

Railroads developed time zones to help schedules

Why would time zones be a Department of Transportation responsibility? The answer is in the history of how time zones were developed over the past 140 years.

Setting “local” time was pretty easy in the early days. Each city had a main clock which was set at “noon” based on when the sun was at its highest point of the day. The other times were the local “sun” time for sunup and sundown. It did not matter whether you were exactly on time because travel was not a scheduled event. You got there when you got there.

Traveling to the east or west, a person would have had to change his watch by one minute every 12 miles to have the correct time.

That changed about the time of the Civil War with the development

of railroads.

With passengers and freight traveling hundreds of miles by train, calculating the time became a problem. The railroads needed to create schedules for departure and arrival of trains, and needed to know about where each train should be at a given time so they could avoid collisions.

Railroad managers tried to address the problem by creating 100 different railroad time zones. This seemed sound until they tried to put it into practice and found that with that many time zones, scheduling remained confusing and uncertain.

Even before that, the ocean navigation had created a need to determine not only where a ship was, but how long it would take to get from one place to another.

In 1852, the Royal Observatory

in Greenwich, England, began transmitting time telegraphically, and by 1855 most of Britain used Greenwich Mean Time, which became the time reference point for the world.

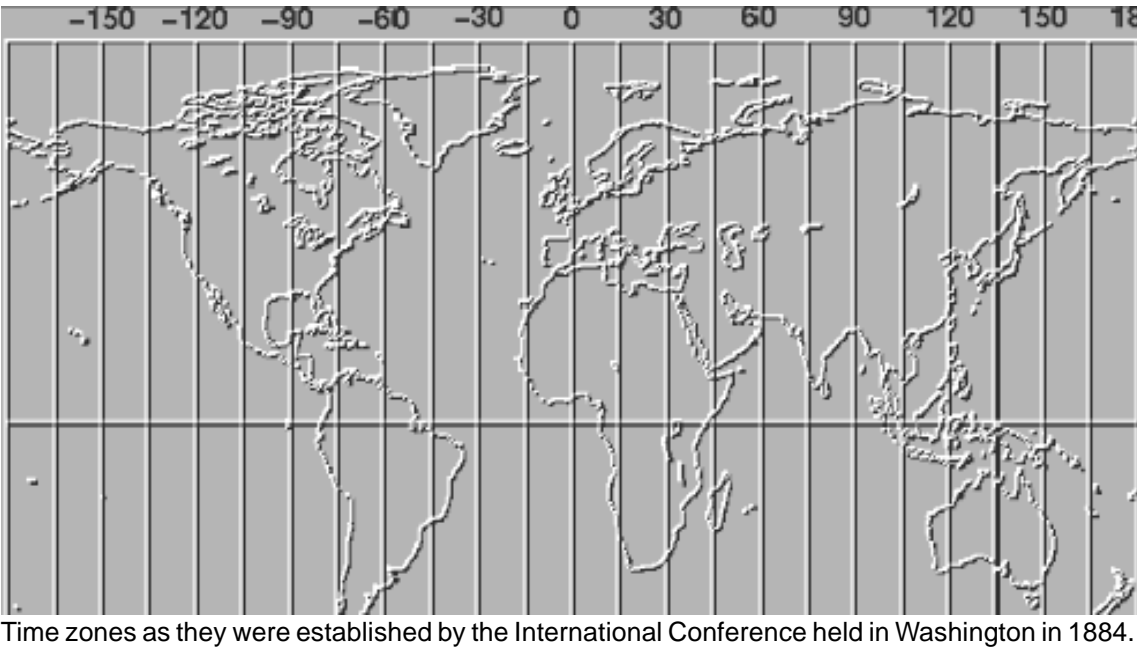
In 1830, the U.S. Navy established a depot which later became the Naval Observatory (1854), with the responsibility to calibrate marine chronometers and other instruments to assure accuracy.

Finally, the railroad managers agreed to four time zones for the continental United States: Eastern, Central, Mountain and Pacific. The Naval Observatory began signaling the new standard time at noon on Nov. 18, 1883.

In 1884, an international congress was called to establish worldwide time zones. The International Meridian Conference met in Washington in October 1884.

At that time, Greenwich was chosen as the point of origin for world time by vote of 22 of the 24 countries attending the conference. They established 24 time zones for the world, each about 15 degrees longitude wide.

Still, there was no official American



Time zones as they were established by the International Conference held in Washington in 1884.

Question of time?

TIME, from Page 1

Prior to 1983 Alaska had four time zones, Pacific, Yukon, Alaska and Bering. In 1983 this was changed to Alaska and Hawaii-Aleutian. The other two to the west are Samoa Time, used in American Samoa, and Chamorro Time, used in Guam and Northern Mariana Island.

Time zone boundaries

The standard time zones in the United States were established in the 1880s by the railroads and were a hit or miss across the country about which city, county or state observed the established time.

During World War I, in March 1918, a federal law established the standard time zones. It set the last Sunday in March as the beginning of Daylight Saving Time and the last Sunday in October as the time to return to standard time.

The four time zones in the United States were declared to be Eastern with the midpoint on the 75th degree of longitude, Central with the midpoint on the 90th degree of longitude, Mountain with the midpoint on the 105th degree of longitude and Pacific with the midpoint on the 120th degree of longitude.

The law established the Interstate Commerce Commission as the authority to issue orders to modify the borders from time to time.

Based on the 1918 law, the Central time zone would occupy the 15 degrees from 83.5 west to 97.5 west, and the eastern border of the original Mountain time zone would have been east of Salina. The midpoint of the Mountain time zone is in Boulder, Colo., at 105 degrees west longitude.

Oldtimers says that the time zone was never east of Salina, but that the border was established on the meridian along the 99th longitude, east of Phillipsburg.

The original Interstate Com-

merce Commission boundary lines included all or part of 26 counties in western Kansas. The counties that were completely in mountain time were Cheyenne, Rawlins, Decatur, Norton, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan, Graham, Wallace, Logan, Gove, Trego, Greeley, Wichita, Scott, Lane, Ness, Hamilton, Kearny and Finney. Phillips, Rooks, Ellis, Hodgeman, Ford and Gray counties were split between Central and Mountain time. Division-point stations where railroads changed crews and time often were chosen for the dividing line.

By 1965, the mountain time zone had shrunk to the five counties, Sherman, Wallace, Greeley, Hamilton and half of Kearny.

There was a move that year take Sherman County into Central Standard Time, and the controversy that followed is an interesting story. The issue ended up in the hands of the Kansas Supreme Court, but at the same time the federal time law was passed, and for a while, Sherman Countians were not sure which time zone they’d land in.

“Time zone boundaries have changed greatly since their original introduction and changes still occasionally occur,” says a document from the U.S. Naval Observatory. “Generally, time zone boundaries have tended to shift westward. Places on the eastern edge of a time zone can effectively move sunset an hour later by shifting to the time zone immediately to their east.

“The accumulation of such changes results in the long-term westward trend. Under the law, the principal standard for deciding on a time zone changes is the ‘convenience of commerce.’

“Proposed time zone changes have been both approved and rejected based on this criterion, although most proposals have been accepted.”



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