



News from Houston N'Crowd



May/June 2022

# THE ORDERBOARD

## T-TRAK at Galveston RailFest



# "GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Naz Hally, President

## Trip tales

I'm writing this in a hotel room on my way back from visiting friends in New England, with, of course, a few stops along the way at a train show and a couple of model train shops in the region.

First up, a brief report on the Eastern Division Train Collectors Association (TCA) York Train Meet. Taking place April 28-30 at the York Expo Center in York, Pa., this is one of the largest model train shows in the region.

Layouts, vendor exhibits and tables were distributed among a half dozen buildings across the fairgrounds site. A friend of mine working the registration desk told me about 7,000(!) people attended this year, a figure somewhat lower than in previous years. For comparison, organizers of the Greater Houston Train Show this past February reported that about 1,900 people attended. The York show was A BIG SHOW!

As with most TCA shows, the York show was predominantly geared toward Lionel and MTH/Rail King collectors, with various HO-scale exhibitors running a close second. Sadly, there were hardly any N-scale tables at all. I located only three or four tables (among hundreds throughout the halls) with scant N-scale items on offer.

Among the major manufacturers, Atlas had a corporate stand featuring a lot of O- and HO-scale products, but no N-scale products. Lionel Corporation did not exhibit; nor did the current owners of MTH. The show takes place every year in April and October. For more info, here's a link: <https://www.easterntca.com/>

Like many of you, I often visit model train shops when out of town. During this trip, I visited four shops where I found great selections - particularly for N-scalers - of some unusual and hard-to-find items. Before I list the shops, let me say that Papa Ben's is certainly

the best model train shop in our region, and probably anywhere along the Gulf Coast! But sometimes, when you come across that rare or unusual item somewhere up in Yankee-land and you've just got to have it, right now... well, out pops the credit card!

In York, not far from the fairgrounds, I walked into White Rose Hobbies and walked out with an Amtrak seven-unit bundled bookcase set including a Siemens ACS-64 with DCC. Not far from York, and right up the street from the excellent Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania, is the Strasburg Train Shop in Strasburg, Pa. I picked up a couple of off-beat items there; look for a new N-scale yellow school bus on the club layout.

Just outside Philadelphia in Broomall, Pa., is Nicholas Smith Trains. Think of an "all-trains" place like Papa Ben's, but on steroids. They stock a lot of imported Kato bookcase sets based on Japanese or European trains. I picked up a 12-unit Deutsche Bahn ICE-4 that I hope will challenge some of the high scale-mph speed records that some of you have demonstrated with your Japanese Shinkansen trains. I'm talking about you, Brian and Tian-san!

Finally, in New Jersey not far from the Walt Whitman Bridge back to Philly, is the Yankee Dabbler. Among other things, they're ESU LokSound specialists. I picked up a couple of Kato-specific LokSound 5 decoders and speaker kits for me and for Tian-san. Sorry, Bill, they were sold out of Accutrack II speedometers - six months backordered!

I'm looking forward to getting back to Houston and running some new trains on the layout - see you soon!

Naz

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**N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:**  
May 18 / June 15 / July 20 / August 17 / September 21  
Meetings start at 7 p.m. at Papa Ben's Train Place.

**N'Crowd Test & Tune Sessions: First Wednesday of odd-numbered months.** 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Papa Ben's.

**N'Crowd Even-Month Ops Sessions: June 5 / August 7 / October 2 / December 4.** Operating sessions subject to change or cancellation.



# N'Crowd rolls into Galveston RailFest

by Tom Marsh

Houston N'Crowd headed to Galveston April 23-24 for the Galveston Railroad Museum's 2022 Railfest. Together with friends from Northwest Crossing Operating Model Railroad Club, we deployed 26 T-TRAK modules at the show.

Galveston Railroad Museum officials were happy with the attendance, reporting that 851 people toured the museum during the two-day show. In

addition, 330 people purchased tickets to ride the museum's "caboose hop" out-and-back train ride.

After some initial electrical issues, the T-TRAK layout ran smoothly and everyone, including museum visitors, seemed to have a good time. For a "tour" of our T-TRAK layout, turn to page 4.

Thanks to everyone who participated in the show!



Above, our T-TRAK layout's electrical system required some tweaking during setup on Saturday morning. Below left, an offshore oil rig looms in the background at the Galveston Railroad Museum. Below, the Texas Brick Railroad featured a LEGO model of the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe's Galveston headquarters building, which now houses the Galveston Railroad Museum. In addition to LEGO and T-TRAK, the show included Z-scale, HO-scale, S-scale, Tinplate and G-gauge layouts.





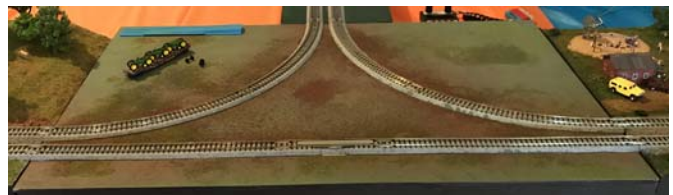
# Galveston RailFest T-TRAK layout tour

by Tom Marsh

Follow along on our tour of the N'Crowd-sponsored T-TRAK layout at the Galveston Railroad Museum RailFest, April 23-24, 2022.



Above, David Crawford's petrochemical industrial scene continues to grow. Below left, John Sweigart has added more scenic details to his greenhouse/nursery scene. Below right, Allan Melton's industrial park is taking shape.



Above left, David Crawford's cattle pen module. Above right, one of the junction modules provided by Mark Wilcox. Below, Debby McLaughlin's castle and creatures two-module set.







Above left, Russell March showed off his first effort at scenery work; he seems to have a knack for it. Above right, the busy scene on two of Mark Wilcox's modules will be familiar to regular attendees of train shows in our area. Mark was an early player in the T-TRAK arena. Below left, Bob Folser's forest cottage looks like a good place to watch trains, such as the BNSF freight swinging through the curve on Phil Poirier's corner module, below right.



Above, farm and grade crossing scenes on modules by Bill Busch. Right and below, modules designed for switching action by Bill Belsher.







Two takes on corner modules. Above left, a Shinkansen train speeds through a Japanese village on a module by Mauricio Varon. Above right, mountain scene by Bill Belsher.



Above left, Bill Busch's nuclear power plant. Above right, another junction module provided by Mark Wilcox. Right, corner module by Cameron Barrett. Below and bottom, Mark Wilcox's modern commuter station and very useful yard.







Above, museum visitors enjoy the T-TRAK layout during the Galveston Railroad Museum RailFest. This end's corner modules, one by Cameron Barrett and the other by Mauricio Varon, are tied together by a country scene by David Crawford. The train running through the scene is hauling mostly Bayou City & Gulf boxcars that have been dispatched from the BC&G yard at Papa Ben's Train Place in Houston. N'Crowd received a \$300 honorarium from the museum for our participation in the event.

#### Houston N'Crowd 2022 Officers and Volunteers

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# Bridge to a well-known “island”

by Naz Hally



*The view looking southwest toward the Cape Cod Canal's outlet into Buzzard's Bay near Bourne, Mass. Photo by Naz Hally*

Many of you may know that the Cape Cod peninsula is technically an island. It is separated from the mainland by the Cape Cod Canal, which connects Cape Cod Bay at its northeastern end to Buzzard's Bay at the southwestern end. Two highway bridges and one vertical lift railroad bridge connect the mainland with Cape Cod. The last week of April, while visiting friends on Cape Cod, we stopped by a park adjacent to the impressive railroad bridge.

When the Cape Cod Canal itself was constructed in 1909-1911, several miles of railroad tracks had to be relocated to maintain train service to and from Cape Cod. The original railroad bridge, completed in 1911, was a “Strauss trunnion bascule bridge” with a 160 foot long span that pivoted on the north side of the canal to provide a 140 foot wide opening for vessels. Two tracks crossed the bridge: one leading to Provincetown and the other to Woods Hole.

The US Government purchased the canal from private owners in 1926 and both the canal and railroad bridge have been owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers since then.

Construction of the vertical lift railroad bridge began in 1933 and was completed by late 1935.

At the time of its completion, the bridge was the world's longest vertical lift railroad bridge with a main span of 544 feet. When the span is raised at mean tide level, the vertical clearance for vessels is 135 feet. It has a single track.

The bridge's heaviest traffic was during the war years of 1940-1945 when, in addition to normal passenger and freight traffic, many trains carried troops to Camp Edwards in Bourne and Camp Nauset on the outer Cape.

Today, the bridge is used daily by trains hauling trash from Cape Cod to a waste-to-energy facility in Rochester, Mass. Unfortunately, this occurs at irregular times, and I was not able to capture a photo of the bridge in its lowered position.

During the high tourism season (May to October), passenger trains cross the bridge. The *Cape Flyer*, operated by the Cape Cod Regional Transportation Authority, provides service between Boston and Hyannis. There are also seasonal tourist trains operated by the Cape Cod Central Railroad.



Right, the lift bridge tower on the mainland side of the Cape Cod Canal rises to 271 feet above mean sea level. Four 200 hp electric motors raise or lower the 2,200-ton counter-weighted span in about two and a half minutes.

Below, built to one of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad's standard designs, this concrete tower housed the US&S Model 14 interlocking machine that controlled the lift bridge until 2009, when more modern control systems were installed. The control tower was built in the 1910-1912 timeframe when the original bascule bridge across the Cape Cod Canal was built. A new station, below middle, was built at Buzzards Bay at the same time. The station is now a visitor center.

Bottom, the mainland approach to the bridge. All photos by Naz Hally





# Test & Tune



**FOCUSED!** Gordon Bliss, Richard Hanna and Yuan Tian during the N'Crowd's May 4 Test & Tune session.

N'Crowd's latest Test & Tune session took place May 4, and it seems most people went home with their model railroading problems resolved. We were able to address some DCC programming issues and Gordon Bliss tackled the cleaning of several locomotives that had apparently been running in an environment not particularly suited to N-scale gears, wheels and drivetrains.

Unfortunately, your editor was not on the list of people whose issues were addressed, as he went home

frustrated by not being able to drop in a "drop in" DCC decoder in an Atlas Fairbanks-Morse H16-44. Well, better luck next time!

The next Test & Tune session will take place Wednesday, July 6, at Papa Ben's Train Place, but stop by the BC&G layout room any Saturday during store hours if you need more immediate assistance or advice. We might not be able to fix everything, but we'll likely have opinions as to what you should do!

## Classic car show at Union Station



You never know what will show up on our Bayou City & Gulf Railroad! Here's what appeared to be a classic car show setting up at Union Station on a recent Saturday. The cars were recently "restored" by our own custom paint guy Andrew Monaghan; they are joining N'Crowd member Joe Kingsberry's fleet.



# Trainspotting for details

by Tom Marsh

Here are some photos taken around the Houston area in recent weeks, with a focus on details. Have you been out and about with a camera lately?

If so, send in some photos of things you find of interest to share with us in the next issue of *The Orderboard*.



Above: Here's Amtrak Train No. 2, the Sunset Limited, departing Houston on Feb. 1, 2022 with specially-branded 50th anniversary GE P42DC No. 161 in the lead. The contraption at left is a track and flange greaser, which lubricates the rails to help ease the movement of trains around the sharp curve encountered when eastbound trains are routed off the former SP Sunset Route to the former Missouri Pacific main. This seems like it would be an easy-to-model detail; if you seek out one of these for modeling purposes, be sure not to trespass and don't step in the grease!

Right: Do you have a small piece of real estate on your layout or module that you don't know what to do with? How about a "Coming Soon" sign? How long do you think it will take the new home owners to start complaining about the trains? Unless, of course, they happen to be N'Crowd members!



Left: A photo backdrop featuring an under-construction residential mid-rise would be more suitable for modelers of the modern scene than most commercially-available backdrop images. How long do you think it will take the new tenants to start complaining about the trains?

This one is a two-fer. For an easy foreground detail where you have track running close to edge of your benchwork, how about these Jersey Barricades lining the alley alongside the tracks? Strategically placed, they would not only be an easy-to-make modern detail, they might keep that \$300 super-detailed DCC sound-equipped locomotive from taking a plunge to the floor when it derails!



# LCL *Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor*

**Thank you!:** Thanks to Naz Hally for the Cape Cod story in this issue. Thanks also to Andrew Monaghan and Joe Kingsberry for making the classic cars available for our car show at Union Station.

**Now we need to hear from you:** Contribute to *The Orderboard* - it's easy! Take a few photos, write down a few words, and we'll do the rest. The deadline for the July/August issue is Friday, July 1.

**Reward offer still in effect:** Amtrak's new Charger locomotives are experiencing some teething problems but will enter service sooner or later and

we'll see one in Texas. As we announced before, the first person who submits a usable photo of a Charger in Texas to *The Orderboard* will receive a copy of Lance Mendheim's new book *How to Design a Model Railroad* published by Kalmbach/Model Railroader. Keep your cameras handy! *Photo courtesy Amtrak*



**Discord is upon us:** But it's not a bad thing. Houston N'Crowd now has a presence on the social media platform Discord. Discord is a free voice, video, and text chat app that can be accessed through a smart phone or computer. We'll be providing more information in the future, but if you want to know more now, go to <https://discord.com/safety/360044149331-what-is-discord>. To join the N'Crowd conversations, use this link: <https://discord.gg/AsF3XVCj74>

## HOUSTON N'CROWD 2022 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

### May 4

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

### May 5-7

NMRA Lone Star Region annual convention, Temple

### May 18

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### May 21

Train Collectors Association Lone Star Division 44th Annual Train Meet, Garden Ridge Community Center, Garden Ridge, Texas

### June 5

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

### June 15

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### June 15-19

2022 National N Scale Convention, Nashville, Tenn.

### July 6

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

### July 20

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### August 7

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

## THE ORDERBOARD *News from Houston N'Crowd*

N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization incorporated in the State of Texas.

### Tom Marsh, Editor

Published fairly regularly for members and friends of N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc., Houston, Texas.

Send newsletter contributions to: [tom@houstonncrowd.org](mailto:tom@houstonncrowd.org).

Please note: We reserve the right to edit any and all submissions for clarity and length.

### Visit our Web site:

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