

**THE TEHUANTEPEC SHIP
RAILWAY: ITS
PRACTICABILITY AND
COMMERCIAL FEATURES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649061495

The Tehuantepec Ship Railway: Its Practicability and Commercial Features by Anonymous

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Cover @ 2017

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Tehuantepec Ship Railway Company.

THE

Tehuantepec Ship Railway;

ITS

Practicability and Commercial Features.

From "THE MEXICAN FINANCIER,"
December, 1884.

NEW YORK:
BOWNE & Co., PRINTERS, 124 PEARL STREET.

1884.

Tehuantepec Ship Railway,

DESIGNED TO TRANSPORT VESSELS OVERLAND BETWEEN THE ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC OCEANS,
ACROSS THE ISTHMUS OF TEHUANTEPEC,
IN MEXICO.

In the discussion of this subject, we propose to show the commercial necessity, practicability, advantages, business and revenue of the TEHUANTEPEC SHIP RAILWAY.

FIRST.

COMMERCIAL NECESSITY.

The Rocky Mountains of the United States, the Sierra Madre of Mexico, the Cordilleras of Central America, and the Andes of South America form an almost continuous barrier, so lofty and extensive as to be nearly impassable to man in his commercial pursuits. The railways that scale these heights by an immense expenditure of money, seeking the business of the fertile valleys on each side, rise to an altitude of several thousand feet, soar up among the clouds, climb over the rocky barrier, and descend the mountain sides by grades almost impracticable for their heavily loaded trains. These mountain barriers separate at least seventy million people living in Mexico, the United States and Canada, nearly all of whom would be benefited by the breaking down of this obstruction to their agricultural, manufacturing and commercial prosperity.

The latest compilation of the internal commerce of the United States alone, shows an aggregate amount of over ten

billions of dollars per annum; more than the value of all the foreign commerce of Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Holland, Austria and Belgium combined. This internal commerce is carried on through the network of her rivers, her extensive coast line and her railroads. The productions of the United States, of almost every kind, are becoming superabundant, requiring for the full extension and growth of its varied industries a commercial interchange with other nations lying to the east or to the west of her obstructing mountain ranges. The Pacific coast, with all its remarkable development of the past few years, now finds itself too far away from the markets of those nations which need its surplus productions. India and Australia are making strong efforts to supply the demand of those countries which the Pacific coast labors in vain to reach over a course of sixteen thousand miles around Cape Horn. The transcontinental railroad lines cannot afford to carry grain from Portland and San Francisco to New York for home consumption or transshipment to Liverpool. The producers and shippers alike look with anxious eyes to every project for breaking down the Isthmian barrier which now stands between them and the markets of the world, and places them four months away from their customers.

The Pacific coast is separated not only from the Atlantic and European ports, but from the eastern coast of South America and the West Indies, and especially from the Gulf ports of the United States, which are the natural entrepôts and exporting centres of all the immense surplus productions of the great valley of the Mississippi. The value of the annual productions of the Mississippi Valley is estimated at nearly four billion dollars, and their natural outlet to the world is through the Gulf of Mexico, reaching it through the sixteen thousand miles of navigable rivers, trunk and branches of the Mississippi, seeking by water and rail the great commercial city of New Orleans, second to New York alone in the value of her exports. Here let it be said, that while opening to the world's commerce the valley of the Mississippi, by removing the barrier at the mouth of the River, Mr. JAMES B. EADS conceived the greater work of removing the more serious obstacle to commerce that,

directly across the Gulf from the jetties at the mouth of the South Pass, rises up between the oceans and between the nations. Again, Galveston, the seaport city of Texas, (a State of two millions of inhabitants, with six thousand miles of railways) is still more completely isolated than New Orleans; with deep water secured for its harbor, it will need even more than at present a direct outlet for its commerce into the Pacific Ocean. Again, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and many intermediate ports and their tributary territory are excluded by the same barrier from all that lies west of these chains of mountains, not only the western coast of South America, as far south as Chili, and the western coast of Mexico, but the eastern coasts of the old world—Japan, China, India, Australasia, and the almost numberless Isles of the Pacific. The United States and Mexico need the surplus peculiar productions of these countries; they need our manufactured products; but the interchange can now be carried on only by transshipment and railroad carriage over the Panama Isthmus, at a cost of from ten to twenty-five dollars per ton of freight, and twenty-five dollars per head of passengers, or by the long, circuitous and dangerous passage around Cape Horn or the Cape of Good Hope, or the expensive route, via the Suez Canal.

Great Britain, the great carrier of the nations, whose flag floats over seventy per cent. of the world's marine, suffers from this barrier standing stolidly and forever between her and the commercial objects of her desire. This barrier is also an obstruction to the commerce of France and other maritime nations of Europe.

To sum up these general statements and to bring together these various features of the subject; the world needs a Gateway through the mountains, a path broad and plain for the intercommunication of the nations, on the shortest possible lines, for the transportation of the varied products which each nation has in surplus for the other's need. More than most other nations does the United States require that extension of her coast line from the east to the west, and the west to the east, which a navigable connection between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific, will give her. More vitally still, though the magnitude of the commerce is less,

does the Republic of Mexico need a union of her east and west coast lines across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, as an auxiliary to the extensive and necessary railway system which this young republic has so heroically inaugurated at great present sacrifice, but for the future greatness and prosperity to which her wonderful natural resources entitle her. With the railroads, and the Ship Railway; with abundant communication by land and by sea; with the throbbings of a new strong national life, and with an internal and coastwise commerce of her own, she will eventually reach such a lofty position among the nations, that her statesmen will be proud of the great stride they have now taken in the march of the world's civilization, and her people will so devoutly reverence the greatness of their country, that no dissensions will be permitted to jeopardize its prosperity and growth.

The preceding general statement is but an epitome of the voluminous reports that have been made and the facts and arguments that have been given during the last three centuries, urging individuals and governments to undertake the removal of this barrier to commerce.

Said General J. G. Barnard, in a brief review of this subject several years ago: "No commercial, agricultural or speculative problem has had a history more marked. From the era of the Spanish conquest of America, the search for the secret of the supposed natural strait was carried on along the coast line of the two continents, and when this ceased, the possibility of the construction of an artificial route began to be discussed. During the last fifty years, governments, companies and individuals have devoted much time and money to the search for a practical route for ships."

Many independent surveys on different lines covering nearly the whole length of the American Isthmus, have been made during the last sixty-five years and embrace particularly the Panama, Nicaragua and Tehuantepec routes, the latter being the most northern and more than twelve hundred miles from the Panama route measured along the axis of the Isthmus.

The facts connected with the attempt to cut a ship canal through the Isthmus at Panama below the sea level, are too generally known to be referred to here, except to say that

the impracticability of constructing the work for any sum of money commensurate with the probable revenue, was the reason for the inception of the Ship Railway and for a location more advantageous to commerce.

The location of the proposed Nicaragua Canal, lies north of Panama. Very elaborate surveys were made here by the United States Government, and a concession was granted by the Republic of Nicaragua to a ship canal company, but the terms of the concession not having been complied with it has recently been declared forfeited by that government.

At Tehuantepec, many surveys have been made by governments and individuals, looking to the construction of an ordinary railroad, a canal with locks and a Ship Railway. The advantages of this route as relates to commerce, climate, construction and maintenance, will be fully given under the appropriate subject. It is only necessary now to support these views of the commercial necessity for an inter-oceanic communication by the publicly expressed opinions of men capable of forming a correct judgment.

The views expressed by Secretary Marcy, Presidents Buchanan, Hayes, Garfield and Arthur, and Secretary Frelinghuysen, all confirm the opinions advanced that this commercial necessity exists.

One of the most far-seeing statesmen of this day who comprehends the immense commercial advantages to be gained by establishing an inter-oceanic communication between the Atlantic and Pacific, U. S. Senator William Windom, while calling attention to the map of the world in the Senate Chamber, in 1881, used the following expressive language :—

“ Bordering upon the Gulf on the north lie the great States
 “ of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida.
 “ North of these lies the mighty empire drained by the Mis-
 “ sissippi River, while to the east are the Atlantic States,
 “ stretching from Florida to Maine. On the Pacific are the
 “ States of California, Oregon and Washington Territory, and
 “ from the Atlantic to the Pacific, stretches a domain whose
 “ magnificence is the pride of every American. Obstructing,

"embarrassing and burdening the commerce between these
 "great sections of the Union, lies this narrow strip of land.
 " * * * * To avoid it, 1,200,000 tons of wheat raised in Cal-
 "ifornia and Oregon last year are compelled to seek a Euro-
 "pean market by a costly and tedious voyage of fourteen
 "thousand miles around Cape Horn. Even the exchange of
 "productions between our own Atlantic and Pacific States
 "must be made by the same circuitous, expensive and dan-
 "gerous route, or else sustain the heavy burdens imposed for
 "railway transportation across the continent. The com-
 "merce of all the leading nations is in like manner obstructed
 "and burdened. The time has come when this barrier is to
 "be removed. The wonder is that it has been permitted to
 "remain so long."

Touching on some of the commercial results to be gained
 by a crossing of the American isthmus for ships, General
 Grant stated in the *North American Review* in 1881:—

"The States of North and South America, lying along the
 "Pacific furnish in large abundance those commodities which
 "are constantly needed in the markets of almost every country
 "of Europe. Of guano and nitre the trade is immense. From
 "the ports of Chili, nearly four hundred thousand tons of
 "freight are shipped eastward annually. More than one
 "million tons of grain are shipped each year from the Pacific
 "States and Territories. There is, no doubt, that more than
 "4,000,000 tons of merchandise find their way from the east
 "and require water communication, in order that they may
 "be shipped economically and profitably, and this is mer-
 "chandise to which railway transportation across the conti-
 "nent is wholly inapplicable."

The statesmen of Mexico from Hernando Cortez to the pres-
 ent time, have been fully aware of the immense benefit to
 Mexico, that would inevitably result from an inter-oceanic
 crossing at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Cortez himself
 sought for it, and when his examinations showed no natural
 opening through the mountains at the level of the sea or by
 the rivers, his great mind looked forward into the distant
 future, and he saw in imagination what is soon to be realized
 —a commercial Gateway between the Oceans. Believing that