

Club News

(by Matt Schaefer)

Well finally! We got the slowing block operating on the layout at Rockville. Three or more trains (depending on the size of the layout) can be run for hours without problems by one person with only two blocks per loop. This is very easy if reliable trains are used and trains gain only 10 feet or so per lap on the next train. Only the faster trains are controlled by holding back to provide the additional interval needed to the train ahead of him. Once the proper space is obtained and the train is released from the slowing block, no other control is required around the layout. Observers on the other side of the layout are beneficial (as is true for any operation) to watch for dragging brake rigging or cars running on the ties or going on the floor.

In the initial shakedown we realized the number of diodes specified by NTRAK specs (for one direction) needed to be changed from four to eight to give better slowing control. We also found the length of the slowing block had to be longer than a train of Kato passenger cars. When the Kato cars are bridging the gap, the electrical pickups on the cars keep the locomotives running. Another limitation is that you can easily reach the capacity of the Lindsay controller setting off alarms. This happened with four trains which had a total of 10 locomotives all doing 60. Conservation of power must be exercised here.

An optional hybrid variation of the slowing block would be to have one loop divided into several blocks, each of which could be switched to the central Lindsay controller or could be switched to local Cab 55 control. At least one block would also have the slowing controller, and then you would have the capabilities of both systems on command.

Deadline for article and announcement submissions for newsletter is the 15th of the preceding month. Newsletter is mailed last week of the preceding month.

The Landmark Mall show was like a breath of fresh air to the Club as we were showing off N-TRAK to the general public -- not just the soot and cinder sniffers that come to the train shows. This is a great way to promote N scale to the public. In

Christmas Party at John Cook's December 18

the mall it was so gratifying to see all sorts, boys of all ages to 90, girls, ladies -- all showing such interest in our trains. The N-Trak layout was located right in front of Ruby Tuesdays, and I expect they had lots of customers asking Ruby Tuesdays for window tables so they could watch our trains while they ate! This was our largest layout, 47x25 feet.

Many of the young spectators reminded me of my younger days in the 40's when I would ride the streetcar into Cincinnati to see the B&O modular layout -- about the size of our layout except it was done in O gauge back then. But it was modular, it had a triple track loop and fully signaled automatic block control. They could run three trains on one loop, lots of action! I now credit a lot of my railroad enthusiasm and inspiration to that layout. Now I feel we are passing the same enthusiasm along to new generations.

I often wonder how much influence that triple track O gauge oval layout had on the birth of NTRAK. The B&O layout runs every year from November 26 through December 31, 8 to 5 PM in the downtown lobby of the Cincinnati Gas & Electric Company. For more information call 513-381-2000. I urge all N-TRAKers to see their predecessor road whenever they have the opportunity.

More yards. Club members have been talking about getting more yard capacity. With the collectors in the Club, we need all the yard space we can get with a place to display trains, pull trains in, switch cars, and then continue on a run. There are many ways to lay out a yard, and I've included one in this newsletter with ideas and features that may be of interest. Both ends of the yard are similar except for

some buildings and sidings. I have laid out this yard in full scale using Peco short turnouts on the ladders and Peco longs on the mains to determine track spacing.

After designing the yard I realized it is similar to Fulton Yard in Richmond where I used to work, so I added scenery to match. Note that, normally, only fast passenger trains used the mains, so employees did not hang around the through tracks.

Features of the yard design:

1. This pull-through yard permits a train to pull in, switch cars, and sit until scheduled for another run from which it can pull straight out onto the mains. The yard can be started as two end modules (minimum) with center modules added later. Also, yard tracks 2, 5, and 8 could be totally left out for primary passenger station use, leaving 7 tracks with adequate space for platforms (see the sketch). Platforms could be dropped over a portion of every third track to temporarily convert to a passenger station track plan as desired.
2. The yard feeds the red and yellow mains directly without crossing over any mains. An alternative design could feed the yellow and blue, but we already have two yards feeding the blue line (Obie's and Edd's).
3. An optional fourth main in front of the red (the NTRAK orange line) gives room for a yard lead for red if the adjacent module has an orange track connecting to the red. An additional track could be added on a dedicated adjacent module to make a lead track for the yellow yard, too.
4. Center distance between yard tracks is compromised at 1-1/2" to give finger clearance. For prototypical look, the mains go around the yard area, and there is room for a switchman's path (and finger clearance) to the mains. Centerline spacing between yard and mains is a generous 2". As mentioned on page 50 of the "How To Book", the yard shown there is not prototypical with trains running through a yard.
5. A yard designed with two ladder tracks doubles the number of yard tracks

obtained in the length of the ladder. Short Peco turnouts were used on the yard ladder design. Sixteen feet of modules will provide yard tracks varying from 128" to 156" in length, and they will hold a string (without engine) of up to 25 eighty foot cars, or 47 forty foot cars. The total yard trackage would be 116 feet which would hold 226 eighty foot cars or 421 forty foot cars. Each eighty foot car is about 6.1", 52' cars are 4.2", and forty foot cars are 3.3".

6. Each additional 4' of module adds 10 tracks x 4' = 40' of yard tracks and room for another 114 forty foot cars. If you can build, transport, and store eight- or even six-foot modules, the longer modules will reduce the number of legs, plugs, connector tracks, setup time, and total weight. All modules can be set up using only two legs per module except one end module. Modules can be either 24" or 30" deep.
7. This design retains all NTRAK standards for module interfaces and curves. No grades, and no extra pushers, are required to move long trains.
8. For quick and accurate handling of connector tracks, fasten a row of standard 4.9" connector tracks in a rack that can be dropped in as a unit into the slot at the interface of the modules. For simplicity of wiring, use the flat Atlas ganged electrical switches to connect yard tracks to either of two cabs (the main tower and the local cab).
9. Stopping blocks should be used to protect all turnouts on the mains by locating the gaps as shown on the layout plan. They are easy to set up and give passive control requiring no additional wiring, switches, or other electrical controls. If the turnout is set to cause a derailment, a locomotive is automatically stopped before it reaches the turnout. This works with either insulated or solid frogs. The block must be as long as the longest brace of engines (four E-8's equal 21"), and one or two cars following the engines cannot have lighting pickups like Kato cars.
10. Paint all plywood first to prevent moisture absorption. Use a pin vise to drill for track pins or add a layer of homosote (a 2x4 foot piece adds 8.5 pounds). Consider sinking most of the ties in old ballast by building up ground between tracks with cardboard shims. Paint all track dirty black, and use dark dirty ballast. Main tracks should be of higher class and should be elevated on cork roadbed. It would be appropriate

to add some switchman shelters with

Report from the Landmark Mall Show

(by Brian Brendel, Member)

Our first mall show is over, and it was TERRIFIC! Our biggest layout yet! Thousands of visitors, hundreds of questions! New members -- probably. New interest -- certainly! Everyone who participated has a very enjoyable experience, and we are all looking forward to future mall shows.

Just why was the show so enjoyable? Aside from being our largest setup, this was our first show in the "real" (non-railroad) public. The surprise and enthusiasm displayed by the shoppers really inspired me. These reactions are something we don't see at train shows, where the great majority of visitors have seen us before. I feel we really accomplished our objective of taking our hobby to the public, and I am really proud of our organization's ability to do this in such a professional manner.

Looking back on the show where we "went public", we find that our success was based on our ability to entertain the public while having fun ourselves. With that in mind, I have compiled a list of "public likes and dislikes" that we might consider during future shows.

The public likes ...

... lots of action. Did you know that at times during the show we had as many as a DOZEN trains running all over the layout? (3 red line, 2-3 yellow line, 2 blue line, mountain division, and private trackage -- plus switching!

... L O N G trains. Although this is something of a headache from an operations standpoint -- with breakaways and all -- it is still a big favorite of the public and us. I think we have found a successful formula in NOT using mid-train helpers, as they cause as many problems as they solve.

... switching. I include in this category any movements not done by the "0-5-0 switcher" (...that thing at the end of your arm ...). I was amazed to find big crowds around any kind of hands-free train movements: adding/subtracting cars to long trains, bringing new trains out of yards, "retiring" long running trains on sidings, and even backing up to hook to a breakaway.

... a module with a STORY. People were consistently interested in modules that were either of real places, or modeled the flavor of real places. If we could each

come up with the background related to prototype design it represents, or even why it's named what it's named, that would help. Small "club standard" storyboards on the front of each module could contain the information. Also, "Under Construction" signs might explain those modules not yet completed.

... colorful trains, "pretty trains", and familiar trains. Matched colorful passenger consists and long, pristine, no-two-the-same unit trains may not be exactly prototypical anymore, but they ARE popular. We need to keep up the good work in this area. Things that ARE prototypical, that people are familiar with, and that DON'T yet model include: The Virginia Railway Express and MARC commuter trains, "Bullet" trains, METRO, and RoadRailers, to name a few. It also might be good to ride the coattails of the "Thomas the Tank Engine" craze, and scratch-build Thomas and a few of his friends for the younger, soon-to-be-model-railroader crowd.

... "WRECKS". We hate 'em, they love 'em. Try to keep a stiff upper lip when they happen. "... this, too, shall pass ..."

... a club with a purpose. Yes, our purpose is promoting N scale, but people did mention to me that they thought our "Operation Lifesaver" literature was very appropriate. SAFETY is the buzzword of the 90s.

... our shirts. "You look so tidy!" a little old lady told me.

So what was the public not thrilled with? The public DOESN'T LIKE ...

... to be yelled at. I have been in emergency services for 16 years. Even on the scene of a dire emergency, when you think you would be perfectly within your rights to scold someone, they still take offense. With this in mind, PLEASE take it easy when you ask somebody -- kids included, and maybe especially -- to DON'T TOUCH or to STAY OFF THE ROPES.

Due to demands on his time, Chris Riddick will be giving up the Club office of Secretary and Editor of the Newsletter effective with this issue. If any member would like to take on the duty of Editor, please contact one of the Club officers. We need someone to take the responsibility for the January issue which should be in production by the close of December.

Chris has prepared a database for the mailing list. It can be provided in ASCII format to whoever takes over.

We maintain our professional image when we stay CALM. LIGHTEN UP, and take time to explain. SMILE more ... at least LOOK like you're having fun ('cause I'll bet you are.)

... empty track. No trains in sight nake people (and fellow NTRAKers) wonder why we're here. Even a Poor running train is SOMETHING. If you need to pull your train off a track because of problems, arrange a replacement FIRST. Consider a change to borrowed motive power, or splitting the train into sections. This is the way we keep things moving. And along those lines: we should strive to use a minimum of two locomotives on all trains -- that second loc acts like a flywheel to minimize jerky operations, which cuts down on breaks and derailis.

... "plywood plains." Won't SOMEBODY adopt the club corners, and put some scenery on them? How about you "no-module-ownin'-dudes?" As to our solution from last week: the "Sprinkle-On" scenery was a good thought, but it stuck to EVERYTHING!! Here's one vote that we skip that next time.

REMEMBER! All these items are meant to encourage discussion, not assassinate character! In a very short time we have become the premier modular group in the area, with still more to come! The talent in this club is immense, and I'm proud to be associated with all of you. Thanks for coming out on November 20-21. It was the event of our model railroad year.

Other N-Trak News

For those of you who were not aware, there is a national NTRAK organization. A bimonthly newsletter is published with lots of info on N-Scale activities. There are also NTRAK resource booklets covering everything from module construction to throttles. You can join by sending \$5.00 to: NTRAK Publishing, 2424 Alturas Rd., Atascadero, CA 93422, (805)466-1758. Jim FitzGerald runs the organization and handles the newsletter.

Report -- Visit to Orlando NTrak

(by Gil Brauch, Director-At-Large)

While on a recent trip to Orlando, I was able to visit with Stew Marshall, Station Master of the Train Depot, Winter Park, Florida (which is surrounded by Orlando). He is one of the -- if not THE -- moving force for NTrak East. I picked up their latest brochure (dated October 1st), which has a good explanation of what to expect along with a registration form. I have run off a bunch of copies and left them at

Obie's Trains if anyone is interested. The convention will be at the Orlando North Hilton, which is a nice hotel, according to Stew, and the rate for the room is \$55 single or double. For Orlando in the summer, this is really a good rate!

I was also able to visit the Orlando NTrak Club and participate in one of their meetings. It wasn't operations night, but there were a few trains running. The club is sharing space with an HO modular club in a vacant storefront. They are paying \$1 per square foot. Needless to say, their dues are a bit higher than ours, but they do have a permanent place where their modules are set up. They meet weekly, and the space is open on other nights for anyone who wants to come in and work. The club is having the plans drawn up for the very own building, which they are financing through member loans at a rate of return of prime plus two percent. That's better than CD's! If I remember correctly, the building will be about 40x50 feet with one end designed for later expansion. Apparently living in Orlando doesn't drain the coffers as quickly as the DC area does.

The quality of some of the Orlando modules I saw is quite high. One set of 4 modules is highly detailed with a town, a large yard (like Obie's, not Edd's), and a river scene that even includes some anatomically correct "skinny dippers". There is also one very impressive model of the Lackawana viaduct. The setup yard is very large and is in the middle. The access is at grade, causing trains to have to cross over the yellow to get to the res line. The blue line goes all the way around the yard and has its own access. There is a large passenger terminal/yard at the end of the setup yard. This arrangement could also be used to put the setup yard "outside" for viewing. They have a neat idea going with the skirt. Each module had several patches of Velcro attached to the face (ends and middle) and the skirt had the companion pieces sewn on at what looked like two foot increments. This eliminates the push pins. Think about it!

If any of you are out traveling around, I encourage you to look up a local club during one of your free evenings. I have

I am putting together an NTRAK montage for a display board to be used at public shows. Anyone with interesting photos or ideas for this project please contact me -- Brian Brendel. Thanks.

been able to connect a couple of times and have found the experience to be quite enjoyable. At the very least, it beats sitting around the bar at the hotel -- but then I'm not as young as some of the rest of you

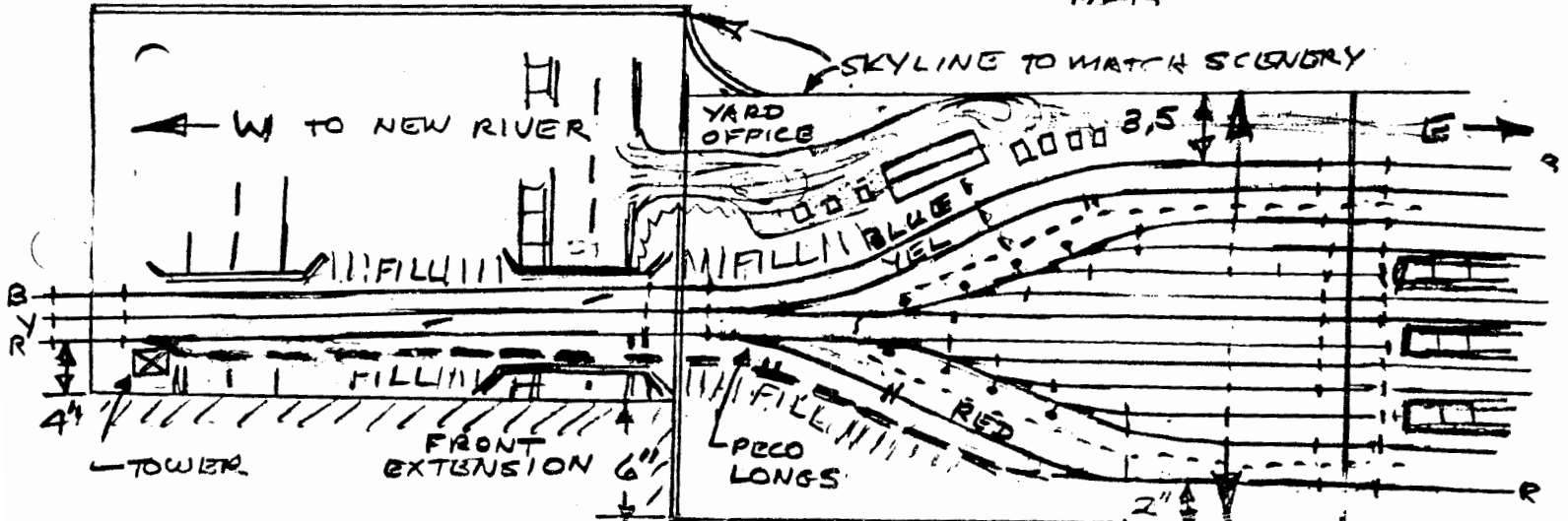
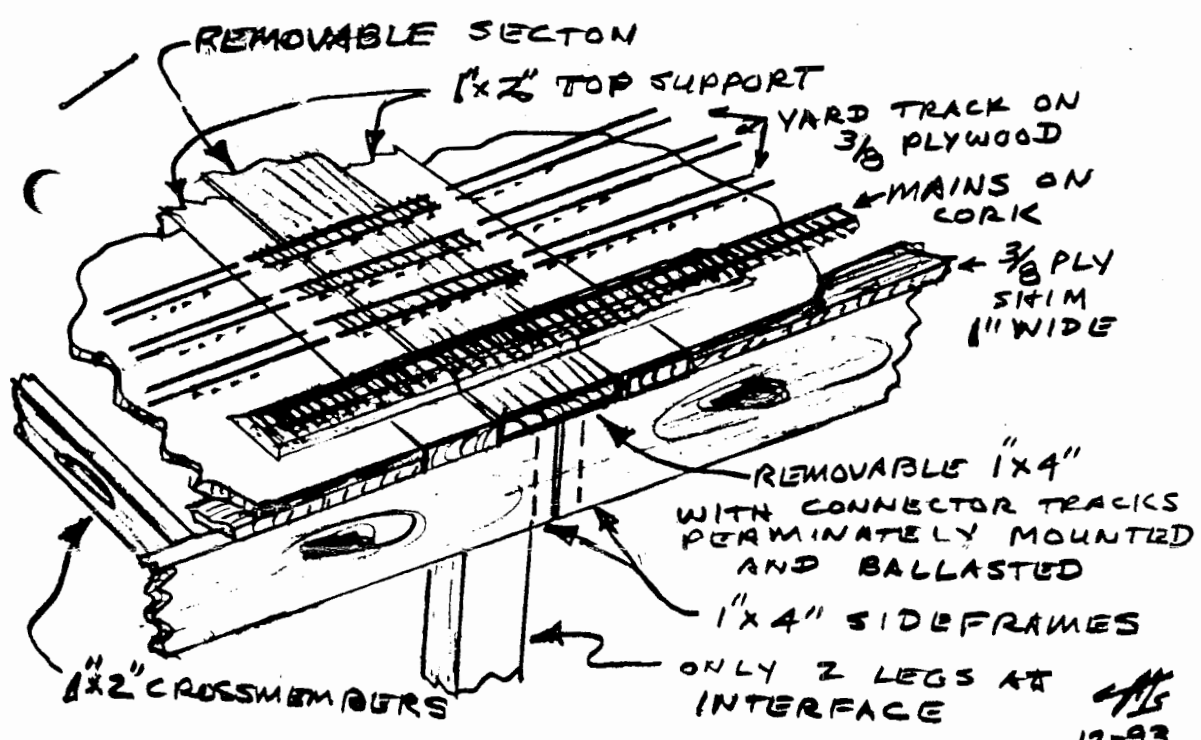
- Gil Brauch

Meeting Reminders

Dec 18 Christmas Party. Hosted by John Cook (RSVP 703-670-9700). Directions: I95-S past Dale City to Rt 234 West (milepost 152). Follow 234 toward Manassas and Montclair for 1-1/2 mile to traffic light. Turn right onto Country Club Dr. It ends at a "T" intersection. Turn left onto Waterway. Turn right at third Street (Brawner). John's house is the fourth on right (past a bridge over a small ditch). Park anywhere you can.

You may bring a guest (spouse or significant other). Everyone should bring a wrapped item that no longer fits your layout. We will conduct a gift exchange using the same rules as last year (pick a gift from the unopened ones or take one from someone who already has one. When you get a gift the third time, its yours).

Apr 9-10 Greenberg Show at Mt. Vernon High School. Contact Charles Greenacre if you want to bring a module.



- KEY:
- STOPPING BLOCK GAP
 - SWITCHMAN PATHS
 - ▬ PASSENGER PLATFORMS (OPTIONAL REMOVABLE)
 - □ □ PARILED CARS
 - — — OPTIONAL TRACK TO MAKE YARD LEAD.

32" TO END OF LADDER USING PECO SHORTS
 MODULE 24" (OR 30" WIDE)

YARD FOR RED & YELLOW
 NOT TO SCALE
 12-93