the LA Jct. RR.

The NCX also included northbound perishables (up to 15 to 20% of the daily perishable loads) from southern California, and oil and other petroleum products including asphalt, sulphur, sulfuric acid, etc., in Warren, Anchor, Hooker, and Spencer tank cars.

Tank car traffic up the pass included gasoline and lube oil for Victorville and Barstow and crude and diesel for the Barstow locomotive facility. Not often, but there would be some fuel for George

Air Force Base. Santa Fe got steam engine fuel out of the refinery at Wilshire located between Santa Fe Springs and La Mirada.

The Santa Fe moved a lot of locomotive (and, later, diesel) fuel in tank cars over Cajon to its engine terminals elsewhere on the Coast Lines; in the late 1940s, loco fuel was supplied by General Petroleum in the LA harbor district and transported in ATSF tank cars.

ATSF carried refinery products from So. Calif. oil companies to wholesalers in the mountain west and northwest. The most common petroleum cars were UTLX, which served the Standard Oil refinery in El Segundo, but Shell (SCCX), Shell Chemical (SCMX), Union (UOCX), Associated (AOX), and Richfield (ROX) were also represented. Some smaller refineries (General Petroleum GPX, Hancock HANX) had their own cars, while others used UTLX (e.g., Signal) or GATX.

Some refinery products went to midcontinent oil companies; for instance, there's photographic evidence of Magnolia Petroleum cars on Cajon in the late 1940s (Magnolia was the Texas affiliate of Socony Vacuum/Mobil). However, cars from refiners that didn't have retail outlets in the far west were few and far between, e.g. Sinclair, Conoco, Cities Service, Midcontinent DX.

ATSF handled a lot of molten sulfur, sulfuric acid and asphalt up the Pass. This traffic moved mostly in three symbol trains, NCX, SWG and CTX. The asphalt movements had special handling because it was hot liquid and if delayed the consignee had the expense of hooking up steam to the tank car heater coils to get the product to flow out the bottom outlet.

Only "special empties" such as auto boxes with internal racks and auto parts cars, or other empties moving on waybills for their owners, would rate inclusion in redball trains.

Train Length and Weight: Typically around 80 cars and 3,000 tons. Shorter in the 1940s and longer in the 1950s. The train carried almost all loads.

Car Types: Considerable box car traffic, carrying products made in So. Calif. and exported to other parts of the country. New automobiles were shipped in (mostly ATSF) XAR cars from the So. Calif. assembly plants (Ford, GM, Willys, Studebaker). Tank cars with refinery products from So. Calif. oil companies, and reefers with produce.

Typical Schedule:

ATSF Complete Freight Schedule at San Bernardino circa 1943-1944:

2:00 a.m. -- Train NCX leaves SB for Barstow (bound for Richmond)

- it has been in S.B. since 12:45 a.m.

- it arrived in San Bernardino as the NCX

- it will arrive at Barstow at 6:00 a.m.

1944:

Train NCX (LA to Richmond)

"North Coast Express"

Departed LA at 9:45 pm

Arrive San Bernardino 12:45 am

Leave San Bernardino 2:00 am

Arrive Barstow 6:00 am

1946:

No. NCX left Los Angeles at 9:45 p.m. and arrived at San Bernardino at 12:50 a.m.,

July 16-30, 1947 (3rd District):

Train NCX: departs LA 9 PM daily, travel time 3.5 hours to SB, avg. 51 loads/8 empties, loco 2-10-2.

Aug. 2, 1947 (sample):
Depart SB 2:50 am "X" 139 (FTs), helpers 3884, 3898 (2-10-2s), NCX-1, 73-5-3551, "1 Wide"

Feb 13 1948 (sample):
NCX-12, loco 120 (FT), 4-unit FT helper 170 SB to Summit, 2:15 am SB departure, 75-4-4041
(loads, mtys, tonnage)

Chard Walker said the NCX normally passed Summit around 4:00 AM.

NCX - 1953 (sample):
Lv. San Bdn. 2:30 a.m. Ar. Bar. 8:00 a.m.

NCX - 1955 (samples):
Lv. San Bdn. 2:00 a.m. Ar. Bar. 6:30 a.m.
Lv. San Bdn. 1:40 a.m. Ar. Bar. 5:30 a.m.

NCX - 1956 (samples):
Lv. San Bdn. 3:45 a.m. Ar. Bar. 7:45 a.m.
Lv. San Bdn. 1:10 a.m. Ar. Bar. 5:40 a.m.

1956 (sample):
NCX, 244CBAL (F7s), 44cars, 2273 tons, SB 1:45am, BAR 5:55am

1955-56: median time leaving SB: 2:00 am

The eastward trains were either leaving their initial terminal at San Bernardino or very close to their Los Angeles initial terminal, so their times were pretty much the same all the time.

The NCX between Los Angeles and Oakland always ran at night, after midnight over the Hill. Its running time between San Bernardino and Barstow was about 3 hours 10 minutes, but if it was light, it could make passenger running time of an hour or less to Summit.

Road Power: 4-unit freight FT sets, until 4-unit freight F3/F7 sets arrived in 1948-53. (3800-class 2-10-2s during each June Spud Rush in the 1940s.)

Helper Power: 2-10-2s, 4-8-2s, 2-8-2s, also FT sets (full or partial), until GP7s and H16-44s arrived in 1950-53, and GP9s in 1956-57.

Operations Details:

Before CTC was installed on the Third District, the NCX ran on the regular second class train No. 134 schedule from Los Angeles to San Bernardino. Train No. 134 last appeared in TT #127 of 6-02-46. But rails continued to call the NCX "134" up until the 1950s to show off their seniority [see caution above about confusing use of the 134 symbol for the NCX].

They also called train NCX the "OX," an even older symbol standing for "Oakland Extra." Train NCX was also nicknamed the "Sacred Ox" (don't delay it). With the downgrading of the terminal of Oakland and the ascendancy of Richmond, the Symbol OX became NCX.

The NCX was a long distance time sensitive train that ran in the wee hours and could make passenger train speed up the Hill.

Eastward loads and waybilled or "special" (XAR, XAP) empties were run in eastbound and northbound redball trains like 34, TDX, and NCX.

During WW2, the NCX received cars at Los Angeles from connecting Train 141 (LA-24), which ran daily except Sunday from Wilmington to Los Angeles. The scheduled times at the end points of Train 141's schedule were as follows:

Leave Pier A Yard 1:30 pm

Arrive Los Angeles 3:25 pm

This schedule allowed 6 hours and 20 minutes to get cars from Train 141 into the NCX before the latter's scheduled departure at 9:45 pm.

The first train departing LA's First Street on a given day was given the symbol NCX. Subsequent trains departing First Street on that day and running on the Train No. 134 schedule were given the symbol 134 with an appropriate section number. [see caution above about confusing use of the 134 symbol for the NCX].

Local freights to SB were blocked into the NCX and sorted on arrival at Richmond for delivery to the inner harbor yards, two of which (yards 3 & 4) were only served by ATSF.

NCX train left LA at 8:45 pm, crew was called for 8 pm, they picked it up at 6th St., took the 3rd District to SB, they only stopped along the way if they needed water. NCX was a hotshot, but it stopped in the B yard at SB for crew change (and engine change if steam), and to put a helper on, or "go the way we look" (without helper). They switched out cabooses there too.

It arrived in SB about 11 or 11:30 pm, then left 30-40 minutes later. NCX used a 3800 2-10-2 from LA to SB, changed to a four-unit set of F units for road engines, then doubled-headed or had a rear helper (or both) from SB. If it was not too heavy, they put a helper on the front. If it was heavier, they also put a helper on the rear.

Regarding power, in the steam engine days it was mostly 2-10-2s in the Valley and four-unit F units with 2-10-2 helpers on the Hill. Power always was changed at San Bernardino. When the diesels replaced steam in the 1940s-1950s, it was two-unit geeps in the Valley and four unit F units on the Hill, with power again changed out at San Bernardino.

On a hotshot maybe 4 units would go through to LA and return east on the NCX, SWG or CTX. In that circumstance the power would stay on the train on arrival in the B Yard

At Barstow the NCX reversed directions. This was done on the passenger station tracks, on track three. Track one was the WB Main and track four was the EB Main. This was between the Depot and the Yard Office.

In those days all trains went into the yard at Barstow, so it wouldn't require any additional handling for a train to or from the north and from or to the south. The engine cut off and went to the roundhouse and the caboose was cut off and taken to the caboose track by a switch engine.

The NCX was blocked so that the northwestern bound cars would be cut out at Stockton and interchanged to the WP. Ditto cars for Reno. Some of that traffic did go to the SP there. Generally speaking, cars to the Pacific northwest did not go all the way to Richmond.

The NCX, or maybe it was the replacement symbol, Expediter, that was Santa Fe's attempt to compete with SP's Starpacer to the SF bay area.

Modeling the Train: Use lots of boxcars (and some auto cars) from ATSF, GN, WP, NP, SP&S, MILW, CN, CP, IC, C&NW, and MP. Also use some tank cars from ATSF, UTLX, Shell, Union, and others, and some reefers (SFRD, etc.). The reefers should go on the front.

Please review this again and send corrections and additions. There is a conflict between the train reversing on a depot track in Barstow vs. in the yard (which is correct?). I didn't include all of voluminous data from Stuart Forsyth for May 1945, but it is in his e-mails for reference there.

Thank you,
John Thompson