Railroad Development

With no railroads, gold-seekers found it very difficult to reach California. This changed when the transcontinental railroad across Donner Pass was completed in 1868. This route remains in use after minor adjustments were made for the larger trains of today. Rails quickly spread west to San Francisco Bay and south to Mexico. The railroads helped establish new towns and cities. They opened markets to sell California minerals and agricultural products in the east.

To pay for construction of these early railroads, the federal government granted ownership of land along the routes to the railroad companies. However, the land was divided up like a giant checkerboard, with the railroads and the government each owning every other plot of land. In several areas of California you can still see this pattern today, which is a lasting legacy of the transcontinental railroad. (See the Federal Lands map on the next page.)

As California's population increased, the railroad network continued to expand and is still growing today with Metrolink, Caltrain, and Amtrak commuter and freight service throughout the state. In 2008, California citizens voted to fund a high-speed rail between San Francisco and Los Angeles. When completed, it will start a new era of rapid commerce and travel much like the transcontinental railroad did when it was fully completed in 1869.

**Image Below:** Chinese laborers pushed the Transcontinental Railroad across Donner Summit in 1867. This worker is removing rock debris from the summit tunnel.

**Source:** Central Pacific Railroad

The sources and credits for this map are listed at http://humboldt.edu/cga/atlas-sources-credits. Note that this map is an 11x14 page, and not meant for 8.5x11 printing or use.