Resolution commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad; honoring the contributions of Chinese railroad workers for their significant contributions; and declaring May 10, 2019, and every May 10 thereafter, as Transcontinental Chinese Railroad Workers Day in the City and County of San Francisco.

WHEREAS, In 1862, President Lincoln signed the Pacific Railroad Act, establishing the Union Pacific Railroad to build west from Omaha, and the Central Pacific Railroad to build east from Sacramento to connect the country by rail; and

WHEREAS, The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad took nearly seven years to complete and stretched nearly 2,000 miles; and

WHEREAS, The Transcontinental Railroad relied heavily on human labor requiring thousands of workers, including Civil War veterans; 8,000 to 10,000 Irish workers; African American freed slaves; an unidentified number of Native Americans; 3,000 to 4,000 Latter-Day Saints; and 12,000 to 20,000 Chinese workers; and

WHEREAS, Facing a severe labor shortage, the Central Pacific began reluctantly to hire Chinese workers from the surrounding area; and upon realizing that Chinese workers were the answer to the labor problem, hired Chinese throughout California and recruited workers from the Guangdong area of China, historically known to experience high levels of poverty and civil unrest; resulting in desperation among residents for employment opportunities abroad; and
WHEREAS, The Chinese workers comprised 80% of the railroad workforce in the west and consisted of almost 90% of the Central Pacific’s entire workforce by 1867, and were considered indispensable for their work ethic and endurance; and

WHEREAS, The Chinese railroad workers took on the lowliest and most dangerous tasks, were paid between half or two-thirds of what their white counterparts made; with no provision for housing and were banned from managerial roles; and

WHEREAS, The Chinese railroad workers were subjected to extremely dangerous conditions, grueling hours of work, and substandard pay; and

WHEREAS, The Chinese laborers moved tons of rock, chipped and blasted away at the sides of mountains, carved 15 tunnels through the granite of the Sierra Nevada Mountains during two horrific winters; and

WHEREAS, The Chinese railroad workers built tunnels and tracks through the most dangerous part of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, taking fifteen months to drill and blast through 1,659 feet of solid granite rock to complete the Summit Tunnel, the highest point of the Central Pacific Track; and

WHEREAS, The treacherous conditions resulted in the death of 1,200 Chinese railroad workers; and

WHEREAS, In June 1867, after enduring deadly explosions and mistreatment, Chinese workers organized a strike against the Central Pacific Railroad demanding higher wages and shorter workdays, marking one of the era’s largest labor strikes against any employer; and

WHEREAS, On April 28, 1869, teams of Chinese workers and eight Irish tracklayers set a world record of laying ten miles of track in one day; and

WHEREAS, On May 10, 1869, the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad met at Promontory Summit, Utah, uniting the country by rail and marking the moment with the driving of a ceremonial gold spike; and
WHEREAS, The contributions of Chinese workers has been minimized, overlooked, sometimes completely ignored in accounts of the construction of the first Transcontinental Railroad; and

WHEREAS, As recently as the 1969 ceremony commemorating the 100th anniversary of the golden spike, then-Transportation Secretary John Volpe ignored the contributions of the Chinese railroad workers by declaring that only “...Americans could drill ten tunnels in mountains 30 feet deep in snow...Who else but Americans could chisel through miles of solid granite?...Who else but Americans could have laid ten miles of track in 12 hours?” despite knowing full well that the Chinese were barred from becoming Americans until after the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943; and

WHEREAS, in 1969, the Chinese American community commemorated the contribution of Chinese workers to the first Transcontinental Railroad by donating two plaques, one in Sacramento and the other at Promontory Summit; and

WHEREAS, In 2014, the United States Department of Labor inducted the Chinese railroad workers into the Labor Hall of Honor for their contributions and their organized efforts to fight for fair wages and safe working conditions; and

WHEREAS, In the face of discrimination and unfair wages, Chinese railroad workers made history by building one of the United States’ most innovative engineering feats; and

WHEREAS, The Transcontinental Railroad changed the face of transportation in the United States and in its 150th Anniversary this year, continues to be a defining part of modern economy providing passage for people across the country and the delivery of goods; and

WHEREAS, The Transcontinental Railroad’s successful completion would not have been possible without the thousands of workers who made possible its construction; and
WHEREAS, By honoring the legacy of the Transcontinental Railroad workers, we
inspire future generations to continue advancing the values of providing dignity, equal
opportunity, civil rights, and equity to working people everywhere; now, therefore, be it
RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco
hereby declares May 10, 2019, and every May 10 thereafter, as Transcontinental Chinese
Railroad Workers Day in the City and County of San Francisco; and, be it
FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
Francisco commits to supporting efforts to illuminate the history of Transcontinental Railroad
workers, especially the sacrifices of Chinese railroad workers; and, be it
FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
Francisco urges that the United States Congress recognizes the Chinese railroad workers by
passing House Resolution 165 introduced by Congressmember Meng; and, be it
FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
Francisco directs the Clerk of the Board to transmit copies of this resolution to the Offices of
Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, United States House of
Representative Jackie Speier, United States Senator Kamala Harris, United States Senator
Dianne Feinstein, respectively, upon passage.
Resolution commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad; honoring the contributions of Chinese railroad workers for their significant contributions; and declaring May 10, 2019, and every May 10 thereafter, as Transcontinental Chinese Railroad Workers Day in the City and County of San Francisco.

May 07, 2019 Board of Supervisors - AMENDED, AN AMENDMENT OF THE WHOLE BEARING NEW TITLE
Ayes: 10 - Brown, Fewer, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Ronen, Safai, Stefani, Walton and Yee
Excused: 1 - Peskin

May 07, 2019 Board of Supervisors - ADOPTED AS AMENDED
Ayes: 10 - Brown, Fewer, Haney, Mandelman, Mar, Ronen, Safai, Stefani, Walton and Yee
Excused: 1 - Peskin

File No. 190461

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED AS AMENDED on 5/7/2019 by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco.

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

Unsigned
London N. Breed
Mayor

5/17/2019
Date Approved
I hereby certify that the foregoing resolution, not being signed by the Mayor within the time limit as set forth in Section 3.103 of the Charter, or time waived pursuant to Board Rule 2.14.2, became effective without her approval in accordance with the provision of said Section 3.103 of the Charter or Board Rule 2.14.2.

[Signature]

Angela Calvillo
Clerk of the Board

5/17/2019
Date