N-Circle Railroad Update 2 – August 15, 2020

A bit more detail on the use of Power Point slides to create temporary scenery panels on standard 8.5 x 11 inch paper sheets. The photos in my summary of August 13, 2020 showed them from a distance, but did not capture the detail.

N-Circle_200815-2_MainIntersection

This view of the Main Street intersection shows the very sharp, clean and even striping for roadways, parking spaces, crosswalks, etc. that are obtainable. I then overlaid some manhole covers, pavement patches and filled cracks in the streets, to add interest and realism. The opportunities to add shapes and adjust colors are endless, and can be easily deleted when they don't come out as you like. The sidewalks here are at the same level as the street. My eventual plan is to use styrene sheets the scale thickness of a sidewalk curb height to create the sidewalk bases that the buildings will then be placed on. Buildings may or may not be

attached, I may just use alignment pegs to keep them in position, then they could be easily removed and stored separately when swapping out scenery plates.

While it is difficult to see here, some of the vehicles have painted lights and decals and details that Jeanne and I added in the past couple of weeks, so we have been doing some "real" modelling too!

N-Circle_200815-3_WestIntersection

This view of the West intersection shows more of the detailing possible. I use Power Point gradient fills for the grass areas, so the whole surface is not the same shade. More could be done with this technique, with a little applied effort and creativity. Note that future prints will probably use the darker shade for the cement sidewalks that I did later in the right rear. The UPS truck and camper trailer are custom vehicles purchased on eBay, we did not detail them, though I did add the metal accents to the vent and front cabinet on the camper.

N-Circle_200815-4_Suburbs

Here you can see the sidewalks have transitioned to gravel shoulders between the pavement and the grass. And a better view of the gravel driveways to the mobile homes, and the stone and brick walkways to the houses. It really is a brick pattern on the red walkway to the house on the right! Some easily added dirt tracks and oil stains on the pavement of the truck terminal would enhance the scene, thoughts for the next iteration on these panels.

And yes, the red Mustang is a bit over-sized for N-Scale, but up close, it just looks cool parked next to a mobile home!

Manipulating the shapes in these scenes is fairly easy, if you have some base knowledge of creating graphics in Power Point. The trickiest part is managing the front-to-back ordering of the shapes and their transparencies, so that you don't see the grass and gravel extending under the pavement, but you can have multiple color semi-transparent shapes to create variation in a gravel driveway for example.

These overlays create nice roadways and parking lots, and with some effort can be used for curved roads - I have started a section, the trick is defining concentric evenly spaced arcs, but haven't completed it yet, until I have a specific location for it. And road surfaces are generally flat, or even on a layout with topography, would have only gradual transitions in grade. So I have considered using them for eventual permanent roadways, as they would be so much sharper than trying to paint or apply striping to a roadway. But I need to come up with a way to clear coat them or otherwise print them so that they are not damaged by water that would cause normal home printer ink to run, when working on adjacent scenery. Ideas for how to do that are welcome!

But obviously these overlays are not great for natural scenery, even for mostly flat topography, as will be on the N-Circle Railroad. So for that, I will eventually use ground foam, etc. techniques, glued to the removable scenery panels, to create texture for grass and gravel surfaces. And of course determine how to attach trees...low shrubs can just be glued to the panels.

Anyway, to summarize the thoughts on the use of these modular scenery panels:

1. They allow easy "changing of the set," like for a theater play, to create scenes for the four intended geographic and time period scenarios described for the N-Circle Railroad previously. This eliminates the need to build, maintain and store four full sets of T-Trak modules. The scenery panels can be stored in plastic storage bins between uses. And some panels will probably be used across multiple scenarios - a generic church or farm scene will not require four different versions - just changing the period of the vehicles which are not attached to the scenery should be sufficient. So once I have the physical track kinks and electrical bugs worked out of the one set of T-Trak modules, they will not have to be disrupted to change periods and locations.

2. They allow easier access for detailed scenery work. For me, just reaching the back of a one-foot deep T-Trak module to work on intricate scenery is pretty much impossible, and would surely lead to damaging the scenery in the front in the attempt. But the scenery panels can be moved to a separate table and thus be worked on from all sides, reducing the required reach to a few inches.

Anyway, that's it for now. Not remotely as impressive as Erich Golschneider’s scenery work on his N-Scale Barre, Chelsea, and Corinth Railroad, also viewable in the NWV's mini-clinics, but at least it's some creative progress beyond only seeing the bench work plywood grain on the N-Circle Railroad for the past 30 years!