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CHAPTER ONE

Pragmatic prototype modeling

If you're modeling alone and only your immediate family will see what you're doing, is there any harm in combining a 21st century locomotive with mid-20th century rolling stock? After all, it's your railroad. Be aware that such arguments wear thin in a surprisingly short time, especially for those espousing to model railroading as it actually exists or existed. Seeing scenes representative of an actual time and place come back to life through accurate modeling is an extremely rewarding endeavor.

A friend is embarking on building a layout. Like many of us, he has a favorite prototype—by coincidence, part of the same division of the railroad I'm modeling—and he wants the railroad to reflect its main attributes. Eager as he is to get started, he—again, like many of us—has some concerns: "I'm stuck between wanting to be as prototypical as possible, yet impatient to get a layout built and running ASAP."



Who's the judge?

He went on to say that as a beginner, he knew that he didn't have the experience that many modelers have, so trying to scratchbuild the downtown area of his hometown as it appeared in the 1950s seemed pretty daunting.

The only people who are likely to see his layout are his wife and kids, and they aren't going to know the difference between Norfolk Southern's "Nickel Plate" ES44AC 8100 pulling a string of 40-foot wood reefers, **1**, or an NKP GP7 pulling double-stacks.

He concluded that he wants to be as realistic as possible for his own sake, but he's willing to bend the visual effects for the sake of simplicity. Maybe.

Another good friend, Ray Breyer, who edits the Nickel Plate Road Historical & Technical Society's free online Modeler's Notebook (check nkphs.org), offered him some advice that is worth sharing:

"If you want to be a 'proto-sincere' modeler," Ray suggested, "there are a few things to keep in mind:



2 Modeling a specific time and place—here Metcalf, Ill., circa 1954—does not require that everything be a perfect replica. As long as it looks the part, that's often good enough. The depot was scratchbuilt by Randy Laframboise, but the elevator is a stock Walthers kit, and the grain bins are Resin Car Works castings.



2 A normal day on Joe's Iowa Interstate sees a freight powered by IAIS GP38-2s (née Penn Central) in their handsome black-and-red scheme plus LLPX 2805, an ex-Reserve Mining SD38-2 leased from Locomotive Leasing Partners before being purchased by IAIS. Joe Atkinson

trains. Most were Union Pacific, but over the years IAIS has also hosted detours from Amtrak, Burlington Northern (or BNSF Railway), Chicago & North Western, Canadian Pacific/Soo, Southern Pacific, and I'm sure a number of others I've forgotten. My personal favorite was the June 20, 1998, Council Bluffs–Des Moines, Ia., detour of a 15-car UP office train led by their three E units."

When the detour move goes past a familiar landmark such as a bridge or depot, **2**, that makes it easier for viewers of a modeled scene to realize what's being simulated. Joe has taken advantage of the prototype's example in his modeling, and his comments got me thinking about detour moves in general. Suddenly, the light went on.

A fondness for Fs

Let's back up a step. I model the Nickel Plate Road toward the end of the steam era. Although the NKP tested a pair of EMD F7A units, they didn't make the cut. Their limited visibility to the rear during switching moves was rumored to be a factor.

Instead, the NKP ordered 10 more Berkshire (2-8-4) steam locomotives, including the celebrated 779, Lima's last domestic steam locomotive, which is now on display near its birthplace in a park in Lima, Ohio.

The NKP did purchase 11 Alco PA-1 cab units, but the remainder of the diesel road power comprised hood units from Alco, Baldwin, and EMD. The rest of the railroad industry eventually followed suit.

But from this modeler's viewpoint, the Nickel Plate's forward thinking left things a bit lacking. Ever since I got my hands on unpowered Globe (later Athearn) plastic F7 A- and B-unit kits, gleaming in their gold paint, I've been a big fan of F units. My first ride in a locomotive was in an F7, a short jaunt south on the passing track to the Rock Island depot in Sheffield, Iowa. It made a huge impression on a pre-teen's mind.

The other railroad in Sheffield was the Minneapolis & St. Louis. They, too, boasted a fleet of F units (as well as Geeps and some curious-looking and -sounding gas-electrics). Countless



hours spent down by the railroad tracks built a bond between a boy and “covered wagons,” as they are known.

When we moved from north-central Iowa to west-central Indiana in 1951, I beat feet down to the railroad tracks. Again, there were two railroads in town, but they crossed on diamonds rather than being parallel, as had been the case in Iowa. The Chicago & Eastern Illinois’s double-track, north-south main between Chicago and Danville, Ill., and Evansville, Ind., went through my new hometown of Cayuga, Ind. The Nickel Plate Road’s east-west St. Louis Division crossed the C&EI in the middle of town, **3**.

The C&EI, which also had a second main that branched off to St. Louis, thus forming an upside-down Y with Chicago at the top, offered familiar company: endless streams of Es, Fs, and Geeps, plus an occasional oddball:

one of their three EMD BL2s. It wasn’t long before I got a ride in a BL2 (**3-10**) and made a new friend.

The NKP, by contrast, was all steam until the summer of 1955, save for a single rough-sounding, smoke-belching diesel that graced each of their two late-night passenger trains that made the trek between Cleveland and St. Louis. It would take a while reading *Model Railroader* and *Railroad Model Craftsman* before I realized those oddball units were Alco PA-1s, **4**, what George Hilton later dubbed “honorary steam locomotives,” and he intended that comment favorably.

But nary an F graced NKP rails, save for some testing Burlington F3s

and those demonstrator F7s in the late 1940s. Thanks to Joe’s offhand comment, however, that could change. On occasion, I could run a detouring C&EI Chicago-St. Louis freight behind an A-B-B-A set of Fs out of C&EI staging, around the wye at Cayuga, **5**, over the NKP’s Third Subdivision, **6**, and into NKP staging at the west end of the railroad.

I was recently chatting with my good friend Ron Marquardt, a retired Monon engineer and later a Louisville & Nashville and CSX official. He recalled a Monon detour occasioned by a wreck just south of Lafayette, Ind. It took the NKP’s Peoria Division southeast to Frankfort, then the NKP’s

The Chicago & Eastern Illinois’ Chicago-Evansville, Ind., main line crossed the NKP’s St. Louis Division in Cayuga, Ind. Here a northbound freight headed by two EMD Geeps and a BL2 hammers over the NKP main between the C&EI tower and joint depot and Fable House Hotel.





Adding visual variety to the otherwise all-NKP roster on my railroad is accomplished in part by posing a Milwaukee Road caboose on the stub-ended track that crosses the NKP's St. Louis Division at the Milwaukee's interlocking tower at Humrick, Ill. (above). Behind the low backdrop the caboose is butted up against is a 30-car stub-ended staging track that allows a pair of MILW Fairbanks-Morse C-Liners to deliver a series of cuts of cars to the NKP using Iowa Scaled Engineering's Automated Interlocking circuitry (below). When the last cut of about 8 cars is delivered and picked up, the FM's ease into view, cover an infrared sensor, and shut themselves off.





an admission that we want to choose something from column A ... and perhaps column B, and maybe columns C and D.

Even those of us who profess to limit our modeling interests to a single railroad—the Nickel Plate Road in my case—usually build in some form of a Plan B, and maybe C and D too. The subdivision I chose to model interchanges with quite a few “foreign roads,” including two personal favorites: the Monon and the Chicago & Eastern Illinois. This allows me to have fleets of cars from both railroads that are interchanged with the NKP.

Enough of the C&EI has been modeled at Cayuga, Ind., for me to employ a C&EI local crew to work a grain elevator and the NKP interchange, plus move a passenger train in and out of staging, **10**. As I describe in Chapter 4, I can even orchestrate a C&EI detour move over the NKP now and then (**4-5**).

At Frankfort, Ind., Monon power is limited to what I can pose on the stubbed-off main line segment by the NKP roundhouse, **11**. But at Linden, Ind., a pair of Monon units, **12**, shows up now and then after they have delivered the last cut of interchange cars to the NKP from a hidden 30-car “live” interchange track that employs

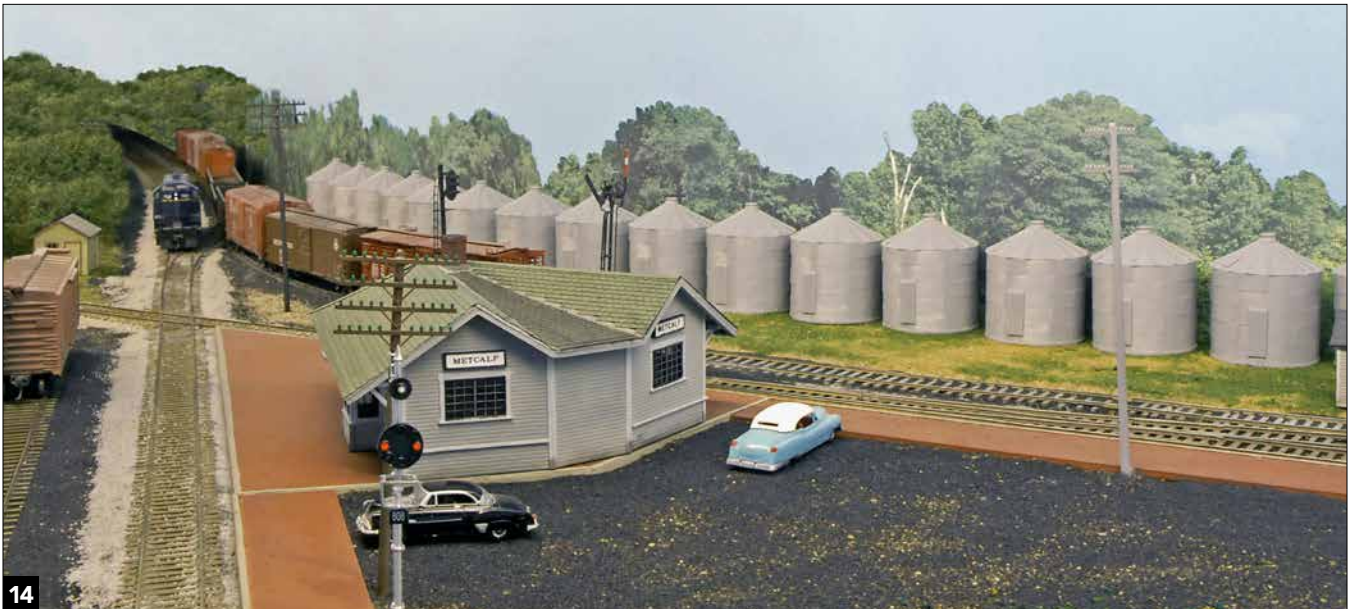
Iowa Scaled Engineering’s Automated Interchange circuitry.

The same thing happens at Humrick, Ill. I spotted a Milwaukee Road caboos on the 16" length of Milwaukee main line to remind NKP crews with whom they’re interchanging there, **13**. A pair of Fairbanks-Morse C-Liners pop out from behind a view block after they deliver the final cut of NKP interchange cars.

I could also pose a New York Central locomotive and a car or two on the former Big Four double-track main that crosses the NKP at Charleston, Ill. And a Baltimore & Ohio local behind one or two EMD GP7s, **14**, comes out of staging to do some interchange work at Metcalf, Ill., a live interchange that—like the C&EI at Cayuga—requires a live crew member to operate.

Visual variety achieved

I’m sure you can think of other ways to achieve some visual variety that isn’t as simplistic as buying one of these and one of those simply because the model appeals to you—although I do admit doing just that on occasion. There are prototypically plausible reasons to model more than one railroad’s equipment on even a very small railroad. Perhaps an example I have shared here helps you to do that.



14

Unlike the automated interchanges at Linden and Humrick, the Baltimore & Ohio interchange at Metcalf, Ill., requires a live operator to deliver and pick up cars from and to the NKP using a pair of 700-series EMD GP7s. The local, which initially fouls the NKP main line as the day begins, switches the interchange, then continues into hidden staging.