

# 6

## ST. LOUIS – SAN FRANCISCO RY “Ship it on the Frisco!”



⤴ REDBIRDS ON THE *KANSAS CITY-FLORIDA SPECIAL* – In this beautiful picture by Ed Dismukes, it’s easy to see why Frisco’s E-units were known as “Redbirds.” When this shot was taken in 1956, E8A #2014, *Truxton*, and its running mate still had gold trim with white fine stripes. The silvered trucks aren’t very visible on #2014, but take a look at the rear truck on the second unit. Immediately behind the second unit, one can see a well maintained Frisco RPO. The Redbirds were almost ready to leave Birmingham Terminal Station with the northbound *Kansas City-Florida Special*. (Ed Dismukes)

Frisco brought a unique Western flair to Birmingham, and it always ranked as a fan favorite. Railfan photographers flocked to places like Adamsville, Billy Goat Hill, and Terminal Station to shoot pictures of the only 4-6-4’s in town, and they went back during the diesel era to photograph named passenger locomotives with bright red paint schemes and silver trucks. Frisco’s main line between Birmingham and Jasper was a great place to watch trains since it was used by both Frisco and Illinois Central Railroad (“IC”). For fans of fast freights, Frisco #138 made the Birmingham to Memphis run in better time than the railroad’s top passenger train.

Frisco predecessor Kansas City, Memphis and Birmingham Railroad (“KCM&B”) completed its line from Memphis to Birmingham in 1887. KCM&B was leased by the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad (“SLSF RR”) and operated as part of the “Frisco Lines” railroad system. SLSF RR made an important acquisition after the turn of the century when it purchased the Birmingham Belt Railroad. The belt railroad had been conceived by Elyton Land Company in the mid-1880’s as an independent terminal railroad that impartially would switch cars between

local businesses and the city’s trunk line railroads. As part of the Highland Avenue and Belt Railroad Company (“Highland Avenue & Belt”), the belt railroad would handle freight traffic while the Highland Avenue branch of the company would operate a passenger carrying street railway serving the Highland Avenue area.

The belt railroad trackage essentially formed a large “U” with the base of the “U” running north and south along 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, east of Sloss Furnace. The southern leg of the “U” ran west on Avenue E, later renamed 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, South, to 15<sup>th</sup> Street where the company had its offices, sheds, and roundhouse. The northern leg of the “U” ran west along 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, North and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, North with branches extending to East Thomas and Finley yards.

After Highland Avenue & Belt went into receivership in 1899, it was purchased by a Mr. E. E. Whitaker. Mr. Whitaker quickly sold the streetcar lines to Birmingham Traction Company and incorporated the remaining freight trackage as “Birmingham Belt Railroad” (“Birmingham Belt”). SLSF RR purchased