Modeling Light Rail

Limits of the Study

- Only electric systems
- Only Canada and United States
- No heritage systems
- Only systems already operating

Light Rail System Traits

- Avoid mixing in with road traffic. If it must run in a street, it uses a median reservation (Howard Street in Baltimore), a curb lane reservation (Sacramento), or a street closed to automobiles (Calgary).
- Most of the route is off road (beside street or on totally private right-of-way).
- Tends to use stations (albeit simple), not street corners.
- Usually is on a converted (or time-separated) railroad. Sometimes uses former interurban private right-of-way.
- Often uses high-platforms.
- Uses pantagraphs.
- Routes generally longer, reaching into suburbs.
- Cars larger, usually articulated.
- Cars often MU, can seem more like a subway train than a trolley.

Modeling Goals

- Do not change East Penn Trolley Standards. These work for streetcars/trolleys.

- Find approach to modeling newer systems as something different from trolleys/streetcars.

- Build modules that show the Light Rail traits listed on the previous slide.

- Build modules that accommodate longer, articulated cars with minimum or no modifications to those cars.

- Use East Penn Trolley Standards as starting point, due to: ease of connecting and adjusting benchwork, handling of overhead wire, and flexibility of arrangements.

Problems modeling Light Rail Systems

- Big range in traits of the prototype. For example, should we do high, low or both platforms?
- Lack of variety of cars. The two most commonly available represent cars over 30 years old.
- Trend away from craft kit building. Witness the popularity of painted, RTR models.
- Cost. May be over rated. How much do game systems, computers, even sneakers readily go for?
- Regional orientation. East Penn is Philadelphia oriented. Are Baltimore, Pittsburgh too far away? Would modelers be interested in systems in far west, even though they're widely spread and increasing in number?
- Tilt toward nostalgia throughout model railroading. Steam-to-diesel is most popular model RR era. Has less than 50 years ago become too recent?
- Traction is a small SIG to begin with. Would this be a sub-SIG?

Potential Hopeful Signs

- Rise of stores like SEPTA Transit Store in CC Philadelphia and NY Transit Museum in GCT. These help stir interest.
- Models such as Life-Like and MHB NY subways, Underground Ernie give modeling exposure to trains people actually ride and see day-to-day.
- The Internet makes research and buying easier.
- Siemens has enough prototype market penetration for the S70 and SD100 to become good standard cars for modeling.
- More RR-like nature of prototype systems means RR components can be used in layouts/modules.

Things to Think About

- Are we modeling a transit system or a museum (i.e. many different systems' cars) in a city environment? Are they compatible?
- Will the need for maintaining visible movement at shows require compromise in module design?
- Would DCC make things easier? (Such as enabling MUing and making changing ends easier.)
- Chicken or the egg question: Will having Light Rail modules lead to more Light Rail modeling, or should we wait until more Light Rail models are available?