

The Big Train Project Status Report (Part 12)

This is the twelfth monthly installment of this series of articles. It's hard to believe we've been at this in earnest for over a year already. Even harder to believe is the speed at which changes have happened recently. If you received and read the June issue of Larry Koehl's Big Train Project newsletter, "The Gandy Dancer," you know what I mean.

With the completion and cleaning of the "back room" (behind the wall adjacent to the Modern City), we now have a place to work and meet in "relative" comfort. All we need now is functioning air conditioning and more than just the current not-too-pleasant single restroom, and the place will be great to work in. Even so, the ability to use the facility for meetings of the section gangs means that such meetings will become more frequent, and your opportunities to participate will increase significantly -- for example, the Bridges Section Gang meetings on 27 and 30 June.

The next scheduled event of significance will be the Open House for volunteers on Saturday, 7 July, from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Come see what's been done. And, come see where you can help, either with your hands or with your minds. We have no shortage of physical work that needs to be done and also no shortage of challenges that need to be tackled with creative ideas.

One of those newly minted challenges comes from how dense the structure is under the layout tables. This is especially noticeable, so far, in the Middle-Era city. It will be a major challenge for constructors and maintainers of the layout to get to the openings for the buildings from under the tables. These openings should be the primary method of reaching the central part of the city to do both construction and maintenance on the city elements like the trolley system. Access from underneath prevents having to walk on top of the layout itself, risking damage to the scenic details and becoming a Godzilla-like presence for the customers who have come to see the layout, not the workers. We're going to need a lot of small and/or skinny people to squeeze between the structural supports under the tables to get to the central part of the city, or we're going to have to modify the structure to provide reasonably sized paths. You can help with good ideas on how we might reduce or eliminate this problem.

As I mentioned in last month's article, we have some interest in getting the Modern Era Amusement Area up and running as soon as possible to provide a teaser for visitors to the seasonal maze that is expected to open for the Halloween season this October. To help with the planning process, I've constructed some 1/12 scale "mockups" of some of the Piko kit buildings that we're planning to use for the "Old-West" themed area. This is a method you too can use to help with your own layout planning process.

I'll go into the details of the process for making these mockups in a separate article some time in the future, but I thought I'd share the results of the work so far. The following figures show the miniature mockups and how they can be used on a copy of the track plan. In this instance the 1/4-inch scale plan was enlarged by a factor of four so that the mockups would be of a reasonable and sufficiently visible size. Figure 1 shows the source image from the Piko website. Figure 2 shows the detail of the station mockup. It's been simplified but does represent the scale dimensions (footprint) of the intended model. The dime gives you an idea of the actual size.

Figures 3 and 4 show an arrangement of some of the buildings. This method can give a good idea of what an intended arrangement would look like and makes changes simple enough to allow exploration of a number of alternatives.



Figure 1 The Piko Station Photo from Their Website



Figure 2 The Station Mockup



Figure 3 The Mockups on the Plan



Figure 4 Building Arrangement Example

We've got a lot of work ahead of us to make this layout great, so, please, respond positively when Section Gang leaders contact you to help with the layout work.

I hope to see you at the Open House. 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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