

# Summary: Linking East and West

## Cut Off in California

In 1850, California was farther away from the nation's capital than any other state. More than 1,000 miles of mostly unsettled land separated California from the nearest states. Communication between California and the rest of the country was slow.

Mail and goods moved as quickly as the transportation that carried it. Railroads did not reach as far as California. The land route by wagon was slow. Ships sailing around the tip of South America took about six months. Goods sent by ship could be sunk or stolen. A Californian who sent a letter to a friend on the East Coast might wait a year for a reply. State leaders wanted to know decisions made by the national government. Shops waited a long time to receive their orders, and some goods never arrived. Business owners paid the costs of losses and delays. Goods in California were more expensive than in other places.

## Better Communication

In 1857, the U.S. government passed the Overland California Mail Act. This law set aside money to create faster mail service to California. The government put John Butterfield in charge of the Overland Mail Company. He used stagecoaches to deliver mail. At the end of each stage, fresh horses and drivers took over. This method cut mail delivery time to California to 25 days.

In 1860 and 1861, swift horses ridden by teenaged boys did the most to speed up mail service. The Pony Express used these boys to carry mail between California and Missouri, changing horses frequently. Sometimes they passed their mailbags to new riders. The riders could reach California in about 10 days.

But in 1844, Samuel F.B. Morse sent the first telegraph message in only a few minutes. The telegraph used electric signals to send messages over wires. Wires quickly went up throughout the eastern United States. By 1861, the Western Union company completed a telegraph line across the country.



### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**communication** *noun*, sharing information with other people

**transportation** *noun*, a way of moving people and goods

**telegraph** *noun*, uses electrical signals to send messages over wires



### After You Read

**REVIEW** Why was mail between California and the rest of the United States so slow? Highlight the sentences that give details about the slowness of the mail service.

**REVIEW** What did stagecoaches, the Pony Express, and the telegraph have in common? Draw a box around sentences that tell how these methods of communication cut down on the amount of time needed for information to cross the country.