

The Engineer's Cab: John Hale

Aloha BANTRAK!

This summer, my wife and I had the pleasure of spending a couple of weeks in the great state of Hawaii. We flew into Oahu, and after a couple of days, we jumped on a cruise ship that took us around to Maui for a couple of days, the Big Island (Hawaii) for a couple of days, and to Kauai for a couple of days before returning us to Oahu. Outside of the city of Honolulu, the islands are very agricultural based. There were several narrow gauge railroads on each island, some still working, some defunct. In Oahu, we visited the Dole Pineapple plant, which used a narrow gauge railroad to move fruit from the field to the plants.



In Maui, we also visited “Hale O Ke Ka’aahi”, ie., the “House of the Train” which was actually a commuter station.

An interesting note, my last name “Hale” in Hawaiian means “House”, so there were a ton



of businesses named “Hale....” If you ever have a chance, I would recommend visiting the state.

We look forward to several more events this year, Altoona N-Scale weekend, The Great Scale Train Show, and maybe more.

John

Baltimore Streetcar Museum: Bob Bunge

About 20 Bantrak members arrived at the Baltimore Streetcar Museum early on July 18th. We moved modules and equipment from our cars into the museum and started to set up in preparation for the layout set up for two weekends, a total of five running days.



Setting up at the museum is a new venue for Bantrak. It was also the first time in recent memory that a modular layout had been set at the museum. The museum's auditorium isn't all that large, so the layout was small and basic, 16x16 feet without a yard to set up trains. Features that were noted by members were that the building is air conditioned and the floor is level and clean, easing set up.



We started unloading cars at 8am and had the first trains running about 11:30. For the rest of the day, kinks, submarine joints and other minor issues were fixed and most trains were running smoothly. Later in the afternoon, the Bantrak members still around were treated to a group streetcar ride with several members riding other cars as well.

Sunday, John Bunge ran an 80 car reefer train behind a BLI Big Boy much to the delight of two young boys, sons of the Museum dispatcher of the day. The Dispatcher is in charge of the museum for the day and

dispatches the streetcars on their trips. The boys had recently seen the real Big Boy on its east coast tour. Later, Savannah allowed the boys to run her train. Justin, the Dispatcher, later rewarded Savannah by taking her on a couple of instruction trips, teaching her how to operate a real PCC streetcar.



A first this year, the Museum is open on Wednesdays as an experiment. While it is a challenge for the museum to staff on a weekday, so far early numbers suggest it is of value, especially for stay-at-home Moms and retirees. I was pleased to see Bantrak have a full run schedule for Wednesday. Arthur Boyd had arranged for a bus from his retirement community to visit and see the layout as well as the museum.

The final weekend also found a full run schedule with Bantrak members not signed up showing up. We almost always found a place for them to run paired with someone else. One interesting aspect of this layout is we were in a smaller room with no other noise distractions. Bantrak President John Hale was pleased to be able to hear two sound equipped locomotives. Normally, either at the large hall at the Great Scale Show or in the large rooms at the B&O museum, it can be difficult to hear the n-scale trains.

Saturday, after lunch, with a large number of Bantrakers in attendance, club members experienced a group ride on the 1902 Brill built open car. The open cars are always fun to ride on nice summer days and this was no exception. Sunday, tear down

Baltimore Streetcar Museum: Bob Bunge

started at 3:30. The dispatcher of the day cleared us to start to bring automobiles up to the museum about 4:30 with the last Bantrak members leaving shortly after.

Sunday, as tear down was completed, President Hale asked for feedback on the experience. There was overall agreement it was a good experience with a bit of discussion over how we might improve the layout at this location in the future. It was agreed that the two week format was a good fit with unanimous agreement Bantrak would like to come back.



Monday morning, I received the following comment from the Museum executive director:

"Hi Bob:

On behalf of the entire Baltimore Streetcar Museum, I wish to extend our sincere thanks to you and the entire BANTRAK club for the wonderful N scale model railroad layout exhibited at the Baltimore Streetcar Museum over the past several weeks.

This was a fun experience for the museum and was very well received by both visitors and members. We would be happy to have your club return for future exhibitions and welcome you anytime here at BSM.

Additionally, it is rare for exhibitors to clean up the auditorium when their event concludes, let alone restore the room to better than its as-found condition. This was both very impressive and greatly appreciated!

Thank you, again.

Sincerely,

*Matthew W. Nawn, P.E., PMP
Executive Director
Baltimore Streetcar Museum"*

With this feedback, Bantrak will start to explore dates for summer of 2027.

Bob Bunge
2026 BSM Layout Coordinator



Bob Mohr Module update :Eric Payne

We are running a bit behind our original self-imposed goal to finish the “City” modules by the end of August. However, we are still on track to hit our secondary deadline before the late-September Altoona trailer repack and Bob Mohr storage tower build. The great weather has been a huge help as we enter the home stretch! Our final work sessions will be fully focused on wrapping up the skyboards, legs, scenery, wiring, and track ballasting.

Back on July 24th, we had a fantastic work session focused on skyboards. David Betz opened his woodshop for us, so Jim B. and I packed the van with materials and headed north for a great, relaxing day of woodworking.



The final stretch for the skyboards involves trimming the edges, priming, and painting them sky blue using our established BANTRAK paint code. We will also be breaking out some stencils to add some clouds to the backdrop! We will knock this out over the next few weeks while the weather is still on our side. Plus, it will be a nice change of pace for the crew as we bounce around between different layout tasks!



Huge thanks to Jim for driving up, helping us brainstorm cutting and assembly solutions, and lending a hand, and to David B. for volunteering his tools and materials! After we finished cutting everything, Jim B. took the materials home for assembly. He glued and clamped the hardwood and plywood together “sandwich style,” using plenty of weight to guarantee a tight, secure bond. Thanks to his hard work, we now have three 4-foot and two 3-foot skyboards ready to go!



Bob Mohr Module update :Eric Payne

We also have another progress update on the module project! On August 8th, I hosted Tim, Alan, and Jim B. for a quick, two-hour work session at my house. We spent the first part of the evening sketching out early layout designs for the Module #5 city scene before diving into ballast work.

The city layout is shaping up to be something special. We've planned a pedestrian bridge perpendicular to the yard to match two of our other modules. For some great visual depth, we are carrying over the 2-inch elevation from Module #4, stepping it down to 1 inch, and dropping it to a lower level just like Module #1. The centerpiece of the whole scene will be Martin & Alan's building. We are hoping to highlight it with a park, unique signs, or specialized lighting to serve as a wonderful "easter egg" homage to Bob.

For ballasting, we are using Woodland Scenics B1375 Gray Fine Ballast. It's a realistic crushed rock, and the four of us agree the color match is spot on.



These modules have seen plenty of action over the years, and we remember Bob using India ink and custom washes to unify the look for his home layout and public shows. To make sure the new and old sections blend perfectly, we intend to give the finished modules a final weathering wash.



Bob Mohr Module update :Eric Payne



As a reminder, here is what the modules looked like when they were in Bob's layout.



We've even discussed airbrushing the track, flashing back to how we tackled the 2010 Club Yard rebuild over at Skip's house!

Moving forward into August, we are in the home stretch of installing the Kato expansion tracks and cleaning up duplicate drop feeders.

With the good weather and after 18 months, we are also shifting our workspace from my basement out to my enclosed porch. It is completely protected from the elements and gives us a great spot to watch the modules finally come together. Once the modules are wrapped up, we will meet in mid-to-late September to assemble the storage carts. We'll (hopefully) time this to align with the Altoona trailer repack, stepping in just as soon as the scheduled trailer maintenance and updates are finalized. Stay tuned—we are still lined up and on track to debut these modules at the December 2026 Holiday Festival of Trains!

The Ultimate Carring Case: Freddy Mitchell



The back of my car with Apache 4800 cases during Harbor Freight's 40% sale

Throughout history, humanity has faced many unsolved mysteries: Who built Stonehenge? What came first, the chicken or the egg? What lies at the bottom of the ocean?

For model railroaders, however, the ultimate mystery has always been: How can I safely and easily transport a full N scale train in a single box?

Over the years, manufacturers have offered large carrying boxes, but many are awkward to handle or fall apart over time. After testing several options, I found the ultimate solution: Harbor Freight's Apache Cases.

Choosing the Right Case Size

In my testing, I focused on two practical Apache protective cases:

Apache 3800: 14 7/8" × 10 5/8" × 6 1/8"
(Holds approximately 30 1940s–1950s rolling stock cars)

Apache 4800: 17 7/8" × 12 7/8" × 6 5/8"
I found these two to be the "sweet spot" for portable storage. Larger models (like the 5800 or 9800) feature external wheels that make uniform stacking and shelf storage tricky. Furthermore, I learned the hard way after buying two 9800 cases that they only offer one level of customizable foam, whereas the 3800 and 4800 include two full layers of customizable pick-and-pluck foam

Depending on what kind of rollingstock you are planning to transport will determine how wide your foam rows will be.

If you've seen my coal drag,

"The Connellsville Special," you know it takes two Apache 3800 cases to haul the entire train. Most of those cars are 33' Micro-Trains Line (MTL) twin-bay hoppers.

In my initial design, I relied on loose foam strips and small bits of bubble wrap between cars.



My initial carrying design- Apache 3800

The problem? It created a chaotic mess during setup and teardown. Worse yet, cars occasionally slipped hidden under loose foam, only to drop out when picking up the insert later.

To fix this, I developed a cleaner, modular build method.

How to Build the Improved Custom Tray System

Materials Needed

- Apache Protective Case (3800 or 4800 recommended)
- Thin Cardboard (Costco pallet separator sheets—the kind supporting toilet paper or paper towels—work perfectly!)
- Foam-Safe Adhesive (such as Gorilla Clear Grip)
- Scissors or Utility Knife
- Pen or Marker

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Determine Your Slot Width

Decide which types of freight cars you are transporting. This dictates whether your custom rows will be 1, 2, or 3 grid squares wide. For standard 1940s–1950s freight cars, 1 square wide is typically ideal.

Step 2: Pluck Out Your Rows

The Ultimate Carring Case: Freddy Mitchell

Pluck out full grid-wide channels to create your rows. Because Apache cases include two layers of pre-cut grid foam, you can construct two complete trays per case.



Looking closely at the pre-cut foam grid squares before plucking.



An Apache 4800 foam tray can yield up to 10 rows per level.

Step 3: Assemble Floor Support Strips

Take the long foam strips you plucked out and glue them together lengthwise. These strips will form a cushioned floor inside each row, ensuring your cars are protected on three sides (bottom and both walls).



It's best to make these strips slightly longer than the tray so you can trim them down for a tight fit.

Step 4: Dry-Fit the Floor Strips

Once the glue has dried, press the strips snugly into the bottom of each open row. A tight fit helps the foam sidewalls maintain structural shape.

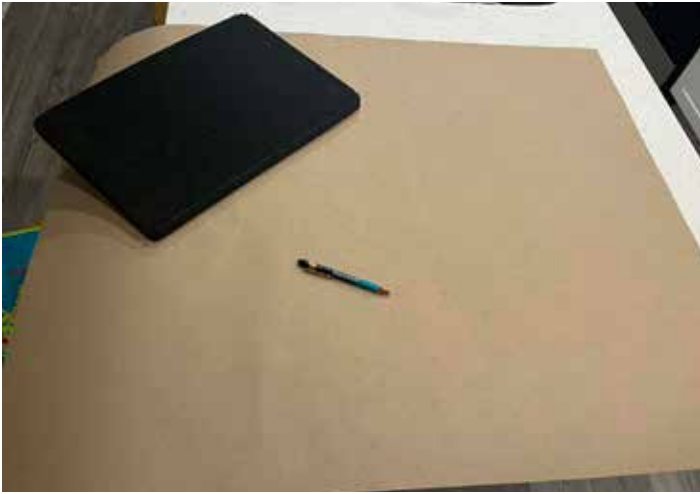


Test-fitting a boxcar into a completed row to verify clearance.

Step 5: Trace and Cut Rigid Cardboard Backing

Using the solid, non-pluggable bottom foam sheet as a template, trace and cut out two cardboard panels. Bonding this thin cardboard to the bottom of the plucked foam matrix prevents the flexible tray from sagging under the weight of the models.

The Ultimate Carring Case: Freddy Mitchell



Tracing a cardboard backing plate using the solid bottom layer of foam.



Without backing and bottom strips, thin foam rows cannot maintain shape.

Step 6: Glue the Tray Together

Apply glue evenly across the cardboard sheet, then firmly press your prepared pick-and-pluck foam layer (with the floor strips inserted) down onto it.

Layer Reconfiguration Tip

Standard Apache 3800 and 4800 cases include 4 total foam layers:

- Top Egg-Crate Foam (fitted to lid)

- Two Middle Customizable Layers

- One Thin Solid Base Layer

Once both customizable trays are completed, reconfigure the stack from top to bottom as follows:

Top Lid Foam

Tray 1 (Customizable Layer 1)

Solid Thin Base Layer

Tray 2 (Customizable Layer 2)



The revised, rigid tray design loaded inside an Apache 3800.

Moving the solid thin layer between Tray 1 and Tray 2 acts as a divider, ensuring top-layer cars don't press directly down onto lower-layer cars while keeping everything cushioned.

Alternative Setup: Using Micro-Trains Plastic Cradles

If you prefer keeping models in their factory inserts, you can build a cradle-style case!

Using an Apache 4800, pluck out wider channels to fit original Micro-Trains clear jewel-case cradles. You can also add small foam top-caps over each cradle to secure the cars in place during transport.

The Ultimate Carring Case: Freddy Mitchell



With this layout, you can safely transport up to 20 passenger coaches in a single Apache 4800



Layer two with varying row widths to accommodate both passenger coaches and express boxcars.



Small foam inserts lock the models into their cradles while carrying the case.



Look at all the jewel cases you no longer have to carry to club operations! (Special shout out to my wife for her fancy soap holder!)



Wider floor strips are required when making custom cuts for plastic cradles.

Final Thoughts

This project provides a cost-effective, rugged, and highly efficient solution for organizing and transporting your N scale fleet.

While other club members spend 20-30 minutes opening individual jewel cases and hunting for matching boxes, you'll be unlatched, staged, and highballing down the mainline ahead of everyone else!

Pro Tip: Harbor Freight runs sales and coupons on Apache cases constantly. Never pay full price!



BANTRAK 2026 Calendar

September 06, 2026

Newsletter content deadline

We need content, please submit your articles by the deadline.

August 16, 2026

Club Meeting

Chris Quinlan's house

September 11-13, 2026

Altoona N-Scale Weekend

Blair County Convention Center

1 Convention Center Drive,

Altoona, PA 16602

Coordinator: Martin Myers

October 31-Nov. 01, 2026

Great Scale Show

Timonium Fair Grounds

Coordinators: Eric Payne & John Hale

BANTRAK Membership: Eric Payne

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 [Eric Payne](#) 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



Union Pacific “Big Boy” #4014 at Oliver Township Park, Newport, PA.

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.

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