THE LAST SPIKE

INTRODUCTION

Building the great railways of America involved land speculation and engineering. In this game, players *cooperate* to build a continuous railway from *St. Louis* to *Sacramento*. Each player also *competes* to accumulate the most money from land speculation before the *last spike* is laid.

The game can be played by 2-6 players, but works best with 3-5 players. Average playing time is 45 minutes.

GAME EQUIPMENT

Gameboard – Shows 9 cities and the 12 routes that link them. Each route has 4 track spaces.

Railway Track – 48 wooden tiles represent railway track sections. Four tiles fit between each two cities. Each tile has a unique letter code and number to match a gameboard space.

Cards – Deck of 45 land cards, 5 each of 9 cities. Sort the land cards into 9 piles of five (one per city), "Land Ø" on top, then cheapest to most expensive ranked below.

Game Money – Currency chips: $1,000 (White), $5,000 (Red), $10,000 (Blue).

PREGAME

One player is chosen as banker. The banker gives each player, including himself, a sum of money that varies with the number of players:

2 Players, $60,000 each
3 Players, $50,000 each
4 Players, $40,000 each
5 Players, $35,000 each
6 Players, $30,000 each

Place the 48 railway tiles *face-down* and mix together. Each player draws one tile. The tile closest to A1 has the first turn (A3 is closer to A1 than B1). Replace the tiles in the pool and remix. Then each player draws four tiles, standing them upright to hide their identity from the other players.

2-Player Game: At the start of play, draw one tile sight unseen from the mix and place aside.

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GAME TURNS

The game starts with the first player and proceeds **clockwise** around the table. Each turn:

- Lay a track tile on the map; **all** players collect Payouts if any.
- Buy **one** land card (optional)
- Draw one new track tile

LAYING TRACK

A3
$3000

The track tiles contain a unique letter and number, one for each space on the mapboard. The tile shown above is "A3", played in the *St. Louis – Omaha* route. Cost to play this tile is $3000.

Each turn begins by playing one track tile **next** to a city, or next to any existing tile. Otherwise, you **must** lay track where possible at **double** cost.

Track cost varies to reflect terrain such as bridges and tunnels. The bank must be paid this cost to play that tile. If you cannot afford to play a track tile you must raise cash by selling land (page 3).

Free Land Grants

Each city has one **Free** land grant, noted as Land ∅. The **first** player to play track **next** to a city gets this free land. That is, to get the Free land for OMAHA, play A4, D1, or C1.

Players **cannot** buy land for a city until its free land has been claimed.

Players getting free land **may NOT also** buy another land card that turn.
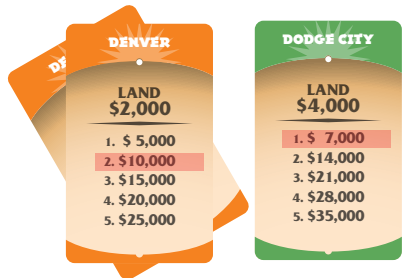
PAYOUTS

When all four (4) track sections between two cities have been built, **every owner** of the two connected cities collects a payout **from the bank.** That is, if the *Dodge City – Denver* route is completed, **all players** owning land for these two cities are paid.

E2 Connects Denver to Dodge City
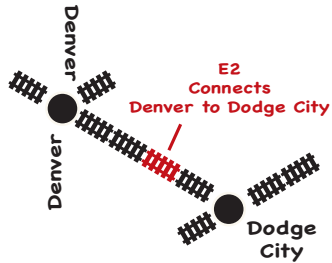
The amount paid to **each** player depends on the number of land cards held for the two cities. If you own two land cards of the same city, collect the amount indicated by the number "2".

EXAMPLE: if you own 2 Denver and 1 Dodge City, collect $10,000 for Denver and $7,000 for Dodge City.

DENVER	DODGE CITY
LAND **$2,000**	LAND **$4,000**
1. $ 5,000	1. $ 7,000
2. $10,000	2. $14,000
3. $15,000	3. $21,000
4. $20,000	4. $28,000
5. $25,000	5. $35,000

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BUYING LAND

SAINT LOUIS

LAND $7,000

1. $10,000
2. $20,000
3. $30,000
4. $40,000
5. $50,000

Playing a track tile allows you to buy *any* ONE Land, provided that city has had its free land claimed. Choose the city, pay the "Land" price noted ($7,000 for *St. Louis* shown) and place it **face-up** in front of you.

*IMPORTANT: Ownership of land is public knowledge. Land cards must remain **face-up** on the table. Money can be hidden.*

End your turn by drawing a track tile.

SELLING LAND

You may **not** sell or trade land to other players, or borrow money from other players. If you cannot pay for laying a track tile, you **must** sell land to the bank for **half cost** (round-up). Hence, land costing $5,000 is sold to the bank for $3000. Two or more land cards may have to be sold to raise sufficient cash to play. If you cannot raise enough cash to play you are bankrupt. Give any unplayed tiles, monies, and land to the bank for reuse, except bankrupt Free land is removed from play.

*IMPORTANT: The bank will **only** buy land to allow a railway tile to be played. The bank will **not** buy a Free Land property, nor buy any city that has made all its possible payouts. Players selling land get a normal turn.*

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The game ends when the **last spike** is played. This is the track tile that forms a **continuous** railway from *St. Louis* to *Sacramento*. Playing the *last spike* earns you a bonus of $20,000 from the bank. See page 4 for diagram.

Winning the Game

After the *last spike* is played, the payout for the two connected cities is collected. The player with the most **cash** then wins the game. Land value is **not** counted, just cash.

If required, break a tie with the highest total **cost** of land cards held.

GAME HINTS

• **Land Values:** Although the payouts for a city are the same, the cost of **buying** land for that city varies. Players get the cheapest land by buying early.

• **Cooperation:** The payout system encourages you to cooperate in track laying. Buying 4 or 5 land cards of the same city is rarely a good plan. It's better to let other players also own some land so they will help build the railway where you want it.

• **Multiple Payouts:** Cities have the **potential** for multiple payouts. *Denver* can pay 4 times if all four routes get built. *Yuma* can pay 3 times; *St. Louis* can pay only twice.

• **Cash Flow:** Players must manage their cash with care. Running out of money to pay for track forces you to sell land to the bank, making it available for other players.

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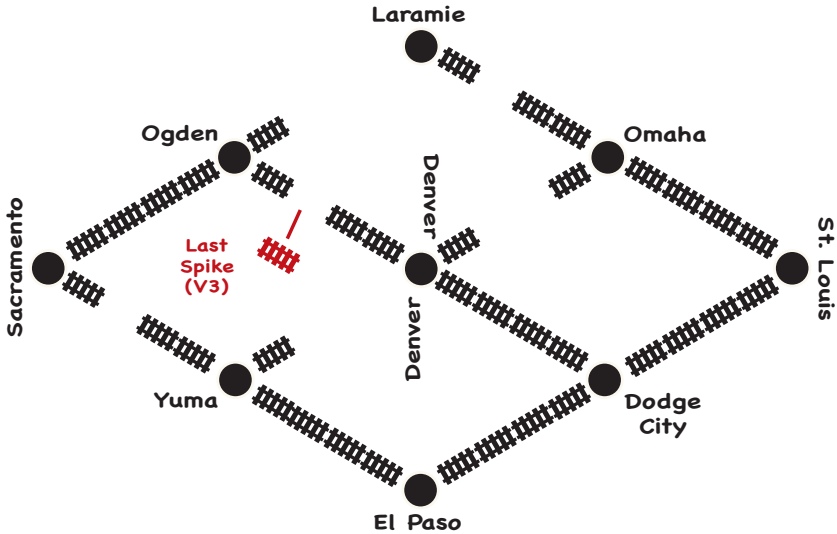
The diagram above shows one LAST SPIKE ending. Tile V3 played in the *Ogden – Denver* route makes a continuous railway from *St. Louis* to S*acramento* (via *Dodge City, Denver*, and *Ogden*).

This game had *7* payouts:

1. *Sacramento – Ogden*
2. *Yuma – El Paso*
3. *El Paso – Dodge City*
4. *Denver – Dodge City*
5. *Dodge City – St. Louis*
6. *St. Louis – Omaha*
7. *Ogden – Denver*

Laramie had no payouts.

Comment: *The player of the last spike did not own Ogden or Denver land, but wished to collect the $20,000 bonus before someone else did. This tile cost $3,000 to play (paid before collecting the bonus). Tile Z3 could also have been the last spike.*

A city might not earn every possible payout before the game ends. With the exception of St. Louis and Sacramento (which must be connected at least once) a city might never earn a payout.

CREDITS