

President - Mark Ferracane Vice Pres - Dan Pawling
Treasurer - Chuck Tremblay Editor - Roland Kelley

Editor - Northeast Ntrak, 41 Easy Street, Lowell, MA 01850-1731, or
e-mail: NortheastNtrak@msn.com Web Site - www.northeastntrak.org



President's Message

Well, the annual meeting will be on June 8th at Fay Chin's home. Bob Pawlak had volunteered to host us again but Fay made an offer to host it at his home. He has a Garden Railroad and a N-Scale layout. Fay will be sending out invitations to all members, via E-Mail or snail mail. We will be discussing a number of topics at the meeting. Show schedule, finances and Club Car Sales. I will have a report of how many cars we have sold. Also, dues can be paid at meeting. Our annual dues are \$20.00. There will also be club cars for sale.

Our season is winding down. The Greenburg show is March 29th and 30th, we hope to have the same area in the Fez Room. Contact Dan Pawling if you want plan on bringing a module. Let's wow the crowd. Make sure your equipment is in top running shape. Also, we received a letter asking us to show at the Hub Division show in Milford, Massachusetts. I would like us to be able to fill their request. The show will be on Saturday April 12th. Please contact me or Dan if you would be interested in attending. And last but not least, the Hooksett, New Hampshire show is on April 20th.
Til Next Month Mark

The 63rd St. Connector: A Progress Report By D. Pawling, Sr.

One of several revitalized transit capital projects in NYC is the East Side Access Project. This project, designed decades ago, will shift some 160,000 workday Long Island RR (LIRR) riders from Penn Station at 33rd street on the west side of Manhattan to Grand Central Terminal (GCT) on the east side at 42nd street. This would save those folks about 30 minutes of cross-town commuting to their job sites and relieve congestion at Penn Station which is shared with Amtrak and NJ Transit.

A key part of the East Side Access is the 63rd Street Connector tunnel which was completed in the '70's as a double-decker - two tracks over two -subway above, railroad below. The subway portion, activated in 1989, is part of the Manhattan 6th Avenue line which runs into eastern Queens County on Long Island by way of a four tube tunnel under the East River. Work is underway to bore the railroad tunnel to GCT from 63rd Street and 2nd Avenue west and south under Park Avenue. Park Avenue has been the site of the New Haven and New York Central rail lines since they were forced to go underground years ago. Metro North uses those tracks now; the LIRR will go beneath them.

In March 2007 workers began assembling the \$10 million,



Engineering recon. photo of subsurface conditions 170 feet below grade midway along unbored section of railway tunnel between Grand Central Terminal and East 63rd Street, New York, NY.

200 ton boring machine at 63rd Street. The face of the machine is 22 feet in diameter, has 45 cutting disks which apply 70,000 pounds pressure against the rock. The machine began cutting west at about 190 feet below grade in October 2007. It moves forward at about 10 feet per hour with debris channeled through the machine on a conveyor. I visited 63rd Street recently and during a traffic lull jumped up and down on the sidewalk. You could tell it was hollow beneath because the sound was different from elsewhere. This tunnel will be 7,200 feet long, but the total bored distance will be 24,000 linear feet. This work will be for the second parallel tunnel and for the terminal and service facilities. The terminal will have upper and lower platforms with at least two tracks (possibly eight) each separated by a mezzanine.

Currently, the Metro North tracks approach GCT underground starting at 96th Street under Park Avenue. The terminal tracks at GCT are on two levels, the lowest being 91 feet below Park Ave. The LIRR tracks will be under Metro North at a depth of 140 feet. The tunnel is being bored through rock known as Manhattan Schist (spell check ok), a metamorphosed material containing generally tiny pieces of mica which gives an interesting sparkle to the dull, blackish rock. This rock has some structural strength and was used in some Colonial era buildings, but the structural quality tends to vary. Because of this MTA sought to avoid any surprises and had some photos taken of subsurface conditions along the unbored part of the route, 170 feet down. We have obtained a copy of one of the shots (see photo). The rock must be pretty dense because there is no sparkle from the mica. Apparently, all is consistent with previous geological surveys. Up-dates on this, and other Metropolitan Transportation Agency projects, will be reported on as information becomes available. In researching this project for example, there is the suggestion that four of the massive tunnel boring machines are being used, but it is not clear to me that they are all on this project.



Lexington Show highlights.

Museum Train Show Wrap-up
by Bob Pawlak

A train show was held at the National Heritage Museum in Lexington, MA on February 16-17, 2008. The layout this year consisted of a 14' x 22' loop with two 3' corners and two transition corners

leading to two peninsulas with end loops. One peninsula consisted of a 2' bridge, 3' corner, and the paper mill end-loop. The other peninsula consisted of a 4' corner (Black Hole), 12' straight (Bridges Canyon), and the coal loader/crushed stone end loop. The result was a 64' long Blue Line and Yellow Line loop, a 146' long Red Line route (DCC), and a 47' long Mountain-Division-down-to-Yellow-Line run on the longer peninsula.

The 18 modules were brought by 9 different members (an average of about 12' of module per member). Some members came Friday afternoon from 2-5 PM to set up. Others came at 7:30 AM on Saturday morning. Four members without modules came to help set up which was very much appreciated. Although set up went smoothly, the doors weren't opened until 15 minutes after the scheduled 10:00 AM start time for the show. My conclusion is that we need more help with set up from

members without modules.

The museum show is not a typical train show because it is just our layout in a large room with no dealers or other layouts. The audience is also different, mostly complete families with husband, wife, babies in arms, and young children. It is more of a general family outing at the beginning of school vacation week rather than a typical model railroader bringing a child or grandchild. The museum has free parking and free admission to the museum but charges \$5/family (for museum members) and \$7/family otherwise. As a result, people seem to linger longer around the layout to get their money's worth. The museum provides a large number of step stools with handrails for the youngsters to climb onto and see better. These seem to help the kids stay put longer.

Attendance was 423 visitors on Saturday and 560 on Sunday for a total of 983 for the weekend. This was down from 2185 for the same weekend last year and 2145 in 2006. The museum coordinator said the Hub show before Christmas was also down in attendance and is pondering the situation. I offered her some suggestions about the advertising for the show. (continued on next page)

(continued from page 2)

We moved a lot of car miles of passengers, coal, automobiles, petroleum products, and whatever Dan Pawling was carrying in his long train of blue Great Northern covered hoppers. Thomas the Tank Engine and his friends ran periodically to the delight of the youngsters. In general, a good time was had by all.

Crooks Target Circus Train

Cincinnati Police are looking for whoever stole thousands of dollars in equipment from a Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus train car.

Circus production manager Kenneth Samuels says he noticed the missing items when he returned to his personal car after the show Saturday night.

Thieves stole a flat screen T-V, DVD Player, laptop computer, and I-pod, jewelry, a cell phone, passport and \$2200 in cash. Cops believe the burglary happened Saturday night between 6 and 11:30 p.m.



It is not just the model trains that can have an accident. Here is what happened when the train does not stop when it should. Guess the engineer was busy talking to someone.

What's New and Crazy With N Scale DCC

by Bob Gatland

I've been here before with a clinic on DCC sound for N scale, three years ago, I believe. At that time DCC sound systems were just starting to show up. Basically, the sound decoders were much larger than regular decoders and were a real challenge to squeeze into steam locomotive tenders and diesel shells. Sound continues to be the big story. Much as happened since then to improve our chances of adding sound to our favorite locomotive. Some of the news is good. But some of the news is not so good. I'll start with the bad news first and try to leave you in a better mood by the end of this clinic.

First the legal stuff. As reported in Model Railroader magazine and in the NMRA's Scale Rails magazine and probably elsewhere, the NMRA has filed a patent challenge against a company named Real Rail Effects, Inc. Frankly, I don't know who they are. A check of the Model Railroader advertisers index for February, 2008, doesn't show them listed. Nevertheless they were granted patent protection by the U. S. Patent Office for their integrated sound/motor/special effects control and are seeking royalties from the likes of several decoder manufacturers and other manufacturers. Needless to say, this patent would cause much chaos for us as end users, and you should watch this case closely and hope that the NMRA prevails. The NMRA has been joined in this suit by several prominent manufacturers. For comparison, think of Lenz Digital Plus which early on decided to share its DCC technology with the rest of the industry in order to create universal standards. Do you think that Debbie and Stan Ames are upset with the way Real Rail Effects does business?

Speaking of universal standards, let's take a look at the DCC throttles offered by MRC. Their newest model is reviewed in the February 2008 Model Railroader. Besides failing to provide important information about how many locomotives their system can handle in the same operating session (the 3.5 amp power supply is a tip off), the reviewer failed to see the significance of the twenty eight functions that can be controlled with it. My trusty Digi-trax DT400 throttle stops at ten. So how do I set functions 11 to 28 on a MRC sound decoder if I'm running with a non-MRC system? The answer seems to be: spend more money. Perhaps some of you have figured out the best way to do it. The original intent of the DCC standards was to make them universal. Now some of the manufacturers seem to be trying to force you into buying into their systems.

DCC sound decoders require more power for programming than non-sound decoders. If your program track doesn't have the necessary power to set CV's on a sound decoder, try this trick I read about on Tony's Train Exchange web site. Add a 10 or 20 ohm resistor in series with your Lenz programming track and miraculously both read and write CV values. The MRC literature that comes with the sound decoder I installed shows a 27 ohm resistor in series to the "test track." Understand that you can also try programming on the mainline with the caveat that if you have not wired the decoder correctly, it will be toast. (Continued on page 4)

(Continued from Page 3)

Speaking of toast, I hear reports from user web sites that a significant number of the MRC decoders have failed and melted holes in the tenders of those magnificent Athearn Challengers. My friend continues to run his without a problem, but, you never know. Still more toast. My club was using a Digi-trax Zephyr system until its voltage regulation system failed and started sending 20 plus volts to the rails. After the second repair failed, we upgraded. Moral of the story: Check your track voltage on a regular basis. Yes, several decoders were destroyed along with some LED lights. We should have started higher up the ladder anyway. Our bigger and better system has several worthwhile features.

Now on to Walthers. I ordered their 0-8-0 yard switcher and eagerly awaited its arrival. After all, it was advertised as "DCC ready." When it arrived, I saw that the tender contained a built in 8-pin connector. According to the instructions, it seemed that all I had to do was drop in a Digi-trax DN143IP. Not! This decoder proved to be too large to fit in the allocated space. So much for design and testing. An e-mail to Walthers asking them just which decoder this tender was designed for was never answered. As of this day, I still don't know. My solution was to pretty much tear out everything in the tender except the six wires from the locomotive and to solder in a decoder the old fashioned way. I discarded their circuit board except for the part with the rear tender light. I understand that the board contains noise suppression components, but heck, I don't watch TV and run trains at the same time. There was still plenty of room to add stick on weights. If you follow my route, don't forget that the lights need a 560 ohm resistor to protect them from burnout. At least it looks nice and runs fairly well.

So, you would think that I, the DCC sound clinician, would have dozens of sound equipped locos on my roster by now. The fact is that I currently have just one diesel up and running. I sent an Atlas GP40 frame out to Aztec to be milled to fit a MRC sound decoder. Aztec does a great job by the way. I got that unit up and running without too much trauma, and it is fun to get down close to it listen to run through its assortment of sounds. Does the sound of the prime mover actually represent that of EMD diesel? Don't ask, don't tell. After all MRC did put out a decoder specifically designed for two different diesel locomotives, but failed to program them with appropriate engine sounds.

I did put a sound decoder into a Concord 2-10-2 steamer, but I removed it because of extremely poor electrical pickup between the tender and the rails. I went back to a smaller decoder and more weight in the tender. I could buy one of those Athearn challengers, but I'll hold out for the retooled D & H specific model. I'm thinking of buying a drop in sound decoder for one of those big Kato AC units. Yes, I know that the body shell will require some trimming to go back together again, but I hear good things about it, and, yes, the decoder really does pretty much drop in. I did order a sound equipped Alco PA (D & H colors, of course) from Precision

Craft. I think that I've been waiting over a year for that one to arrive. Maybe next year.

Have any of you tried adding lighting effects on your locos. A variety of flashing and blinking options are available. I like to add light dimming to my locos. Lenz and Digi-trax use different CV's to set up dimming and get slightly different results. Our club layout may as well be in a dust bin. Dirty rails are often a problem. I suggest that you set your acceleration CV to 0 to help get across the dead spots. Lenz does make decoders that can cope with intermittent pickup. That may be an answer for a particularly troublesome loco.

Now for the good news. Sound decoders have gotten significantly smaller while adding all kinds of sound options. Drop in decoders simplify installation. Speaker size is always going to be a problem in our scale, but improvements have been made here, too. Just about every new locomotive introduced to the market now is either DCC ready or comes with DCC as an option.

Finally, back to my original experience with N scale sound. I still remember one of our veteran modelers following his train behind the sky boards of the NTRAK layout. In his hand was a portable tape recorder with an assortment of engine sounds.

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Jack Brown **781-686-1284**
20 Colwell Drive
Dedham MA 02028 moranbrown@comcast.net

Jack is 10 years old and has been in the hobby 1 year.
 Victor, his father, will be assisting him.

Show Schedule for 2007 – 2008:

Mar 29-30, 2008 Great Train Expo, Wilmington, MA
 Shriners Auditorium, Wilmington, MA
 Set up Sat 7:30AM Show Sat 10AM to 4PM - Sun 10PM to 4PM
Coordinator: Dan Pawling - 617-244-5261

Apr 22, 2008, Hooksett Lyons Club, Hooksett, NH
 Cawley Middle School, Hooksett, NH
 Set-up 8am Show 10am to 4pm
Coordinator: Mike Walker - 603-426-8620

June 8, 2008 Business Meeting, Hosted by Fay Chin
(Details will be mailed separately with directions)