

Believable Passenger Operations on a Sheet of Plywood

Ok, so you are on a tight budget, but you have two saw horses, a sheet of plywood, and a large patio deck. Great, a sheet of plywood is of manageable enough size that you can store the layout away on its edge when not in use, in a similar manner as a you can store away a Murphy Bed. Now we just need to choose a track plan that will provide hours of operating enjoyment. But what if what you got for your birthday was a Passenger Train Set? Well you are in luck, because this layout has been specifically designed for big-time passenger operating fun in a minuscule **4x8** foot space.

You've got coaches of course, well there is a station platform to load them and a coach yard spur to maintain them. Observation cars? Don't ever have to worry about them facing in the wrong direction. Diner or Cafe? Serviced on the end of the commissary track. Baggage cars? They go to the express depot (or if you don't have any baggage or other express cars, assume the depot is decommissioned, and you can use the track as another coach yard spur). Sleeping car? Most use the station platform, but there is even a setout spur beside the station for convenient early loading. What about the locomotive? Diesel locomotives can be prototypically fueled anywhere from a tanker truck.

Naturally on a layout this small compromises had to be made. The spur beside the station is shared by diners and sleepers. The diners (and often cafe cars) use the end of the spur by the commissary (where food service necessities are stored and prepared), while setout sleepers use the head of the spur by the station (a linen service handles wash, with clean linens stored in the station). The layout does feature a continuous run oval for train watching, and the station resides on its own siding so that station activity doesn't foul the main line. Trains are intended to be run in a clockwise direction, and the curves are a sharp O-36 (although the layout has managed to slip in a few O-45 curves on the station siding).

There are two road crossings on the layout. One crosses the main line so that a truck can back up to the express depot. The other is a double crossing so that service vehicles can get to the station and commissary buildings. It is assumed that passengers have a parking lot on the other side of the tracks across from the station, and that there is a tunnel that allows passengers to safely walk beneath the main line from the parking lot into the station building. Taxi cabs have permission to go over the crossing and wait outside the station building itself.

The buildings shown on the layout drawing are just there for illustrative purposes. Build you own, or substitute with some prefabricated structures. Although freight is already handled at the express depot (and that includes express refrigerator and milk cars), the coach yard spur paralleling that track could occasionally be used as team track for unusual priority freight (such as for example thoroughbred horse cars).

While passenger trains, especially in a night scene, are exciting to watch traveling around the layout, it is assumed that you will try to reproduce actual high-priority traffic operations. You can set out a sleeper car for a long distance train so that passengers can load at their convenience before the train arrives, or sleep in late after the train leaves. For efficiency dining cars are never hauled exclusively in a single train, but are cut-out of one train, restocked, then added into a different train. Train length changes as seats are sold, plus all passenger seating areas have to be cleaned and maintained (although light cleanup and linen swaps are often performed on the station platform), so cars sometimes must be removed and added from the coach yard spur.

Passenger trains (as well as exclusive Express trains) carry high-speed freight cars of all sorts, which needs to be rapidly transloaded at the express depot. Baggage cars will carry items such as priority packages and newspapers from another city. Refrigerated cars will carry perishable items such as bananas, berries, beer, and fresh-cut flowers (the express building is assumed to have both room temperature and refrigerated temporary warehousing areas). Even milk and orange juice tank cars can be quickly pumped into waiting tank trucks in the driveway next to the depot building.

Although it is assumed that cars will be fiddled on and off the layout from the main line track in front of the station, there is no reason why you couldn't add a turnout (perhaps in the corner where the 4x8 label is drawn) which forms a spur leading off the table to a staging yard.