

# Tower 55



*Tower 55 as it appeared in the 1920s. Photo courtesy John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library at UMSL. Used with permission.*

Tower 55 began as one man's dream in 1873, before railroads even reached Fort Worth. Today, it is critical to multiple railroads, connecting traffic nationwide, including Canada and Mexico. A \$115 million upgrade completed Aug. 28 generates numerous economic and environmental benefits.

## HISTORY

In 1873, Buckley Burton Paddock saw the potential for Fort Worth as a major rail hub. His idea, created three years before railroads existed in Fort Worth, became reality as the next three decades brought many railroads into the area.

A railroad junction developed south of downtown, with multiple intersecting rail lines. Railroads cooperated to build an interlocking, and the Railroad Commission of Texas designated it Tower 55. It entered service Sept. 26, 1904. An interlocking is an intersection of railroad tracks controlled by a tower operator or dispatcher to prevent conflicting train movements.

## PRE-UPGRADE CHALLENGES

UP and BNSF trains constitute most of Tower 55's traffic, along with a handful of Amtrak trains. More than 100 freight and passenger trains traversed Tower 55 every day, which was above its fluid capacity range. Dispatchers staged trains up to 150 miles away as they jockeyed for position through the interlocking. Upon arriving at Tower 55, delays of up to 90 minutes occurred daily, often blocking grade crossings.

## Tower 55 (cont.)

### THE FIX

UP and BNSF partnered with various governmental entities to obtain a \$34 million federal grant. The balance was funded primarily by UP and BNSF. Fort Worth and the Texas Department of Transportation each contributed \$1 million and the North Central Texas Council of Governments contributed \$2.5 million. The improvements allow for 20-25 percent additional interchange capacity.

Major work began in March, and finished 13 days early Aug. 28, thanks to cooperation among Union Pacific departments and other railroads. The upgrade added a third north/south main line through the interlocking and four new train slots to the north. New switches and sidings allow increased simultaneous train movements and faster train speeds. Modern signaling and control system upgrades include Positive Train Control (PTC) compatibility, a new federally mandated rail safety system.

City arterial intersections were enhanced and two grade crossings closed. A new emergency vehicle access was incorporated to allow for faster response time to a nearby neighborhood.

### PRIVATE AND PUBLIC BENEFITS

Tower 55's upgrade generated about 900 jobs, and benefits railroads and the public. The project helps avoid nearly \$667 million in transportation costs. It reduces motorist and pedestrian delays by 100,000 hours annually at grade crossings and bridges affected by Tower 55 train traffic. Other benefits include reduced greenhouse gas emissions and fuel savings for motorists and railroads.



*A crane prepares to move the new diamond into place Aug. 9.*



*UP 9649 pulls the first train across the upgraded interlocker Aug. 28, nearly two weeks ahead of schedule.*