

The Replatforming of Money

Money is getting its internet moment. The next decade decides who runs it.

Introduction

You can see the future of money first from inside its infrastructure. My team operates regulated financial rails that span both systems, the traditional one and the new one: we move money, hold it, convert it across currencies, and issue it as stablecoins. More than \$6 billion has moved through them, and when you operate them side by side, you notice things most people never see.

What we see is simple: money is finally making its move to the internet, and it is further along than most people believe.

Start with one pattern from our own ledger. On our current platform, nearly one in five transactions settles on a weekend or a federal holiday, days when the US banking system is not slow but closed. On the rails we grew up with, that number is zero. The demand was always there; the old system had no way to serve it. And it is climbing: a year ago, the number was one in sixteen. Give people money that never closes, and they stop waiting for the next business day.

Everything that moved onto the internet became cheap, instant, and global. Money never made that move. Sending it across a border still costs more than 6% on average, nearly 13% through a bank, and takes days to settle.^{3,4} Information got a curve that went to zero. Money got a floor.

The new rails already work. Last year, stablecoins settled \$10.9 trillion, up 91% from the year before, on Visa's own bot-filtered count.^{6,7} This June, stablecoins settled \$1.79 trillion in a single month: PayPal's entire 2025 volume, growing 125% year over year.⁷

A payment that settles in seconds, for less than a cent, anywhere on earth, at 3 a.m. on a Sunday, is simply a better product, and it's doubling every year against a system that charges 6% and closes on Saturday.

The volume is one of three lines converging right now.

The law arrived: the GENIUS Act passed in July 2025, and five months later the OCC granted five conditional national trust bank charters in a single day.⁸ Regulators spent nearly a decade asking whether this technology should exist; now they ask who is qualified to run it.

The incumbents folded: Stripe paid \$1.1 billion for a stablecoin infrastructure company, Visa and Mastercard settle in stablecoins, and Western Union and MoneyGram each launched their own.⁹ Stripe and Visa launched a competing consortium stablecoin with more than 140 members.¹⁰

And the machines are coming: this June, bots passed human traffic online for the first time.¹¹ AI agents did the driving, and agents need money that is programmable, with policy and compliance built in. Only the rails being laid for stablecoins can carry them at

machine scale.

There's a name for what these lines add up to. Money is being replatformed: the rails, and the legal and compliance machinery wrapped around every payment, all of it rebuilt as code the same way media, communication, and software were rebuilt before it. Replatformings end with a handful of foundational institutions that everyone else builds on. We're about three years into a ten year transition, at the point where insiders consider the outcome obvious and everyone else considers it niche.

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Chapter I. The Last Platform

Look at what the internet did to the cost of everything it touched. In 1931, a three minute phone call from New York to London cost about \$650 in today's money; now it costs nothing.¹ Internet capacity that ran \$1,200 per megabit in 1998 costs five cents today.² One industry after another moved onto the internet and watched its costs collapse toward zero. Money is the exception. Every payment you have ever made runs through a system designed before the personal computer.

In 1973, 239 banks across 15 countries founded SWIFT to replace the telex, which had turned every international payment into ten free-form messages re-keyed by hand.¹² It was a genuine improvement. It is also, half a century later, still the system.

SWIFT does not move money. It moves messages about money. When you send dollars to a supplier in Mumbai, no dollars travel anywhere: a chain of correspondent banks updates ledgers against each other, one hop at a time, each hop with its own fees, its own compliance review, and its own business hours. That takes one to five business days.⁴ In the fifty years since, we got ATMs, cards, online banking, mobile wallets, and a thousand fintechs. Money never moved to the internet; the interface did.

The obvious pushback is that the old rails are getting faster. Brazil's Pix moves money in seconds, for free, and processes more transactions than cards do. India's UPI does the same at even greater scale. The Fed launched FedNow in 2023. If domestic rails can be rebuilt, why does money need new ones at all?

Look at what those systems share. Every one of them stops at a border. Pix is a triumph inside Brazil and does not exist one meter outside it. Each instant scheme is a national island, and linking the islands requires the same multilateral coordination that has failed for fifty years. What the islands prove is the demand: offer people instant, free money and adoption is total. Stablecoins are the first rail that delivers the same physics between the islands, and the between is where the 6% lives.

You can see it in the price. In 2009, sending \$200 across a border cost 9.67% on average; today it costs 6.36%, and the number has been stuck between 6% and 7% since 2019.³ Sixteen years of fintech competition bought three percentage points, and then the price stopped falling.

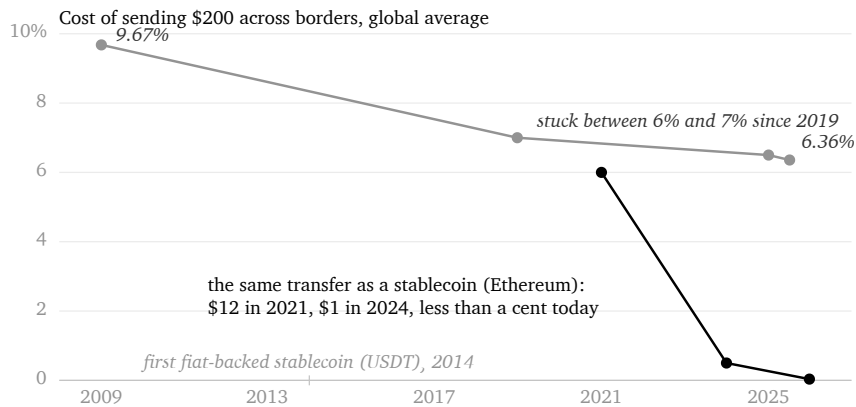


Figure 1. The floor: Cost of sending \$200 across borders, global average (World Bank Remittance Prices Worldwide; published anchor points, connected linearly), against the same transfer as a stablecoin on Ethereum, the reference chain (a16z State of Crypto).

The standard defense of the floor is that the 6% is what safety costs: verifying identity, screening against sanctions, absorbing fraud and disputes, guaranteeing a payment is final and survives a bankruptcy. It's half right, but that work is done today with annual reviews and hand-filed PDFs, a chain of institutions each re-verifying the same customer, compliance built with the tools of 1973. The new rails rebuild it as code, running on data instead of documents. Compliance gets replatformed too.

And the system is shrinking while the demand on it grows: banks cut 22% of their correspondent relationships between 2011 and 2019, citing compliance risk, and the Pacific Islands have lost 60%.⁵ Entire countries are losing their working connections to the dollar system.

Why did money never get what information got? Because information can be copied, and copying is what the internet does. Money must never be. A dollar spent twice is fraud, and until recently exactly one thing prevented it: a trusted institution keeping the ledger. Banks were the anti-copying technology. Money stayed inside closed networks because it had to.

That constraint quietly expired in 2009, in nine pages, from an author nobody has ever met.

Chapter II. The New Platform

The Bitcoin white paper described a way for a network of strangers to agree on who owns what, without a bank keeping the ledger. The double-spend problem had a solution. Value could now move over open rails and never be copied.

Bitcoin proved the rails work. It also swings 10% in a week, and no amount of maximalist conviction makes that usable as money for anyone with payroll to run. The instrument for moving money came later, and it is almost embarrassingly simple: the stablecoin. A digital dollar on internet rails, backed one to one by cash and short-term US Treasuries, redeemable at par. All the boredom of a dollar, all the physics of the internet. A transfer costs fractions of a cent and reaches finality in seconds.¹³ This is the collapse the phone call went through, arriving for money.

For years the standard objection was that stablecoin volume was fake: bots, wash trading, exchanges shuffling their own balances. The \$10.9 trillion is what remains after Visa strips the inorganic activity out, a haircut of as much as 80% on some chains.^{14,6,7} A fair skeptic will note that this is settlement volume, wholesale flows between institutions, and that comparing it to Mastercard is comparing a wholesale layer to a retail network. True, and it is how every financial system gets built: settlement first, commerce on top. Nobody buys coffee over Fedwire either, yet Fedwire is why the card networks can exist. The layer on top, strictly defined merchant and B2B payments, was about \$400 billion in 2025 and doubling year over year.⁶ Foundations get poured before floors.

Now do the math. \$10.9 trillion, doubling roughly every year: two more years and stablecoin settlement passes Visa and Mastercard combined. Citi's base case puts \$1.9 trillion of stablecoins in circulation by 2030,¹⁵ and BlackRock's Larry Fink compares tokenization today to the internet in 1996.¹⁶

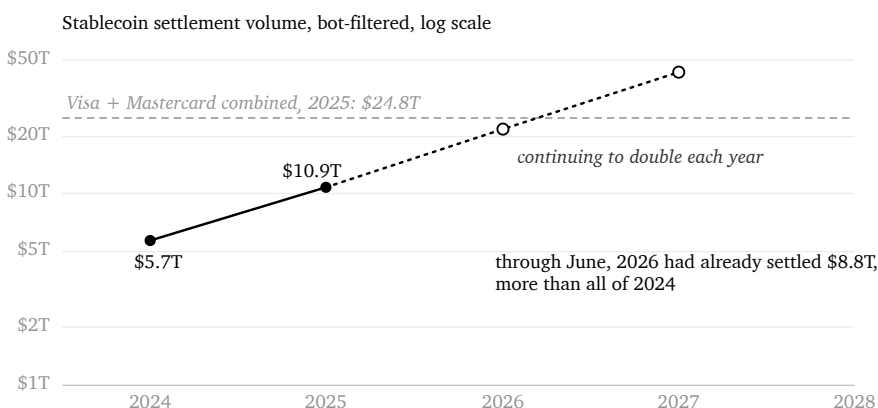


Figure 2. Adjusted stablecoin settlement volume (Visa Onchain Analytics with Allium; inorganic activity removed), extended at its current doubling rate.

Public numbers are one kind of evidence. Since we operate both systems, we can report what the new one actually measures. On our current platform, every transaction since January, measured end to end from initiation to funds delivered, compliance review included: the median settles in about two minutes. Any hour, any day. Nearly ninety percent of transactions complete inside six minutes.

Then there is a wall. Just short of the ninetieth percentile, settlement times jump from minutes to hours. The fast majority live entirely on the new rails; the slow tail is almost entirely transactions that touch the old ones, a wire that must clear, an ACH window that must open, plus a few we hold ourselves for compliance review, the system working rather than sleeping. A transaction inherits the clock of the slowest system it touches. The bottleneck sits at the 88th percentile, shaped like a banking day.

A dollar that moves like an email is a new settlement layer for the world's reserve currency. The shift has happened. What remained was the thing every enterprise was waiting for. It was never the technology. It was the law.

Chapter III. The Law Arrives

For nearly a decade, regulation was the reason institutional money stayed out. Then, in about eighteen months, the question got answered.

On July 18, 2025, the United States enacted the GENIUS Act, its first federal law for stablecoins. The vote was the tell: 68 to 30 in the Senate, 308 to 122 in the House, in a Congress that agrees on almost nothing.⁸ The law is strict, and its strictness is the point: licensed issuers only, one-to-one reserves in cash and short Treasuries, monthly attestations, holders first in line if an issuer fails.⁸ The dollar's internet-native form now has a federal rulebook, and it reads like a banking statute because the institutions it creates will stand alongside the banks.

Then the fastest shift in chartering posture in modern financial history. In four years, the OCC had seen exactly one digital-asset trust charter through to an operating bank; on a single day in December 2025 it approved five, and by spring the count was eight, from Circle and Stripe's Bridge to Coinbase; in June, Morgan Stanley followed.^{8,17} Europe answered first: MiCA has governed issuers since 2024, and firms without authorization are exiting European clients as you read this.¹⁸ The shift had a practical reason: the new rails gave regulators something correspondent chains never could, supervision they can actually read. Issuing and moving internet-native money is now a licensed activity on both sides of the Atlantic, with a rising floor.

That floor only moves one way. Call it the ratchet: a decade of state licenses, then European law in 2024, then federal law in 2025, then the charter wave in December. In April 2026 a bipartisan House bill, the PACE Act, was introduced that would go further

still: direct access to the Federal Reserve's own rails for registered nonbank payment providers. It is an introduced bill, nothing more. But it tells you where sponsors on both sides of the aisle believe this goes.¹⁹

Follow the law and the bill to their conclusion. A GENIUS Act issuer can mint regulated digital dollars, custody them, and move them. Give it the Fed access the PACE Act proposes and the law will have minted something new: a federally regulated institution with no lending book, whose business is to custody and move money at internet speed. Every bank then faces a question it has deferred for fifty years: is it in the payments business or the lending business? The economics will answer: most will keep the lending book and hand the pipes to institutions built to run them. The unbundling of payments from the bank is being written into law.

The sharpest banks will not go quietly: JPMorgan is already tokenizing its own deposits. Even that confirms the thesis. The replatforming itself is no longer in question, and the only contest left is who operates the pipes.

The GENIUS Act did for internet dollars what the Federal Reserve Act did for bank dollars: it made them safe enough to be boring, and boring enough to run payroll on. It also converted the compliance perimeter into the scarcest asset in the industry. Now that issuance and custody at scale are becoming licensed activities, what comes next accrues to the institutions that hold the licenses and run the infrastructure.

Chapter IV. The Enterprise Wave

Every replatforming looks small right up until it looks inevitable, because adoption runs in a sequence, and the early stages happen where most observers never look.

The cloud is the precedent. Amazon launched AWS in 2006, and for years the customer list was startups, because startups had no data centers to defend. Serious companies called it a toy. Then Netflix moved, finishing in 2016. Then Capital One, a regulated bank, closed the last of its own data centers in 2021.²⁰ Startups to regulated core took roughly fifteen years.

Money is running the same program. Stage one was crypto-native firms, exchanges and market makers settling with each other; it had largely run its course by 2023. Stage two is businesses in hard corridors, importers and exporters in emerging markets, who adopted internet dollars because the alternative was measurably terrible. Stage three is the platforms that pay people, payout networks and marketplaces, where the weekend problem and the fee problem compound. Stage four is treasury, companies in soft-currency countries holding working capital in digital dollars; it barely existed before the GENIUS Act and it is the stage inflecting now.

Stage five is the incumbents themselves: Stripe buying Bridge, the card networks settling in stablecoins, Western Union and MoneyGram, whose entire margin structure is the 6% toll, launching their own.^{9,21,22} When the companies with the most to lose start issuing the new money, they are hedging against their own demise.

Stage six, the core money movement of ordinary companies, has not happened yet. That is the point. On the cloud calendar this is roughly 2013. The incumbents are committed and the median company has not moved a dollar. The real-world payments layer is a rounding error against global payment flows, which is what e-commerce was in 1999: 0.6% of US retail, compounding, and dismissed for being small.²³

The cloud calendar

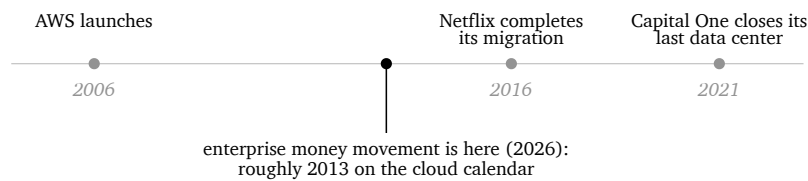


Figure 3. The cloud calendar: Cloud adoption ran from startups to the regulated core in roughly fifteen years. On that calendar, enterprise money movement sits at about 2013: the incumbents are committed, and the median company has not moved a dollar.

The companies moving now do not think of themselves as crypto companies. Their reasons are boring: cost, speed, weekends. Reasons like that are the ones that scale. The wave is invisible because it happens in back offices no journalist covers; the visible consumer moment arrives near the end of the sequence, around the time the median observer concludes it happened overnight.

The fair objection about cost lives here too. The cheap part is only the middle: entering and exiting the rails still costs real money, and an all-in remittance today might still cost a percent or two, even as enterprise flows on the same rails clear for basis points. But edge costs fall with adoption in a way the old floor never could. Every balance that stays on the rails deletes an off-ramp, and every merchant that accepts digital dollars deletes two. The old system's cost was structural. The new system's cost is transitional.

Every adopter so far is a person or a company. The next one is a machine.

Chapter V. Machine-Speed Money

Every open network humans have built ended up with more machines on it than people. This June it happened to the web itself: bot traffic passed human traffic for the first time, 57.5% of all requests, driven by AI agents, not scrapers.¹¹ One layer down, most of what moves over the internet is already software calling software.²⁴ Payments are an open network with exactly one population still missing from it.

The missing population is at the door. AI agents can already shop, book, and procure, but they pay by borrowing: a card issued against their owner's identity, on networks whose fraud models treat automated buyers as attackers. The workaround holds at demo scale and fails at machine scale.

The native version already exists. This spring, at Stripe's annual conference, John Collison asked an agent onstage to research how AI demand affects energy markets. The agent found a dataset it needed, priced at four cents, bought it from a stablecoin wallet, and kept working. Four cents cannot profitably move on any other open rail. Then Collison told it to publish the report and sell it, and it did: it set a price, built the page, and made the report purchasable by other agents.²⁵ No checkout, no card form, no human approval.

Machine commerce will run in two lanes. The first is machines buying from merchants, and much of it will stay on card rails, which exist to connect buyers to millions of merchants and resolve disputes; Visa and Mastercard each launched credentialed-agent programs in 2025.²⁶ What changes is what stands behind the card. Back the card with stablecoins instead of a deposit account and the agent's spending policy, its authorization logic, and the funds themselves live on programmable rails, settling in seconds, with the card network as the last hop of acceptance. The card persists. The account behind it gets replatformed.

The second lane has no merchant in it. Machines buy from machines, data by the row, compute by the second. This is the lane the Collison demo came from. The payments are too small (a two-cent transaction dies on a twenty-cent fee floor²⁷), too frequent, and there is no cardholder to phone and no human intent to verify. Machine-to-machine payments invert everything the legacy system was built for, and they are stablecoin-native from birth because nothing else can clear them.

Now count the buyers. There are eight billion of us, and we make a handful of payments a day. Agents are software. They work continuously and transact hundreds of times an hour. The count of payments does what machine traffic did to the web: it grows until human activity is the rounding error.

The money this population requires is programmable, policy-bound, compliant in code, final in seconds, and divisible to fractions of a cent: the property list of the new rails, governed by the law that arrived in 2025. The agent economy cannot exist without the

replatforming of money. The human economy migrates to the new rails; the agent economy will be born on them.

Chapter VI. The Last Barrier

It is worth asking what all this plumbing is for. For all of history, doing business with someone across the world meant clearing four barriers: you had to find them, understand them, trust them, and pay them. Three of those are now falling at once. An agent can find a supplier in a country you have never heard of, read its catalog in a language you do not speak, check its record, and negotiate, in the time it takes to read this sentence. Discovery, translation, and trust are collapsing toward zero, the way the phone call did. The one barrier the internet never brought down is the fourth, which makes payment the binding constraint on global commerce. Remove it, and any two parties on earth can simply transact.

What that returns is not abstract. In 2024, migrants sent an estimated \$685 billion home to developing economies, more than three times what the world spends on foreign aid, and paid over 6% to do it, nearly 13% through a bank.^{31,3} That is roughly \$40 billion a year skimmed from the people least able to spare it, a toll the old rails could never cut below the UN's decade-old 3% target because the cost was structural. The new rails clear it by default. And 1.3 billion adults still have no bank account while 900 million of them carry a phone:³² a phone that holds digital dollars is the account their bank never opened, and in a country whose currency melts each year, the savings account that finally does not.

Then there is the commerce that never existed at all, too small or too far for the old system to carry: the freelancer in Lagos paid the instant the work lands, the machine buying a four-cent dataset from another machine. When finding, understanding, trusting, and paying a counterparty all cost nothing, the question of who can do business with whom stops having an answer. It becomes everyone. That is what the replatforming is for.

Chapter VII. 2030

Start with an ordinary Saturday in 2030. A payroll platform pays forty thousand people in sixty countries at 7 a.m., and the money is spendable at 7:01. The compliance checks run in code, in milliseconds. Nobody involved uses the word stablecoin. It is simply what money does now.

None of this requires an invention; it is a straight-line extension of what already works, already carries volume, or already passed into law.

The interesting question is no longer what the system looks like. It is who operates it.

The market puts the companies operating this layer in the wrong category. The familiar frame is banking-as-a-service: an API veneer over a partner bank, where the fintech rents the bank's license and every capability is the bank's. That model produced a generation of neobanks. It also produced Synapse, whose 2024 bankruptcy froze the accounts of more than 100,000 people while the fintechs and the bank argued over whose ledger was right.²⁸

The stablecoin-era institution is structurally different: a regulated principal, operating on its own licenses, standing alongside the bank rather than downstream of it. The bank is a settlement rail. Dollars enter and exit through it, and the role is clean: fee income, defined risk, no shared ledger to argue over. The moment a dollar arrives it becomes a digital dollar, a third-party stablecoin like USDC or an asset the principal issues itself, backed by Treasuries. Value lives on open rails, in reserves anyone can inspect.

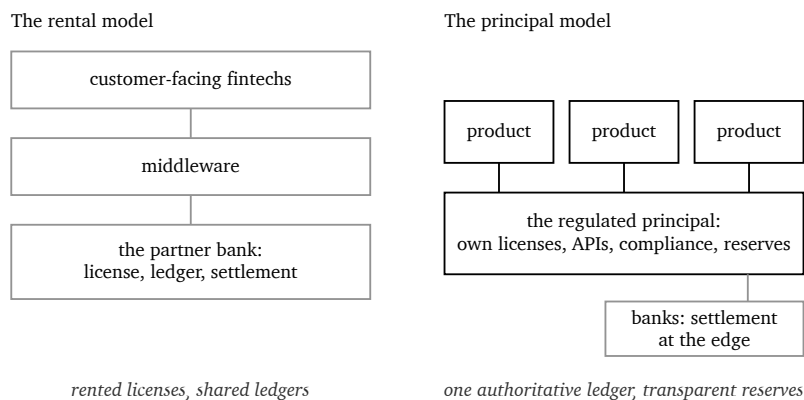


Figure 4. Two architectures. In the rental model everything rests on the bank. In the principal model the foundation flips: products rest on the principal's licenses, and the bank hangs off the edge as a settlement rail.

The economics explain why the migration runs one way, and none of it depends on crossing a border. A business that parks customer funds at a partner bank is paid a negotiated fraction of the overnight rate, and the fraction is worst for the companies that need it most: a new startup earns close to nothing, and even a billion-dollar neobank earns the fed funds rate minus a meaningful haircut.³⁰ The haircut is not a service fee. For every hundred dollars of deposits a bank holds, regulators require it to set aside roughly ten dollars of its shareholders' own money, and shareholders expect around fifteen percent a year on it. That math eats about a percent and a half before the bank has done anything at all. A full-reserve institution holds the same dollars one to one in short Treasuries, and the line item does not get negotiated down; it disappears. The bank cannot match the price without ceasing to be a bank. A company that builds on a full-reserve principal keeps that spread, or hands it back to its own customers, and out-earns the same company built on a bank. The spread is not inefficiency. It is the product.

What the principal sells is a combination of three hard things: APIs that compress accounts, payments, currency conversion, custody, and card issuance into a few endpoints; the regulatory perimeter, so the businesses building on it inherit a working compliance framework instead of spending years assembling their own; and the counterparty web underneath, bank partners, liquidity, compliance, assembled over years. Any one is buildable. The combination is the moat. Every transaction sharpens the fraud models, every customer hardens the compliance program, every corridor deepens the counterparty web. The platform gets better at defending money the more money it moves, and a competitor starting today begins that accumulation at zero.

AI is collapsing the cost of writing software, which only steepens the divide. When anyone can generate the code, the scarce thing is everything code cannot generate: the licenses, the counterparties, the trust.

The same force works inside the institution. The operating stack of a financial company, compliance review, reconciliation, reporting, support, is becoming software that watches software, and a team built around it runs on a fraction of the headcount the last generation needed. We see it daily: an AI-native team now competes with one three to five times its size, and the multiple is still growing. The licenses stay hard to earn; the cost of operating them is collapsing.

A charter by itself is a vault without pipes: the API surface and the counterparty web still have to be built, and the largest license-holders sell against their own customers, platforms competing with the businesses that would build on them, banks whose success cannibalizes their own deposits. Most of the seats are still empty.

In 2019, standing up a banking product meant fifteen to eighteen months and roughly two million dollars: a bank partnership, a compliance program, licensing, a bank integration.²⁹ On the new stack, the same launch is a few weeks of engineering and less than ten thousand dollars in platform fees. Drop the cost of a financial product by two orders of magnitude and the market fragments into products that could never have carried the old fixed costs: a music platform folding artist payouts into rights management, royalties settling the day they are earned, viable at five figures and six weeks. Markets that were never worth a bank's time are about to get financial products built for them.

That is the replatformed system: banks at the edges, reserves in the middle, regulated principals combining the hard parts so everyone else can build the products. And payments are only the first layer to move. Tokenized deposits put a bank balance on the same rails, earning and spendable at once. Tokenized credit lets a loan settle and repay in the instrument it was issued in. Stablecoin-backed cards turn any balance into something an agent can spend, the likeliest checkout the agent economy adopts. None of these is a feature of payments. Each is its own market, on the rails payments laid down first.

Money is being replatformed. The only open question is who the principals will be.

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