

The Northern Virginia NTRAK Newsletter is produced for and by the members of Northern Virginia NTRAK. Submissions should be sent to the editor, Bernard Kempinski, 6056 Estates Drive, Alexandria, VA 22310 or by electronic mail to bkempins@ida.org.

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

Please get your submissions for the newsletter to me as early as possible. I frequently travel and I have had minimum time to work on the last two editions. Thanks for your cooperation.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

April 9-10 Greenberg Model Train and Doll House Show. Lake Braddock High School. Contact Matt Shaeffer if you wish to bring a module or present a seminar.

**FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE CAR ENROUTE M&K JCT**

by Matt Schaefer

**GREENBURG SHOW, APRIL 9TH & 10TH** I'll be the acting coordinator for Greenburg's Show with Dave as back up. If you didn't sign up your modules at the March 20th meeting for Apr 9th call Dave or myself by Thursday April 7th if you are bringing a module so we can plan the layout at Lake Braddock HS. Lake Braddock HS is off Burke Lake Road, OK? Modules should be brought in Friday evening the 8th by 7 to 7:30PM for partial set up. Saturday morning all modules should be in place to clamp up at 9:30 AM and the show is from 11 to 5 and Sun from 1 to 5PM.

**COORDINATORS** The club always needs more help with coordination stuff, making calls to members and particularly contacting malls and fairs with pictures so we can get more offers and have a greater selection of activities to pick from.

Maybe we could have more monthly half a day or all day operating meetings as shows in malls? Do we have some PR men to sell our shows?

**CLAMPING UP LARGE LAYOUTS** Since our Landmark show, two items have come to my attention on clamping up large layouts. The first is the famous "Obie Technique" from the renowned Fredrick of Hollywood. The procedure for large layouts is as follows:

After the modules have been located in their approximate position, clamp them up in groups of 6 to 8 modules (about 30 feet in length). When all the groups are in place the groups can be shuffled as necessary to close any gaps. This technique eliminates the problem of moving half the layout at one time while it is clamped to the other half. The modules need to be lifted only 1/8th inch to take the weight off the legs. This is easier on the module frames and the layout should be is easier to close up divided into sections. Also I see no advantage in using two clamps instead of one. One clamp should give more flexibility to the layout and one has always held adequately. The clamps do not hold the 1X4 onto the module, actually they can only pull out on the 1X4 end piece.

**SHIMS** The second item I noticed is that Jim FitzGerald in his "How To Book", Chapter 9 page 85, tells how he carries a series of shimming boards 2 feet long and 2, 1, 1/2 etc inches thick which he says most layouts do not need. But this tells me any layout can have problems with alignments. I am hopeful with the Obie Technique we will not need shims but we have the set made by John.

**CINCH JONES CONNECTORS** The club has discussed Cinch Jones chassis mount connectors that have bare terminals showing. These connectors

are permitted by N-TRAK but should be chassis mounted OR any terminals suspended on the end of wires should have all bare terminals covered with black tape and/or nonconductive caulk or potting compound. Plugs mounted under the modules are harder to see and troubleshoot than connectors hanging out on the wires.

**MONTHLY OPERATING MEETING** The monthly operating meetings are casual and there is no hysteria to start running. It is a great opportunity to check out new modules, new trains (Atlas mallets), new control systems, etc. The new members have priority on whatever. On the Mar 20th meeting:

- We had a fancy layout with 6 corners and ONLY FOUR STRAIGHTS! Foggy Bottom, the reversed corner, was put in NOT reversed to check the match with M&K which has just gotten the standard treatment of rounding mountains on the ends of the modules.

- One Club Corner was reversed in a 10 module layout and I was told there was a 2 degree misalignment but tracks all connected fine. Hay, these layouts are not perfect but they work! We need to work on the ski jumps Friday April 8th more than anything as some uncoupling was experienced with the 80' cars and E-8's.

- We tried a policy of switching power periodically but we let the cars generally run on through to minimize staging time. Edd's 40 car coal drag and the 18 car B&O Cap Limited (Kato) ran for most of the day with only engine changes. This has worked great in shows too.

- Alan broke in his mallet for a couple of hours without incident running westbound and then eastbound with 40 hoppers. I saw Dave's single unit RDC go buy pulling the 16 car Cap Ltd by itself at 70.5 MPH but I do not want to even think about it.

So if you like railroading laid back where anything goes - drop by the operating meetings. Someday we may test a West Va. layout, i.e. 1000 modules, ALL CORNERS!

We make excitement N-TRAK!

## TRAIN OPERATIONS, PART II

In the February Newsletter Pete talked about operations and how to get cars where they are supposed to go and back. In the March Newsletter we talked primarily about simple train operations related to loaning out and switching out head end power and picking up and setting out blocks of cars. There is another aspect of operations related to dispatching trains and think it should be mentioned with any discussion on operations.

**DISPATCHING TRAINS** Just as much a part of railroad operations and actually the highest priority is the Operating Dept's job is getting whole trains, particularly the priority trains, the merchandise and the varnish across the road to their terminals on time. Sometimes this involves running to the capacity of the line whilst dealing with wrecks and derails because of equipment failures, track problems, operator failure or a combination. Again these problems are typical of N-TRAK operations too and are a very interesting and exciting part of operating. Also these are simple operations if you do not want to worry about getting your \$20 Kadec cars spread all over the railroad and getting them mixed up with Schaefer's vintage collector cars!

**DISPATCHING BY RADIO** No, I never was a dispatcher and "all I know is what I hear on the radio". Before radio dispatching all train orders from the dispatcher were put in writing and handed up to the train crews by the operators or agents at the towers and stations. As an example see Southern RR train orders found in May 1081 around AF Interlocking, at the Telegraph Road Bridge over the RF&P in Alex. The operator logged everything in on the big train sheets.

Today dispatching is composed of a radio language directed from by the central dispatcher giving the authorization, authority name and time.

The authorization is repeated back by the receiver, and then verified correct by the sender and a "have a good day", "have a nice trip", etc. Everything is on audio recordings and the dispatcher no longer has any paper work! The dispatchers are located in operations centers like Jacksonville, Fla (Jacks) for the entire CSX line, Roanoke for sections of the NS. There is a complete description of the CSX Dufford Transportation Center, Jacks, in the in the November 1993 TRAINS MAGAZINE. The old CTC boards were thrown out and now big projected computer screens show track layouts with location of all trains, and their numbers. Nothing is in writing and all authorizations are now given over the radio. See image of screen of AF Interlocking Alexandria. There are 8 small crosses that 8 represent 8 crossovers.

**PRIORITY TRAINS** The time merchandise freights and the varnish or Amtrak have priority over the other trains, they run around anything slower or they pass through a bottle neck first. But where it can really get busy is in the trunk portions of the road where several junctions will feed traffic into heavy mainline traffic. Often these sections have 3 or more tracks, like N-TRAK!! What usually happens is everything shows up at once, Murphy's Law of Railroading. But when problems occur be on the lookout for complications to set in (like the infamous Feb 21th wreck of the Capitol Ltd, our premier train, at Foggy Bottom).

**DISPATCHER PROBLEMS** Random problems are what really require all the skills of the dispatcher. On my train trips I've been delayed by engine fires, low oil alarms, bridge fires, wash outs, radio/communication problems, derails and now drug busts are more common on the trains. For instance the drug runners got on the Cardinal at DC and they delayed the train in Huntington for the SWAT team to take them off to the Huntington jail, with Monroe as a close witness. The engine fire was on the California Zephyr and the dispatcher had us meet an SP freight going downgrade and get a freight engine to help us eastbound up the grade over the Sierra Mountains. That remind me of the time a freight got

stuck ahead of us on the N&W but that's another story about grades.

## N-TRAK RANDOM PROBLEMS

In addition to all the different operations discussed there is another layer that can be added to operations. Phil has mentioned a roll of the dice that would reference a list of problems like drug busts, frozen switches, stuck on a grade, a mud slide across some tracks, or crews running out of time, etc. This could be done once a meet or whatever and would require the dispatcher to do some alternate operations.

**TRIPLE TRACK** Some books say you need single track to get the best operations. Wonderful, when we operate tracks continuously we are actually running three single tracks side by side plus all the yards and sidings. When dedicating the blue or red to a peddler it can be treated like a single track but retaining all the looks and excitement of triple track. Ooorrr we can run double track or single track with two continuous passing/service tracks which you could have in a heavily industrial area. Take your pick, we're easy! But N-TRAK is really triple track for the purpose of running heavy traffic for shows. And don't forget we still have a real single track too, the Mountain Division. The mountain line could have a passing track automated for passing trains like the end loops have automatic reversing.

**SWITCHING OPERATIONS WITH INCREASED TOTAL TRAFFIC** Some operations are counterproductive to the normal N-TRAK continuous running process but it need not be that way. Taking additional time and tying up traffic for operations during shows are the concerns some members have. For increased action, traffic can be increased on two lines to 2 or 3 trains each and the blue taken out for switching of 1 or more peddlers. Running 3 or 4 matched trains on red on a 35 module layout has proven to be routine with slowing blocks. There is no reason we could not run two reliable 70 car trains on one loop if blocked properly. So we can still have 5 or more trains running continuously PLUS peddlers fiddling on the blue, the best of both worlds!

**SLOW ORDERS** For automatic slowing for an imaginary or real slow order board or tight curves like the blue in New River, a slowing block can be installed and set to reduce the speed of all fast trains automatically. For running long slow drags it could be turned off.

**LAYOUT DESIGN** Another whole subject we need to get into is designing our N-TRAK layout for operation. Where do we need more sidings and fiddle yards? We could "T" a 5 or 10 module branch off of the main circle of modules. It could be operated as a branch line, a short line or as an interchange to another heavy railroad which could connect with another circle of modules and so on, etc. New River has an abandon passing siding for red with a crossover to the yellow. Old Town has a passing siding on yellow. These are there now and could be put to good operational use. I know if members had the use of more fiddle yards with a lead that was clear of the mains we could do lots more fiddling. The Mountain Div. could even use a fiddle yard!

**OPERATIONS ON N-TRAK** There are all types of operations and layouts that we have discussed that are helpful to increase traffic and our operating enjoyment. Dispatching is generally concerned with getting trains through with a minimum of delays. This is a big N-TRAK goal too. Let the operating experts sign up for a block of time and put their minds into gear. We can activate some of those abandon tracks and add some interchanges and set up tracks. I have a prototype CTC board I showed at the Landmark Show and hope to get it operational someday soon. Do not be afraid to try something different, something maybe you have wanted to do all your life! ~~\*\*\*\*~~

## OBIE'S CORNER

News and Gossip from the Hobby Industry

There are lots of new releases and stuff in the shop. *Concor* Auto Racks have arrived- SP and Conrail first *Walters* Double stack cars are in stock. # pack TTX, 4 pack TTX, 1 Pack TTX, CN, CP. All containers also available.

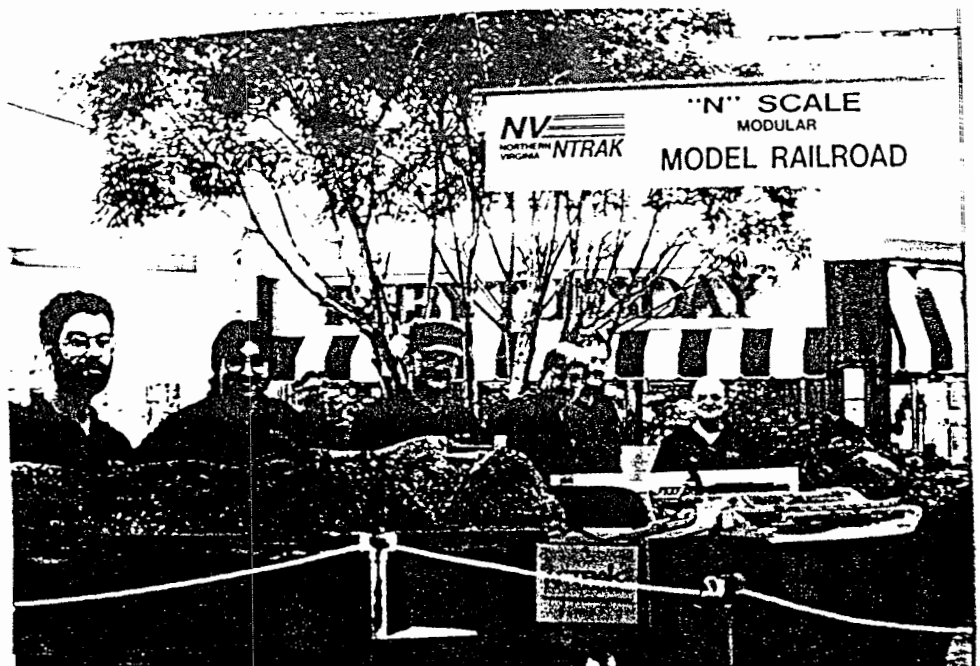
*Lifelike* Their second run GP-18 are due in June 94. Roadnames include BO, CNW, Southern, Lehigh Valley, BN, NW, NYS&W, Boston and Maine and undec. Low and high hood and with and without dynamic brakes. Lots of kitbash options here.

*KATO* E8/9 Are in. Roadnames include BO, UP, Amtrak, VIA, Penna, NYC and undec. They will also re-release an older diesel, probably the SD-40.

*Rix Products* The highway overpasses look pretty good.

A lot of new N scale products are coming out in 1994. N scale is the fastest growing model railroad scale. Laser printing and Chinese production have produced excellent molds with super detailing equal to brass models.

*Rail Fan tip:* Local area modelers can revisit the tracks at the cross over of RF&P and NS. The area is on Eisenhower Ave. But there is a trick in getting there. Go down Duke Street, turn at Fudruckers onto Gordon Street, go to the end and make a right onto Wheeler Ave. Park there and bring a camera because it will be worth it. I won't spoil it anymore. Call me for details.



CAR LENGTH			BEST WEIGHT	
inches	inches	N-scale feet	ounces	grams
1 7/8	1.875	25	.78	22.14
2 1/4	2.250	30	.84	23.74
2 5/8	2.625	35	.89	25.33
3	3.000	40	.95	26.93
3 3/8	3.375	45	1.01	28.52
3 3/4	3.750	50	1.06	30.12
4 1/8	4.125	55	1.12	31.71
4 1/2	4.500	60	1.18	33.30
4 7/8	4.875	65	1.23	34.90
5 1/4	5.250	70	1.29	36.49
5 5/8	5.625	75	1.34	38.09
6	6.000	80	1.40	39.68
6 3/8	6.375	85	1.46	41.28
6 3/4	6.750	90	1.51	42.87
7 1/8	7.125	95	1.57	44.47
7 1/2	7.500	100	1.63	46.06

NMRA's recommended practice (i.e. standard)  
for N-scale is 0.5 ounce plus 0.15 ounce per inch.

Submitted by John Cook. He also recommends lighter weights if your cars roll freely to save stress on the couplers.

