

## **The Big Train Project Status Report (Part 11)**

Lots of happenings, some noteworthy decisions, and some challenges.

The structures for the walkway tunnels in the layout area are complete. The tables for the Early Era are nearing completion, and work on the Middle Period tables will begin soon. Surprisingly, construction of the “mezzanine,” the centerpiece of the layout area, with its planned stairs and waterfall, has not yet been started. Construction of the interior “buildings” and rooms has progressed well, with most of the drywall in place and some of it already already painted.

Major decisions about the layout tables have produced both good news and bad news. Discussions with fire-prevention officials have eliminated the need for cement board between the table structure and the fire-retardant plywood top surface. That will simplify modifications to the tables for penetrations through the tabletops, e.g., for access holes and wiring. In addition to fire sprinklers in the access rooms and walkways (inside the mountains), the tables will have sprinklers underneath, good for fire safety, but potential head-knockers for people accessing the under-table areas for layout construction and maintenance.

The contractor’s part of the construction work is scheduled to be complete by the end of August 2007. Don Oeters wants to open the seasonal maze in October to bring in some Halloween customers and start getting some income from the facility. That opening may also open up the “public” area of the facility (food concession and meeting rooms, and maybe even the hobby shop), which means that some portions of the layout, especially the Modern Era Amusement Section, will be readily visible by the customers. We’re working on the plans to get that area up and running as soon as possible to provide a tease for maze customers, who will, hopefully, come back to see the full layout when it’s finished.

One of the key portions of the contractor construction, as far as the volunteers are concerned, is the “back room” which will be used as a workshop, meeting space, place to store materials, etc. The most important part of that is the ability to lock it up to prevent pilfering of tools and supplies. This should be complete as you read this, and will make it possible to have both meetings and work sessions in the facility. That will result in a number of calls for meeting of the individual section gangs. In addition, there will be a general “open house” for volunteers on Saturday, 7 July 2007, to show what has been accomplished so far. So, put that date on your calendar and come see.

Some of the construction supplies for model buildings and bridges have been ordered and should be available for checkout to approved building projects once the “back room” is put into full use. Also some building kits have already been purchased and are ready to be built once their specific locations and context have been defined. Some volunteers have asked if all work on the Project has to be done at the West Chester location. The answer is an emphatic “NO!” Items like buildings and trees which can be readily transported can be built in volunteers’ homes and workshops and brought to West Chester when appropriate (either for installation, or for further work, if necessary). In fact some items, like the spindly “temporary” bridge replacing a war-destroyed span in the Early Era Civil War scene, are already under construction at volunteers’ homes.

As table construction continues, a major challenge is to retain the integrity of the design concepts and control the interfaces between design elements as attempts are made to simplify the construction. In some cases what seem to be minor changes have forced some significant re-designs, to the chagrin of the affected designers. The steering committee has had to spend some effort to keep changes and interfaces under control.

All the while, work has continued on defining and refining the details of the designs in the individual sections of the layout. As mentioned in one of my previous articles, the Bridges Section Gang is making significant progress and they're setting the example for the other section gangs to follow. They have already gotten approval to build a number of Early Era bridges. Bob Mott has recruited his son, and his model railroad club in Virginia, to build the structures for the "company town" in the Early Era. During a recent visit, Bob Junior put together a beautiful model of the town and its surrounding scenery to show what they're planning to build. The study model of the central loading room and surroundings is nearing completion (see Figure 1). While not intended to show exact details of the structure of the track supports and mountains, it does show some of the concepts to be used for the structure. It also shows the basic shapes and locations of the multiple levels of track and the walkways that will provide access for the people loading and removing trains.



Figure 1 Study Model of the Middle of the Layout

With the near-term availability of a common and spacious location (the “back room”) for volunteers to start working on buildings, scenic details, etc. and with the layout tables finished to allow the laying track, the pace of volunteer work can pick up significantly, and your presence and participation will become vital for accomplishing all of the work that needs doing. So come join us when calls come.

And, as always, stay tuned to the Big Train Project Yahoo group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bigtp> for the latest news.

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