



Presidents *Travel* By Rail

For 100 years, from the 1840s through the 1940s, rail was the most efficient way for Americans to travel long distances. In the early days, presidents used trains just like everyone else did – to get from one place to another. They traveled in grander style, and they attracted crowds along the way, but mostly presidents rode trains to get somewhere.

By the late 1800s, expanding duties made it difficult for presidents to take long trips outside Washington, and their ability to communicate with the American public suffered. Presidents were increasingly at the mercy of the press, who represented – or misrepresented – the presidents' views to the American people. The White House quickly realized that the best way to bypass the press and deliver a message directly to the American public was to travel the hundreds of thousands of miles of rail that reached into every small town in America.

By the 1900 election and for the next fifty years, presidential train trips were organized to make the most of the route traveled and less to reach a destination.

- William Taft traveled more than 100,000 miles by rail during his term, reaching every continental U.S. state except North Dakota.





- Woodrow Wilson used a 10,000-mile train trip to convince the nation to support America's entry into the League of Nations, over the objections of an isolationist Congress.

- Franklin Roosevelt traveled nearly 250,000 rail miles while in office, conducting several secret trips to boost morale at America's military bases during the war years.

- Harry Truman, certain to lose re-election in 1948 according to all polls and pundits, covered 30,000 rail miles in the last months of his campaign. He delivered 343 speeches to an estimated six million people and surprised the world by convincing American voters to return him to the White House.

- While Abraham Lincoln never traveled alive in his specially crafted presidential business car, the unique equipment carried his and his son's bodies home to Illinois from Washington D.C. The funeral train finally reached Springfield, Illinois on May 3, 1865. After a 1,645-mile journey, Lincoln was home. The funeral train had passed through 400 cities and towns. One million Americans viewed Lincoln's corpse, and millions more saw the train as the North united to bid Lincoln farewell.





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