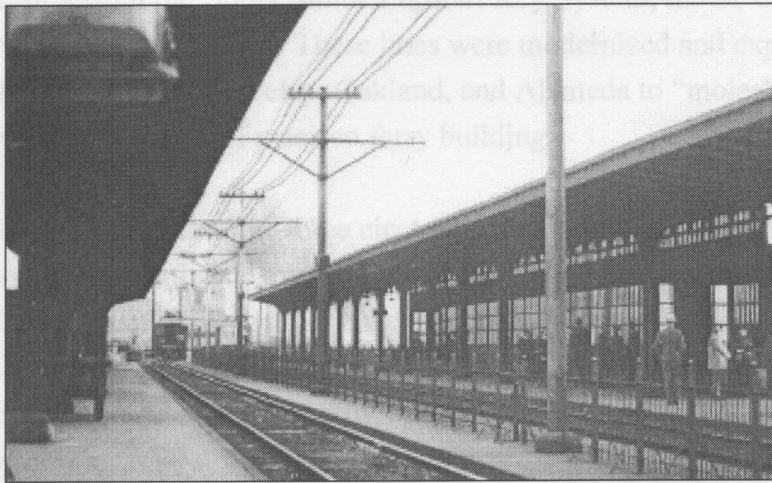


16TH STREET STATION: QUEEN OF THE EAST BAY'S LOST INTERURBAN ELECTRIC SYSTEM



Perhaps more than any other structure in the East Bay, the 16th Street Station is emblematic of the rapid development of Oakland and its sister East Bay cities in the early decades of the Twentieth Century. One commonly associates the station with the Southern Pacific's mainline service and with Oakland as the western terminus of the transcontinental railroad. Yet the SP had long been content with a comparatively modest station at Seventh and Broadway, which marked the beginning and the end of the transcontinental railroad.

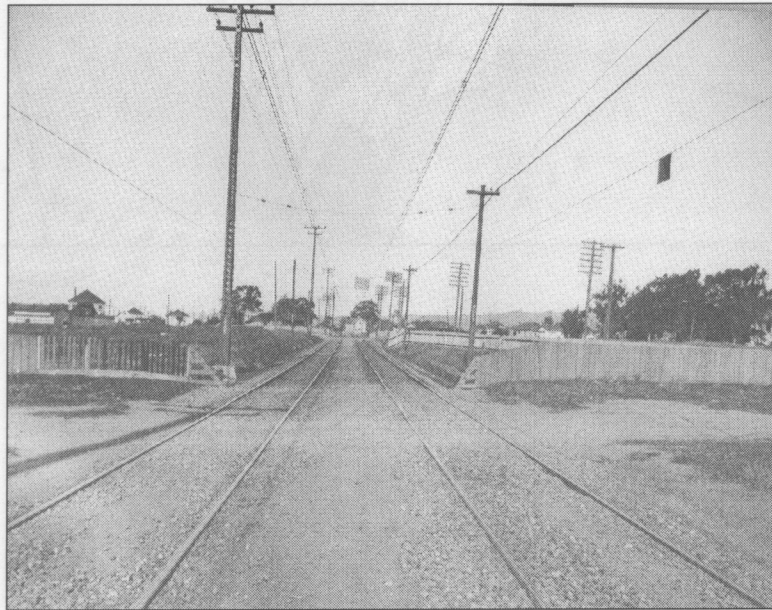
No, it was not the mainline, at least not the mainline alone, that fired the SP's ambitious plan for a monumental station in the Beaux Arts style, clad in sierran granite. The SP designed the 16th Street station as the centerpiece of another railroad altogether, the SP's extensive system of interurban electric cars that served the East Bay for 30 years until 1941 and in so doing played a central role in the rapid development of the East Bay. The last and best vestige of this great interurban electric railroad is the interurban platform still standing at the station, known in the EIR as the "elevated tracks."



At the turn of the Twentieth Century, electrification of suburban railroad lines swept the United States in much the same way the internet presented itself a century later not just as a revolutionary mode of communication, but as transformative of our very way of life. In response to competition from the Borax Smith's upstart Key System, the SP electrified its steam suburban lines between 1905 and 1912. These lines were modernized and expanded to provide electrified suburban service from Berkeley, Oakland, and Alameda to "moles" where ferries could be boarded bound for the San Francisco ferry building.

In the years following the 1906 fire, the three electric "interurban" railroads of the East Bay provided a pre-automotive, yet thoroughly modern, transit spine that spurred the real estate boom out of which the East Bay first took the shape we recognize today. The SP's "Red Cars," the Key System, and the Sacramento Northern knit the East Bay together and, linked by long piers extending out to meet the transbay ferries, provided rapid, clean, and quiet commute service to jobs in San Francisco's financial district.

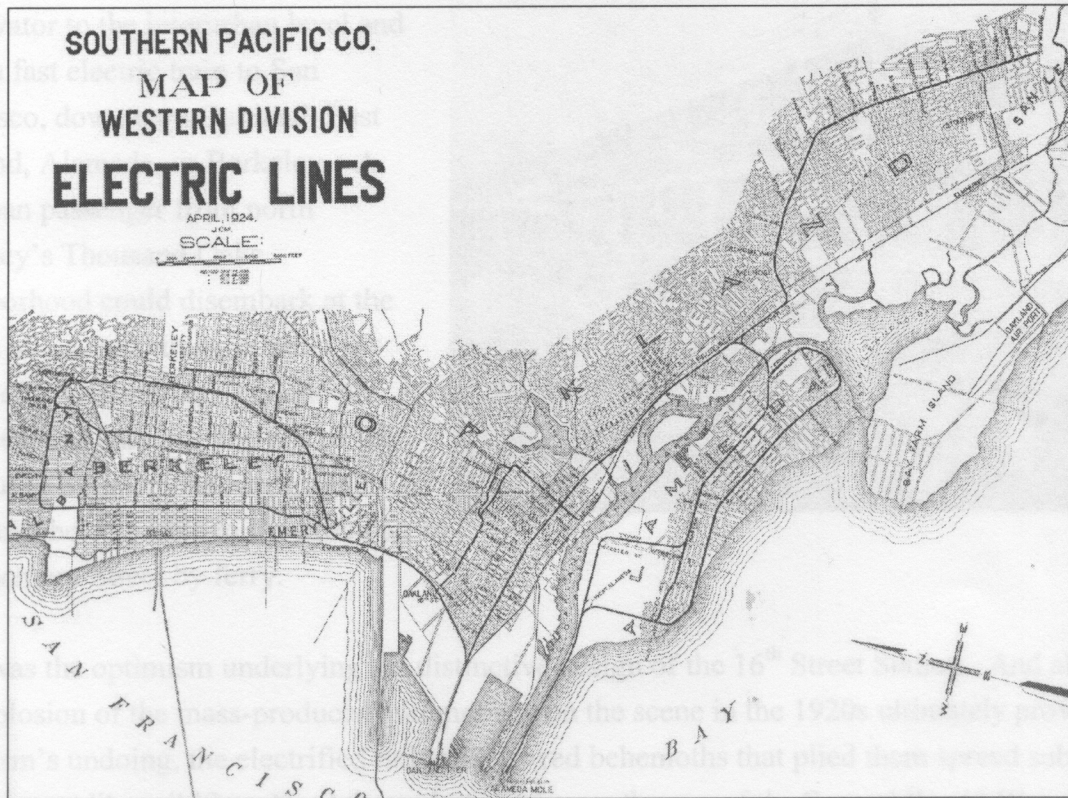
Interurban service preceded real estate development; after laying the tracks, the railroad interests then sold the vacant lots lying on either side.



On those same lots now lie the East Bay neighborhoods of the teens, twenties, and thirties that still hold so much of the area's character and charm.

The SP's Red Cars served Berkeley, East Oakland, and Alameda from 1905 until 1941. In the early years, there were few automobiles, bridges, and through highways. People turned to

electrified rail as the revolutionary technology of personal mobility. Accordingly, the SP grandly conceived and built the 16th Street Station as the central transfer point between the SP mainline and its interurban electrics and as the gateway to and from the newly reborn City of San Francisco itself.

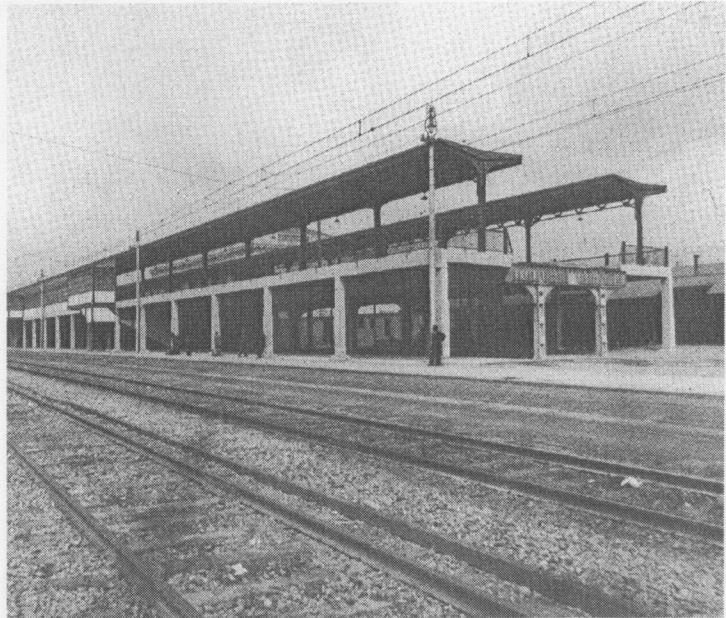


Such was the program underlying the 16th Street Station, though the explosion of mass-production in the scene of the 1920s ultimately proved that optimism's undoing. The 1920s also witnessed the spread of suburban development, and the Red Cars spurred the construction of homes and the development of commercial districts as far north as Northbrae in Berkeley, through south Berkeley and Emeryville, as far east as Flaverscourt and Dutton Avenue in East Oakland, and throughout Alameda.

Today, the platform remains intact and a perhaps haunting reminder of the rapidity of our societal change. Thousands of passengers from a simpler time waited here on ordinary mornings for trains to take them to their homes, jobs, friends, and loved ones. The catenary standards that remain to this day supported the wires



The 16th Street Station is unique in its specific design to accommodate both mainline and interurban service. To avoid interference and delays and to provide ease of transfer, the SP designed the station to accommodate its steam mainline on the ground and its interurban electrics on an elevated platform. Mainline passengers could disembark at 16th Street, have their baggage transferred by elevator to the interurban level and catch a fast electric train to San Francisco, downtown Oakland, East Oakland, Alameda, or Berkeley. A suburban passenger from north Berkeley's Thousand Oaks neighborhood could disembark at the station as a central transfer point to another SP line serving Oakland or Alameda, or could ride the rest of the way out to SP's Oakland mole, and complete the commute to his office on Montgomery Street by ferry.



Such was the optimism underlying the distinctive design of the 16th Street Station. And although the explosion of the mass-produced automobiles on the scene in the 1920s ultimately proved that optimism's undoing, the electrified rails and the red behemoths that plied them spread suburban development like wildfire. Until the end of service on the eve of the Second World War, the Red Cars spurred the construction of homes and the development of commercial districts as far north as Northbrae in Berkeley, through south Berkeley and Emeryville, as far east as Havenscourt and Dutton Avenue in East Oakland, and throughout Alameda.

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that transmitted the power to move the huge trains in and out of the station. Through creative reuse, the “elevated tracks” could serve as a monument to this chapter in our East Bay heritage.