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## Post Road from Fort Smith to San Diego

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POST ROAD FROM FORT SMITH TO SAN DIEGO.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 492.]

MARCH 3, 1851.

Mr. R. H. STANTON, from the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, made the following

REPORT:

*The Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads, to whom was referred the memorial of William Bayard, proposing to construct a post road from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to San Diego, on the Pacific, and to convey the mails over said route, respectfully report:*

That the committee, impressed with the importance of an overland route to the coast of the United States on the Pacific, have considered, with some attention, the proposition of Mr. Bayard to open a road between Fort Smith, Arkansas, and San Diego. With a view of eliciting information upon the subject, the chairman of the committee requested the opinion of Lieutenant Maury, whose letter is here inserted:

NATIONAL OBSERVATORY,  
Washington, April —, 1850.

SIR: I return you herewith Mr. Bayard's bill, which you were kind enough to permit me to examine, with a request that I would furnish you with my views in relation to the subject-matter thereof.

I have been, and am, a decided advocate for all those measures which shall tend to facilitate communication between the "States" and California; and I would have the government to encourage such measures as far as it may be constitutional and expedient so to do. I am also in favor of doing justice to the West, by giving her—whenever it may consistently with the public interest be given—her fair share of public disbursements.

California is far distant, and it appears to me that I am stating a self-evident proposition when I say that government itself must either open a way to that distant land, or encourage its citizens so to do; that for this purpose it must incur expenses for which it will be reimbursed—not immediately, indeed, but after a while.

Ultimately I look to a railroad across the country to California, but it will be some years at least before that can be completed. In the mean time we want a good wagon road; a road over which the western emigrant and fortune-seeker may haul his stuff, drive his cattle, and find, in a well-established line of military posts, security against Indians and banditti.

California is an anomaly. It has been turned to gold at our touch. It is the common property of the citizens of the United States. All have an

equal right to go there, and it is the duty of the government not to afford one class of citizens or one section of the country any facilities or advantages over those of another.

The people of the seaboard are accustomed to the ocean; they see it, and sail on it, and use it, and are familiar with it from infancy; and when the government established a line of steamers to California, via the isthmus, it opened a road which practically was for the benefit of the people of the seaboard. The western man, who was familiar with the forest and a stranger to the sea, would resort to this route as seldom and as reluctantly as he of the seaboard, being unacquainted with forest life and habits, would undertake to fight his way overland among Indians and wild beasts.

Practically—not designedly, but nevertheless practically and in effect—the isthmus route is almost exclusively for the benefit of the people of the seaboard. Let them have it, but do justice to the West; and the West, I have maintained often, has never yet received its fair share of public expenditures.

California had been scarcely annexed before the coast survey was on its way there to point out shoals and dangers, and to make the way smooth, safe, and easy to the people of the seaboard, for the people of the seaboard are those “who go down to the sea in ships,” and who reap the first benefits and profits of commerce.

For the safety of that commerce and the people who are engaged in it light-houses are maintained, the coast survey is carried on, and the navy is supported, at a cost, all told, of some eight or ten millions a year. None of this money is expended among the western people. They are left to battle the watch with snags in the rivers—with the forest, with wild beasts, and savages on the land; and there are but few ways in which the government finds it expedient or practicable so to shape its disbursements as to give them their fair share.

But when one of these occasions does occur, I am for embracing it; and this is one in which the interests of the government and the convenience of the western people will be both promoted and advanced. That such will be the case is obvious, and there needs no argument to prove it.

In case of war, communication by sea would be broken up; therefore give us the land route.

The faith of the government is pledged to protect the Mexican frontier against the Indians. A stage road would help us to do this.

The pirates of Sumatra or the cannibals of the Feejee islands plunder an American ship, and instantly a man-of-war is down upon them; and it is as much the duty of the government to protect the citizen from the savage on the land as on the water; and this stage road, with the settlements that it would draw after, would effectually do this in the course of a few years.

In truth the advantages and necessity of having a good road across the country are manifold, and so palpable withal, that it is needless to enumerate them.

Mr. King, in his California report, estimates that in 1854 there will be more than half a million of people in California. These people must be fed, he tells us, with meat driven on the hoof from the western States.

It is as much the duty of government to provide for the safety of this commerce as it is to provide for its safety after the same cattle have been killed, salted, packed, and sent around Cape Horn.

At each station on the road there will be the nucleus of a settlement; the stables will call for the blaeksmith shop; the hostlers, with their families, for groceries, vegetables, &c.; and the eating-places for the passengers will call for the tavern, with its accompaniment of stocks, farms, dairies, &c. And thus this road will be fringed in a little time with settlers and settlements that will keep the Indians off and make the way safe for the pedler, the merchant, the drover, the teamster; and, above all, for the west-ern emigrant with his family, his cattle, and stuff of various kinds.

Mr. Bayard's proposition is silent with regard to the point of departure on this side. That, perhaps, should be left to the Executive for the present, and to be a mere temporary arrangement until the various routes for the railroad are examined.

I am of opinion that these examinations, which I hope will be authorized at the present session of Congress, will lead to the discovery of a better and more desirable route than any that is now known. And, in case it should so turn out that a better route, whether it be north or south, be found, I would have a clause in the bill requiring the contractors to start from such point on this side as, after these examinations shall have been made, the President of the United States shall decide to be the best and most desirable.

The Spanish Americans, you know, are a people of but few mechanical resources. They manufacture nothing and buy everything.

The people of Cuba bought of foreign merchandise last year, on the average, upwards of \$60 for every man, woman, and child on the island, not counting slaves.

If the people of northern Mexico, who have nothing but the produce of their mines to sell, should take but \$5 *per capita* of foreign merchandise, they would be supplied with it over this road, provided that it take the southern route; and that would give rise to an inland commerce greater by far than all our trade with China and the whole Pacific ocean, exclusive of California and Oregon.

With the facilities which a stage road will offer, I reckon this inland trade with northern Mexico at from 10 to 15 millions the year. I reckon the trade to New Mexico, with a good road, at three millions, with Deseret at one, and with California at almost any amount the wildest visionary would be willing to write down.

The claim of the people of the West to have an immediate, safe, and practicable overland route, to serve until a railroad is built, I think a fair, reasonable, righteous, and a constitutional claim.

I am told that Mr. Bayard is responsible, and that he is fully able to comply with all the promises and engagements that he offers to make with the government.

If you will permit me, I will go for a moment into the reasonableness of this proposition.

He proposes to open and grade a road 18 feet wide, by the least circuitous route, to any point that shall be named on the coast of California; to put 20 men and 60 horses on every 30 miles of the road; to have relays at every 10 or 15 miles, with 50 armed men at each relay through the Apache country for the protection of passengers and travellers; to carry the mail once a week each way in 4 horse coaches; to commence the service within six months after the date of contract; and, at the end of 15 years, to let the road and bridges revert to the government without charge; provided

the government will pay him annually \$750,000; give him the right to use government timber, stone, &c., for the road; exact tolls enough to keep it in repair; and to have the pre-emption right, at 10 cents the acre, of four sections of land along the road for every 30 miles of the road.

I would not allow the people to be taxed for travelling over that road. The contractor might be allowed to charge moderate tolls not exceeding a fixed rate for all necessary bridges of a certain description; provided the construction of such bridges were approved of by competent officers of the army, who should inspect and pass them.

The land asked for is neither here nor there.

Considering that the contractor has to open the road, build bridges, and furnish halting-places in the wilderness where travellers may stop and get refreshments, it does not appear to me that the charge of \$750,000 is unreasonable.

Mr. T. Butler King, in his report, estimates the population of California for this year at 120,000, with an annual increase of 100,000 till 1854, when it will amount to 520,000.

Now, the population of California consists almost entirely of men; there are but few women and children. The inhabitants are all grown-up men, who have for the most part left families and friends behind, and who have gone there mostly as sojourners. These men write home often, and as often receive letters from friends in the States.

We have all been amazed at statements showing the immense numbers of letters coming and going by the California mails.

I suppose it would be safe to assume that each man in California averages a letter home once a month, and receives a letter in reply as often. This would give to each one, at 40 cents postage the single letter—the present rate—an annual postage bill of \$9 60; for the sake of round figures, say \$10.

This, according to Mr. King's estimate of population, would give for post office receipt on account of California:

For 1850	-	-	-	-	\$1,200,000
1851	-	-	-	-	2,200,000
1852	-	-	-	-	3,200,000
1853	-	-	-	-	4,200,000
1854	-	-	-	-	5,200,000

I do not pretend to claim any degree of accuracy for this array of figures—estimate I cannot call it. It is startling. But at 40 cents the single letter, the postage between this country and England by Cunard steamers would even exceed this. And California so sets all rules, experience, and judgment at defiance—and that, too, always in the same direction—that no fancy on this side seems too wild for reality on that.

Mr. Bayard proposes to keep 20 men and 60 horses for every 30 miles of road, and to run a weekly line of coaches.

Supposing the road to be 1,700 miles long, it will require 3,400 horses and 1,140 men, exclusive of the extra number for the Apaches; and, if we suppose each team of four horses to perform one stage a day, and the entire trip to be made in 20 days, which is less than 100 miles on the average, we shall have an outfit of 300 coaches.

I suppose that the cost of these men will average him out there at the rate of \$300 each through the year; and the horses, at lowest livery stable prices here, at least \$15 the month.

If these estimates be near the truth, we shall see that this enterprise requires a very large outlay, as per estimate:

Cost of 3,400 horses, at \$60	-	-	-	-	\$204,000
Cost of 300 coaches, at \$800, including harness	-	-	-	-	240,000
Forage for 3,400 horses, at \$15 per month, or \$180 per year	-	-	-	-	612,000
Pay 1,140 men, at \$300 per annum	-	-	-	-	342,000
Total	-	-	-	-	<u>1,398,000</u>

But the purchase of horses and coaches is not an annual expense; they will be on hand for the next year. Deducting the cost of these, without any allowance for wear and tear, we have, for the annual cost of maintaining the men and horses on the line, \$954,000, or more by \$200,000 than he charges for carrying the mail.

The contractor looks, I presume, to passengers and freight, merchandise, &c., to make up the difference and to remunerate.

The proposition, therefore, seems reasonable enough, as far as the government is concerned. A person, said to be responsible, proposes to build and bridge a road 1,700 miles through the wilderness, to settle the sides of it, to haul the mail once a week each way between the States and California; for \$4 25 for every mile that each mail is so hauled; i. e. he proposes to haul the mail 176,800 miles for \$750,000.

For such service, and at such a rate, I think the government may well afford to open a way by which the western people may get to California.

Another consideration in favor of opening an immediate overland route is to be found in this point of view, viz: On account of the present channels of communication, all the gold from California finds its way into the Atlantic cities; precious little of it gets into the western States.

Open this road, and the western States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas, with large portions of other States, will get their share. The gold will be brought over with the mail, and the traders and emigrants over the road from the West will bring back that way in gold the returns of their ventures and the fruits of their labors.

In short, I think the West may fairly claim from the government such speedy and prompt action as may be necessary to secure them the use of such a road, so reinforced and protected, as this is promised to be, against the difficulties and dangers of the journey.

Respectfully, &c.,

M. F. MAURY.

HON. EMERY D. POTTER,  
*House of Representatives, Washington.*

Some of the evils pointed out in this letter as likely to occur have actually occurred.

If we take the number of the overland emigrants who set out for California last season at 40,000—and this estimate it is believed is quite in bounds—we shall be enabled to form something like an approximate estimate as to the loss which takes place on the way-side to that distant region, and which losses the establishment of a weekly line of post-coaches would do much to lessen, if not obviate.

Thousands of these emigrants perished by the way-side—some by treachery, some from fatigue, but multitudes by famine. Large sums were subscribed, and relief parties sent out to succor and help many of the emigrants.

It may be doubted whether a case parallel to this can be found in the history of the world; a case in which the government has left its citizens, in travelling from one portion of its territory to another, so utterly exposed, helpless, without protection or succor of any sort. The fact that they were so left, and have so suffered, is attributable not to the want of sympathy on the part of the government for the worthy emigrant, but to the circumstance that the case, and the incidents growing out of it, were suddenly sprung upon the country, and there was not sagacity to foresee nor time left to prepare for such a state of things.

If, for the sake of the calculation, it be supposed that, owing to the exposures and dangers from savages on the route, each emigrant is called upon to expend \$100 more on the way to California than he would do if there were a line of stage-coaches, with its stables, barns, shops, and conveniences scattered along the distances of 15, 20, 30, and even 50 or 100 miles apart, and at which the emigrant could exchange his jaded horse for a fresh one, repair his wagon, and replenish his stock of supplies:

If, for the want of such facilities as the proposed line would furnish, it be taken that the expenses of the journey average \$100 more than they would do; and if the number of overland emigrants be taken, as above, at 40,000 for the season,—we shall see that the emigrants of the West have actually strewed the way-side of their dreadful journey to California with cattle, with stock, with wagons, and other articles of private property, valued, in the aggregate, at 40,000 times one hundred dollars; or, in round numbers, four millions of dollars.

Of all classes of our fellow-citizens, this is the class which can least afford such a loss, and the class upon which this tax comes with the most ill-favored grace. They are going, these emigrants, to reclaim a wilderness, and make the desert blossom. They are going to develop new States, and the dormant wealth of unknown and almost unpeopled regions. They are going to give value to the public domain that but for them would be valueless, and they are going to increase the prosperity and multiply, by the sweat of their brow, the sources of wealth to this great nation.

To have them, for another season, to do all this at a sacrifice of another four millions of their hard earnings, would be to incur a degree of legislative responsibility, no part of which your committee are willing to bear.

The committee do not propose a line of stage-coaches to California as a permanent post office measure. Nor do they suppose that the postage for the mail matter to be conveyed on this line will be sufficient at the outset to defray the expenses of it; but it lies in a direction where the American citizen has yet to be made secure in life and property. The establishment of these postal facilities would draw after them national advantages greater than any which can flow from the receipts of postage.

Therefore your committee recommend the passage of the bill which they ask leave to report, as well on account of high considerations of public good, as for the transportation of mail matter within the territories of the United States, where it is the duty as well as the right of Congress to establish post-roads and mail lines.