

Capital idea in Kansas

Union Pacific, BNSF Railway, and Amtrak converge along the river in Topeka



Union Pacific C44AC No. 7191 heads east past the UP yard and through SJ Junction with eastbound coal loads from the Powder River Basin on Aug. 25, 2009. Jeff Carlson

CITY: Located 65 miles west of Kansas City along the Kansas River, Topeka, Kan., is a city whose story is intertwined with railroads. Incorporated in 1857, its first mayor was none other than Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe founder Cyrus K. Holliday.

TRAIN WATCHING: BNSF Railway and Union Pacific follow opposite banks of the Kansas River from Kansas City to Topeka. Along the north bank, three Union Pacific lines from the west join together at Topeka, forming a high-traffic, double-track main

line to Kansas City. On the northwest side of Topeka, the Salina Sub (KP line) from Denver meets the Kansas Sub from Marysville, Kan., at Menoken Junction. Continuing east from Menoken is UP's fairly substantial yard, which handles locals, manifests, and unit grain trains, including those of the Kansas City Southern. At the east end of this yard is SJ Junction, which is where the ex-Rock Island line from Herington (now UP's Topeka Sub) funnels into the Kansas Sub. Just east of SJ Junction is the BNSF interchange, a short remnant of the Santa Fe's Atchison line. Following the south side of the

river, BNSF's Topeka Sub begins west of Kansas City at Holliday Junction, runs through Lawrence and Topeka, and then turns south to re-join the Transcon main line at NR Junction in Emporia. The Topeka Sub is a single-tracked line that hosts locals, coal trains, and Amtrak's *Southwest Chief*. The Topeka Sub often serves as the Transcon's third main track to take extra traffic or allow for track work or problems. Train movement along the Topeka Sub is authorized by track warrant, so a radio can pay big dividends here. Topeka is also home to the railroad's business car fleet and a large BNSF diesel shop, located just north of the Amtrak depot. You can get good views of it from the Branner Street overpass. You likely won't see Amtrak trains running in daylight, though, unless one of them is running late: The west-bound *Chief* is due at 12:29 a.m., and the east-bound *Chief* calls at 5:18 a.m. On a typical day, the Topeka Sub sees at least six and as many as 10 road trains and a handful of local switchers, though this is often augmented with rerouted trains from the Emporia Sub. UP's Kansas Sub between Topeka and Kansas City sees approximately 60 to 80 trains in a 24-hour period. Railfans often gather at Porubsky's curve in North Topeka at the UP-BNSF interchange, where photography is good in both the morning and afternoon. In addition, the neighborhood is fairly quiet, there's ample parking on either side of the tracks, and police will rarely bother you here. To get there, exit I-70 west at 4th Street, go north on Kansas Avenue, and then head east to the tracks on Gordon Street. For more info on railfanning in Topeka, visit <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/topekarailfans>.

RAILROAD FREQUENCIES: BNSF: 161.145, Topeka Sub (Holliday Junction-NR Junction). UP: 161.520, KC West Dispatcher (KC-Soldier Creek, west of Topeka); 160.290, Topeka Yard; 160.740, KP (Salina-Menoken); 161.550, Topeka Sub (Topeka-Herington); 161.175, Kansas Sub (Soldier Creek-Marysville).

FOR YOUR FAMILY: As the state capital, Topeka offers tours of the capitol building, the Kansas Museum of History, the Brown v. Board National Historic Site, Mulvane Art Museum, Great Overland Station, and more. Hotels and restaurants are located on the west side of town along Wannamaker Road. For more information about visiting the area, go to www.visittopeka.us.

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TRACKSIDE GUIDE TOPEKA, KAN.

