BANTRAK News
A Monthly Newsletter for BANTRAK Members • Volume 34 • Issue 3 • March 2021

The Engineer's Cab: LeRoy Brandimore

Hello All,

Well, here we are, almost a year into 2 weeks to flatten the curve. I'm sure "Cabin Fever" has set a good while ago. One way to cure that may be the upcoming Covid Safe Great Scale Model Train Show that is scheduled for April 10th & 11th at the Marriott Hotel in Hunt Valley. There will not be any layouts at this show. This makes me wonder about the May 8th & 9th in Timonium. As of this writing the website still lists it as being on. It has not been cancelled. The Marriott Hotel is where MER convention is scheduled for this October.
The yard committee presented their report at the February meeting. There was a lengthy discussion over some of the ideas presented. More reports are expected in the future. There could be a few discussions about what we want to do before we get close to a decision.

Also, during the February meeting, the status about T-Trak was discussed. We will had a Zoom meeting on March 10th to see what interest there is for T-Trak. Having T-Trak closer to the N-Trak Layout at the GSMTS should help with more interest by the club. T-Trak can also be useful in exposure at smaller venues. The main thing we need for T-Trak is for more people to provide modules. They are much easier to transport than N-Trak modules.

Stay Safe and Well
LeRoy Brandimore

Baltimore Area

Dues Invoice

Payable to: Baltimore Area N-Trak

Invoice Date:
February 1, 2021
Due Date:
April 6, 2021

Remit to:
Mr. Tim Nixon
719 Mount Alban Drive
Annapolis, MD, 21409
Or pay at possible prior meetings

Annual Club Dues
(Including National N-Trak Membership) → **$45.00**

Member Name:
Please Print _____

E-mail & Phone: _____

N-Trak Member Number: [ ]

Please print a copy of this invoice and submit with payment.

For Treasurer's Use

Date Submitted: _____ Check #: _____

Member's Receipt

Name: _____ Date: _____ Amount: _____

_____
Tim Nixon

Quarantine Time = Modeling Time! : Ethan Bernstein

Let's Make a Scene Part 1: Scenery Formation

It is a typical early fall afternoon in Saint Denis, MD. The leaves have begun changing colors, but the warm tones of summer are still present. There is a regular stream of traffic across Route 1, and the I895 overpass can be heard nearby. The low rumble of 32 cylinders and the screeching of steel-on-steel approaches in the distance. A southbound CSX manifest freight suddenly emerges from the trees as it crosses above Route 1. This phenomenon is a daily occurrence to local commuters, but to the local railfan, it is an exhilarating experience every time.

I have mostly completed the first "module" on my layout: a 2'x4' section, based on a scene in St. Denis where the double track CSX Capital Sub crosses over Route 1. The representation on my layout is "proto-freelanced," meaning it is not an exact replica of the real location, but instead captures the general feel and surroundings. Over the next few months, I will share with you how I made this scene from start to finish, covering everything from topography formation to making street signs, roads, guardrails, street lights, telephone poles, trees, and even a Dunkin Donuts Store! The techniques I use are a bit unconventional, but they yield incredibly realistic results in much less time as compared to many conventional methods. This month, we will start with terrain formation.

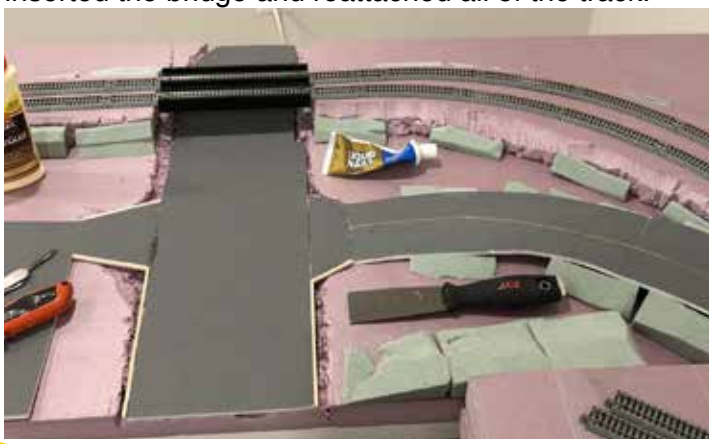
Foam board as a layout base offers lots of versatility when it comes to scenery, as the material can be easily carved and contoured to the desired shape with ease, and there are many different ways to create a scenic base. The board can be carved and sanded to make a smooth hillside to which ground foam can be directly applied, or can be roughly cut to be used as support for plaster cloth or similar materials. These methods are the most popular, and allow for incredible scenery, but there is yet another, much less common, technique that is much faster and achieves the same level of realism: commercial grass mats. Grass mats are a very recent addition to model scenery materials, finding a strong niche market with beginner modelers and allowing anyone to quickly have a grass-covered table top layout. Grass mats are not just for "beginners," however. Model scenery manufacturers, notably Walthers, Noch, and Woodland Scenics, have begun offering much more realistic "static grass" mats, often advertised as "tear-and-plant" material. These mats, sold in a variety of seasonal colors, use a combination of static grasses to achieve an incredibly realistic appearance, and the "tear-and-plant" product lines are incredibly versatile and create a naturally random look, not the cheap "sea of green" that grass mats are thought to create.

I took "grass mat scenery" to the next level, using it both as a scenic base for terrain formation and as a realistic grass texture. Many grass mats have a form of paper or plastic backing to which the grass material is secured. This backing allows the mats to

Quarantine Time = Modeling Time! : Ethan Bernstein

be cut easily with a pair of scissors, and also permits easy and realistic hill formation by laying the mats overtop of some form of scenic sub-base which provides support and a rough topography. This 2'x4' scene demanded somewhat sophisticated scenic contours, with the tracks passing over a road and lots of surrounding hills, as typical of Maryland terrain. The foam base for my layout consists of two layers of 1.5" foam insulation board. I designed the layout specifically with road underpasses and hills curving down from the track in mind, as the top layer of foam acts as a sub roadbed for the track, while the bottom layer is the base of the scene, permitting the top layer to be completely cut away around the track if desired.

Before shaping the foam, I first determined the location of the bridge and the road which will pass underneath it. I sketched the outline of the tracks onto the top layer of foam, leaving some space on each side of the mainline. This sketch will be used to cut out the top layer of foam, giving the tracks a higher elevation than the rest of the scene. Once I had all of my cut lines drawn, I removed the track on the top layer of foam where the bridge will be inserted, and began cutting the top layer of foam. I cut the foam using a pocket knife and a narrow putty knife, first scoring the foam along the sketch lines with the pocket knife then successively increasing the depth of each cut. The putty knife is useful to ensure the board is cut all the way through and help separate the cut section from the remaining pieces. Once the desired sections were removed, I secured the remaining pieces supporting the track to the base layer of the board using foam-safe Liquid Nails adhesive. I then inserted the bridge and reattached all of the track.



Next, I sketched the road onto the remaining bottom layer of foam. I use poster boards to make most of my roads, as it is easy to cut and can be bought pre-painted in a gray color that resembles asphalt. The paper-based surface also makes it easy to paint and weather. The downside to the posterboard is it is very thick for N-scale. I decided to embed the poster board into the bottom layer of foam for the main section of road (Route 1). Once I had sketched the path of the road underneath the bridge, I cut less than ¼" into the foam along the outside edges of the sketch. I then made lots of cuts horizontally across the sketch, staying within the outside cuts. Using the putty knife, I was able to lift off material, leaving a shallow channel in the foam.

This process took some time, as though the foam board is comparatively easy to cut to wood, it is still a relatively tough material, and I had to ensure I kept my cuts to a consistent depth so that the road would be nearly flush with the top of the foam. I also cut out the foam at an angle on both sides of the road at the intersection for the exit ramp that slopes up on the right and the plaza entrance on the left. I cut the posterboard to the desired shapes and sizes, securing them to the foam board using Liquid Nails. In addition to Route 1, there is also a base for a shopping plaza at left (the structure is currently under construction), and a highway (I895) exit ramp. The plaza lot is glued directly on top of the foam board, giving it a slightly raised elevation from the road. The exit ramp gains in elevation, eventually rising above the tracks, supported and banked using craft foam which I cut to form risers. Maryland is notorious for its hilly terrain, so level roads are non-existent. Varying terrain heights really takes a model railroad from a flat, basic toy train setup to a realistic work of art. Using thin strips of wood, I made curbs, glued to the sides of the poster board using wood glue. The curbs help cover the gaps remaining on the sides of the channel, and, once painted, add an extra level of realism. (4)

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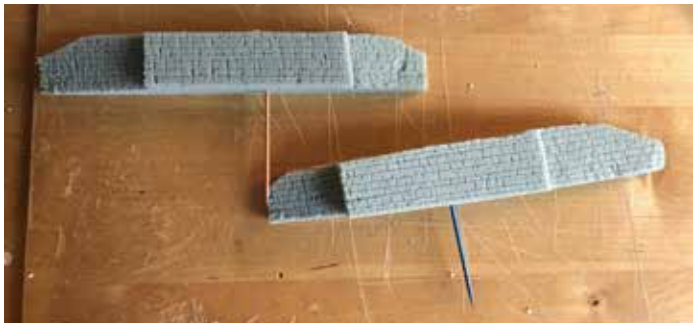
The bridge abutments are made from a low-density craft foam found at craft stores. I cut the foam to the correct heights and shaped it to look like an old stone abutment, typical of the Capital Sub. I incorporated retaining walls into the abutments as well. To create a varied stone texture, I gently scored vertical lines onto the face of the foam abutments, then add random vertical scoring to simulate individual rocks.



I hand-painted the abutments with an assortment of acrylic and watercolor paints. I first applied a base coat of gray acrylic paint. Then I applied a coat of water color gray paint over top to fill in any exposed foam. Next came a wash of black water color, which seeps into the scored rocks and brings out the detail, as well as adds shadowing to give the abutments more texture. Finally, a wash of burnt umber watercolor was applied sparingly to simulate worn, eroded rock. I added a few small clumps of ground foam to the face of the abutments to simulate moss, and added a few dead vines. I then glued the abutments in their appropriate locations on the layout. The final result is visible in the first photo.

Now it is time to create the subterrain base to support the grass mats which will be laid over top. I cut low-density craft foam to make forms to create contours in the scene. This step is not precise, the goal is just to have something to support the mats to create the desired hills and curves. Once the foam dried, I began cutting the grass mat to fit the different areas. I used two different types of grass material for this initial terrain formation step. One mat is a basic ground-foam Woodland Scenics summer green grass mat. The second is actually a floral decoration used to decorate pots or planters, very similar in construction to “tear-and-plant” mats with a static grass type material and a fiber backing that can be separated by hand. I first applied the Woodland Scenics mat around the road areas to simulate cut, more maintained landscaping. I then filled in the remaining areas with the static grass mat, laying it over the foam contours and covering the foam base up to the tracks. It is OK if there are some gaps between the mats as these will be filled in later with scenic details, ground foam, and other textures of grass mat (stay tuned for part 2!). The result can be seen in the second photo.

Ballasting Unitrack

With the major terrain completed, the tracks can now be ballasted, but how does one ballast sectional track? There are two main ways to ballast sectional track: 1) Ballast just like flex track on top of cork, or; 2) apply ballast only on the sides of the sectional track, not in between the rails. The former method is the best technique for Bachmann and Atlas sectional track which are not very detailed (if at all). The latter method is ideal for Kato Unitrack, which comes exceptionally detailed, textured, and painted from the factory, and looks great on its own. I also did not want to completely cover the track so that it could be removed and reused in the future if I decide to redo the scene. I began by applying all-purpose white glue in between the double track main and between the edge of the sectional track and the grass mat. I spread the glue around so that it covered the entire area I wanted to ballast. Using a plastic spoon, I first applied a layer of Woodland Scenics Gray Blend fine

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ballast, covering all of the pink around the track.

Next, I applied Kato fine ballast, which matches the color and texture of the Unitrack, just around the edges of the Unitrack to simulate a more recent layer of ballast. I then secured the ballast using heavily diluted white glue. I sprinkled in some green ground foam in a few areas as well before the glue dried.

The last step of the first phase of scenery is to paint the curbs. I again used gray acrylic paint, which, combined with the grainy wood texture, simulates concrete very well.

This concludes part 1 of “Let’s Make a Scene!” Stay tuned for part 2, where I will go over scratch building and adding scenic details! (8)

Happy modeling,

Ethan Bernstein

Yard Committee Report : Bob Bunge

The Bantrak yard exporatary committee was formed in the fall of 2020 with the intent of reporting back to membership options for a new yard in early 2021.

The committee exchanged email and met via online meeting.

Committee members:

Bob Bunge
Lauren Baker
David Betz
Eric Payne
Freddy Mitchell
John Hasson
Chris Quinlan
Ryan Jones

Objectives:

1) Increase reliability over current yard.
2) Don't use any components from the current yard in construction of the new yard.
3) Provide ability to have one long yard or two shorter yards to be used on the same layout.
4) In single yard configuration, provide for trains of similar length to current yard.
5) Reduce setup time, reduce amount of physical lifting.

Basic Assumptions:

1) The new yard will be built as new construction. This will allow the current yard to be used during construction and removes any hard deadlines for completion.
2) Conduct carpentry work at one location and in one work session so "kits" can be distributed to members.
3) Members will work on modules at home, but will meet several times to mock set up, ensure track layout, standardize paint, scenery colors and work out technical details.
4) Kato Extension pieces will be used at module ends as done in the current yard.
5) A power layout box(es) will be constructed to provide yard track power cut off as in the current yard for DC running.
6) Legs will be integrated into each module.
7) Manual Peco switch/turnouts and flex track will be used.
8) Same or similar depth as current yard to allow easy reach to all tracks.
9) Each main line will have two or more yard tracks.
10) Explore slide out bars to the back that could be used to support train boxes.
11) The project will include modifications to the trailer as needed.
12) The folded up modules will be stored on shelves on one or more carts that will be rolled out of the trailer.
13) More vertical adjustment in the legs then the current yard.
14) No ballast between tracks.
15) Explore the use of Gatorboard for module tops if the material can be sourced and afforded, or perhaps hollow doors.
16) New storage boxes for scenery will be built as needed.
17) Explore reusing the front and back scenery from the current yard.
18) Red/Yellow/Blue approach into the throat may be centered to simplify layout resulting in a "bump out" to the front when mated to a N-trak module.

Module Layout Options considered:

1) Four 6 foot modules, similar track layout as current yard. Two throats.
2) Four 4 foot modules with four throats to allow either one large or two small yards, two track power boxes.
3) Six 4 foot modules with four throats to equal current size and allow division to two yards.
4) One ended "inside" yard with a junction module to access red/yellow/blue lines via either flyovers or switch/turnouts.

Scenery ideas:

1) Keep scenery out of direct way to avoid damage;
2) Light industry on blue line or in empty ends of throats:
a) REA/freight platform;
b) Water/coal towers;

Yard Committee Report : Bob Bunge

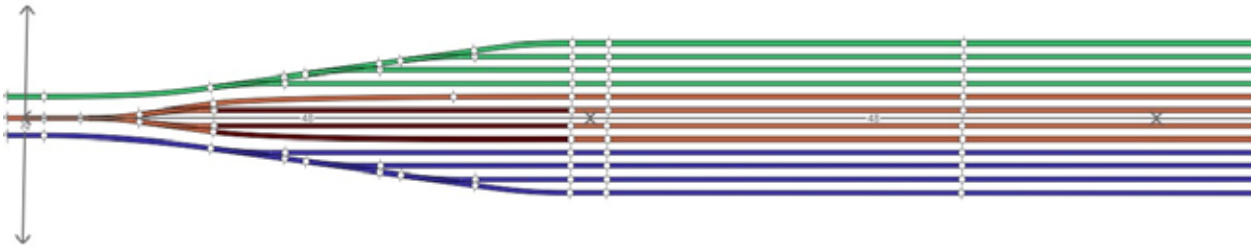
c) Icing platform;
d) Coal ramp/platform;
e) Locomotive fueling station;
3) Passenger platform on red line.

Committee Recommendations

The committee met online February 16 and collaborated on this report online before and after the meeting. After two hours of discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1) Present to club members layout options number 2 and 3 for discussion at February meeting.
2) Publication of this report in the March newsletter.
3) Continued discussion at the March meeting followed by vote at March meeting for the project to enter preliminary design and costing stage and establishment of Yard Construction committee.
4) Yard committee presents proposed detailed design and budget at either April, May or June meeting.
5) Final vote for go ahead at either May, June, July meeting.

A preliminary throat and straight through module layout by Ryan Jones. Entry into the throat is centered on the module end. In this example, each line has a total of four tracks. Line to line transfers are not shown in this example.



Discussion points from March meeting:

- Options from March Meeting discussion:

a) Build two six foot ends + Four foot centers
b) Build additional ends later

- Cut wood at one location, assemble at one place if possible
- Use templates for module ends to better ensure compatibility

BANTRAK 2021 Calendar

March 21, 2021
Club Meeting
Location: Zoom

April 6, 2021
Newsletter content deadline
We need content please submit your articles by the deadline.

April 10-11, 2021
Great Scale Show
Marriott Delta Hotel at 245 Shawan Rd. in Cockeysville

April 19, 2021
Club Meeting
Location: Zoom

October 21, 2021 - October 24, 2021
2021 NMRA MidEast Region Convention
Location: Mount Clare Junction
See Alan Del Gaudio for details

BANTRAK Membership: Al Palewicz

BANTRAK does a significant amount of charitable activity, although we rarely think of it that way because we get pleasure out of it. When you think about it, that is as it should be with all giving from the heart.

What is our charitable activity? Our major participation is in the B&O Museum's (which is a charitable organization) Annual Festival of Trains. Our display has been a major draw for people to come to the Museum for many years, both recent and in the past. There are plenty more examples, this is just one.

Please contact Treasurer Tim Nixon for more information regarding your membership status and roster questions or contact Al Palewicz with general questions.

Member Benefits:

- Sharing of your knowledge (railroading and modeling) with others of similar interests
- Access to railroading and modeling knowledge of other members
- National exposure and recognition of your endeavors in modeling
- Hands on activities: Club modules - track, wiring and scenery. Raffle layout - track and scenery Members' layouts
- Recognition as being part of a Nationally known club.

Train Spotting: David Betz

BANTRAK was founded in 1983 as the Greater Baltimore N-Scale Associates. Begun as a “round robin” group to share skills and experiences, we have expanded our focus to include participation in many diverse activities to promote model railroading in general and N-Scale model railroading in particular. Activities include participation in local, regional and national shows, meets and conventions. BANTRAK membership includes membership in the national NTRAK organization.

The BANTRAK Newsletter is the official publication of Baltimore Area N-TRAK (BANTRAK), Inc.
This is ***your*** newsletter! Please send articles, photos, and suggestions to newsletter@bantrak.net
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