

Sacramento Northern Railway (Images of Rail)

Paul C. Trimble



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The Sacramento Northern Railway was once a critical interurban link between California's northern Central Valley communities, the state capital, and the Bay Area. Running through orchards, farmland, swamps, and cities, this electric railway began its life in 1905. Service eventually ran from Chico to Oakland, but after the Bay Bridge opened in 1939, the 186-mile route started in San Francisco's Financial District, crossed the bridge on the lower deck, ran through Contra Costa County towns like Moraga, Lafayette, and Pittsburg, across the Suisun straits on the massive rail ferry Ramon (which could hold an entire train), and into Sacramento, the halfway point. From there, the train continued through rolling hills and farms on to Marysville, and finally to Chico before making its return journey. The Sacramento Northern soldiered on until World War II, but eventually the growing car culture, along with competing diesel railroads, undid this splendid line. Interurban passenger service ended in 1941, and the various lines were gradually abandoned or dieselized. Today a 22-mile segment of the route remains in operation at the Bay Area Electric Railway Museum in Solano County.

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