



# MANAGING THREE MILLION HORSEPOWER: OVERSEEING UNION PACIFIC'S FLEET OF FREIGHT LOCOMOTIVES

As with most things on the railroad, the way that Union Pacific has managed its motive power fleet has evolved over time. The fleet was managed very differently in the 1940s than it was in the 1970s, with a transition over time from local to centralized management among other changes. All along however, the goals have been the same: to have a sufficient number of well-maintained locomotives in the right place at the right time to move the company's traffic on schedule, while keeping costs at a minimum. In this article we'll look at how Union Pacific managed its freight locomotive fleet from the 1940s into the early 1970s.

### Historic Practices

Throughout most of the steam era, from the first days of the railroad into

the 1940s, decisions regarding the day-to-day movement of specific locomotives were made locally. Once company officials had assigned certain types of locomotives to specific "pools" (see "Pool Power" sidebar, page 6) based upon their characteristics, it was then up to the Chief and Assistant Chief Dispatchers responsible for those territories to manage their assigned locomotives. Steam locomotives were assigned to specific pools based upon their characteristics with those pool territories normally covering only one or two crew districts. The length of locomotive pool territories varied widely across the system. In the mid-1940s for example, pool territories ranged in size from just 56 miles (Cheyenne-Laramie) to much longer runs such as Council Bluffs-North Platte (284 miles), Caliente-Yermo (297 miles),

Pocatello-Huntington (336 miles), and Kansas City-North Platte (423 miles).

For the longer pool territories, normal operation with steam power could mean that a train was handled end-to-end by a single locomotive, or that different locomotives handled the train with

Power from two different locomotive pools sit side-by-side in Ogden in this mid-1960s photograph. At that time, the SD24s were South-Central District power assigned to the Ogden-Los Angeles pool while the GTEL was Eastern District power assigned to the Council Bluffs-Ogden pool. The expense and lost productivity associated with these layovers was one of the main reasons that ever-larger pool territories were established, allowing locomotives to operate through terminals where they had previously been swapped out and held until needed for subsequent trains. —Dave England photo, Don Strack collection