



The Hot Box

*The Newsletter of the
Eastern Canada Division
of the NMRA*



Issue # 31 March 2026



Do you know what these signals mean? This month's issue looks at signalling in a model railroad environment, and offers an opportunity to download a signalling simulation game

(Photo credit: Lou McIntyre facing east at Lake Louise, Alberta station)

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Editor

Lou McIntyre
506 847-7009
<mailto:louisrca2012@gmail.com>

Division email address:
<mailto:easterncanadadivision@gmail.com>

President's Message



From the Fireman's Side

Editorial by Hot Box Editor Lou McIntyre

In this issue, we have a great lineup of shows in Amherst and Moncton/Riverview, convention in Stellarton and modelling events this Spring. For an area with a fairly small population, we punch well above our weight class for activity. Be sure to join us for these.....a chance to pick up a model you have been searching out for years, or perhaps one you didn't know you needed.

It is also a wonderful time to renew old acquaintances and meet new friends. For me, this is perhaps the highlight of these events. The closeness of our relationships here in the Atlantic region is a gift that is not available to many in other areas with bigger populations. The Eastern Canada Division, the Maritime Federation of Model Railroaders, plus local clubs promote a strong sense of belonging. In fact, last weekend, Doug Devine and Steve McMullin hosted a large contingent of

modellers from New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia to operate on their layouts. (left to right back): Luc Nowlan, Steve McMullin, Doug Devine, Scott Jay, Allan Bishop, Thomas Savage, Ric Hamilton, John Richard, Taylor Main, Will Lawrence

(left to right seated 😊) Dave Barraza, Mitchell O'Brien, Bruce Castle, Derwin Cole, Urs Seigrist, Gerry McCoy, Mike Bourgeois

Scott Jay and Derwin Cole then held an operating session in the Summerside PEI area the following weekend with some "CFA's" 😊

(Clockwise:) Murray McCormick, Barry Kennedy, Allan Bishop, John Richard, Scott Jay



Our ECD Executive and Board of Directors:

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mcmulls@nb.sympatico.ca

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dasfergmiester@gmail.com

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douglas.margison@gmail.com

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Call Board - the NMRA and the Region

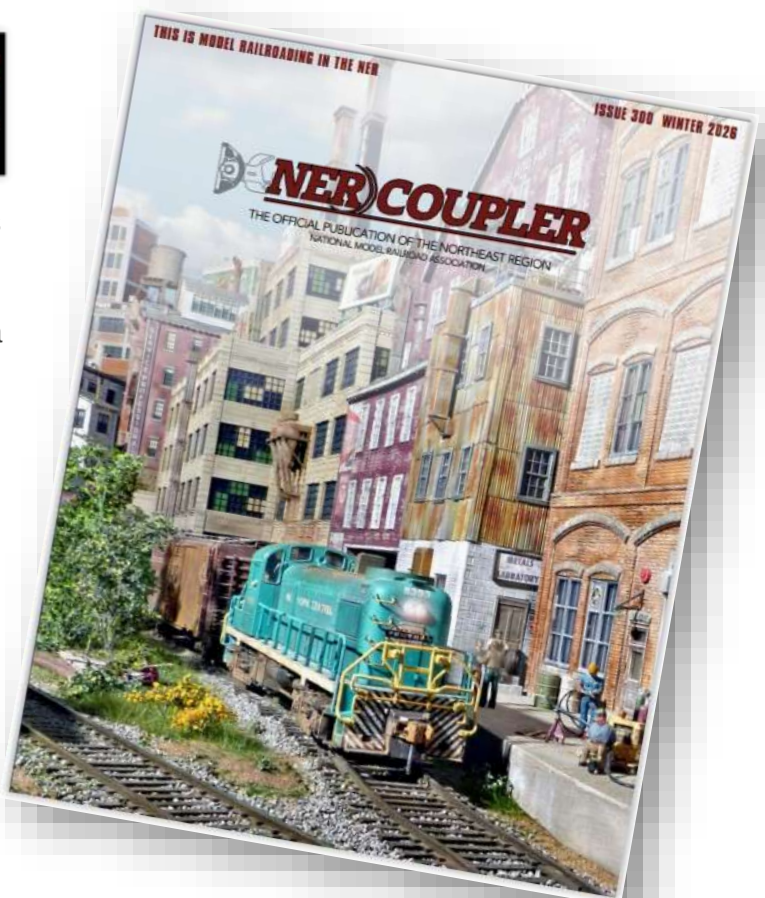


<https://www.nerx.org/>



The Winter 2026 issue of the **NER Coupler** is now available online. We extend a warm welcome to the new Coupler editor, Bill Rutherford. In his first issue, he has compiled a great variety of articles including Mike Tylick's article on "Paper Car Sides". There are also stories on working with remote staging yards, model railroad inventory, creating backdrops, and a visit to the Winter layout at the Shelburne VT Museum

<https://nrmra.org/ner-couplers/>



***NER* CONVENTION**



**START PLANNING
YOUR TRIP NOW!**



**OCTOBER 15-18, 2026
SOUTHBRIDGE, MA**

<https://conventions.nernmra.org/home/home-2026/>



Balloon Track – News around our Division

Monthly Presentations

Thursday, **March 12**, 2026, at 08:00 pm ADT (UTC-3): **“An Update on 3-D Printing”**, by **Greg Williams**.

Thursday, **April 16**, 2026, at 08:00 pm ADT (UTC-3): **“British Columbia Railway in the 1980s”**, by **Ron Tuff**.

Thursday, **May 21**, 2026, at 08:00 pm ADT (UTC-3): **“Scratchbuilding Detail Parts for Rolling Stock Projects”**, by **James Whatley**

Stay tuned for the Zoom log-in details, which will be sent out via email a few days prior to each presentation.

Monthly Presentations Online

The monthly presentations are now being recorded and placed on YouTube. If you have missed one of the recent presentations, or want to see one again, go to our Eastern Canada Division website and click on the “Videos of Interest” tab:

<https://easterncanadadivision.org/>



Switch List – How to's, history, etc.

Automatic Block Signalling for your Layout

Douglas Margison has taken a keen interest in electronics and in signalling. Join Douglas as he takes us through his vision of automatic Block signalling

Thinking about adding signalling to your layout? Doing so is one of several animation enhancements that can add interest to operations.

Ideally it is best to plan for signalling before or during the early phase of layout construction:

- What type of signalling?
 - ◆ Turnout
 - ◆ Block
 - ➔ Manual — need fascia mounted switches
 - ➔ Automatic - what type of detection?
 - ◆ Combination turnout and block
 - ➔ Full meal deal
 - ➔ Simplified using power routing insulfrog turnouts
- Signal type
 - ◆ Signal heads
 - ➔ Separate 2- or 3-lights
 - ➔ Searchlight
 - ➔ Position lights — vertical = through route; horizontal = diverging route
 - ◆ Semaphore
- Signal location and clearance - don't place too close to the track and make sure it is high enough to clear your tallest rolling stock
- Block and Combo signalling
 - ◆ Track gaps and track feeders for current detection
 - ◆ Point detector location and clearance if they are being used



- Electronics location and sufficient space

It is a lot harder to install signals, detectors and electronics in a finished layout.

Prototype signalling uses single-head Automatic Block (ABS) and Automatic Permissive Block (APBS) signalling on long stretches of single mainline between Control Points (e.g., turnouts). ABS is used for opposing trains entering a block. A red light means an absolute stop. APBS is used for following trains entering a block. A red light means stop, look, listen then proceed with caution at a reduced speed.

This prototype is somewhat complicated to model, so we tend to use ABS for following as well as opposing trains on our layouts.

Prototype signalling at turnouts adds a second head below the first one. Green on the upper head over red on the lower head means proceed at top speed based on the rule book. *For model railroad operations*, we will interpret Green-over-Red as 'take the through route'. Red-over-Green on the prototype means reduce speed to 30 mph because the train is going through a turnout. *For model railroad operations*, we will interpret Red-over-Green as 'take the diverging route' — as most of us have no idea what speed our train is travelling at.

For turnout signalling, most commercial turnouts have a Single-Pole Double-Throw (SPDT) switch that can be used to control the turnout signal electronics. If one also needs to control frog polarity, then the SPDT needs to be connected to a 2-channel Opto-Coupler relay. One channel controls frog polarity. The other channel controls the signal.

Block signalling can be manually operated using a Double-Pole Double-Throw (DPDT) switch, or automated. The DPDT switches can be located on the fascia or in a dispatcher's office.

For those of us who don't have a dispatcher's office and want to see signals change as trains move from block to block, we move into ABS ± turnout signalling. ABS requires some means of train detection. The simplest is current detection. Some current detectors are DCC only. Others handle DC as well as DCC. A weakness of current detection is that one needs at least the last car on the train to have resistance wheelsets to allow current to flow between the rails. The current detector triggers the signal electronics through a wire from its logic terminal.

A somewhat more complicated approach uses two 'point detectors' — one at each entrance to the block. Laser detectors are better than an 'under-the-rail' infrared detectors, which don't detect black very well. Laser detectors takes up less space than 'across-the-rail' infrared detection. Infrared detectors are less affected by room light than photo-electric detectors. Two input terminals or pins will be needed on the signal electronics for point detection compared with one for current detection.

On to the signal electronics. Will you get a commercial system or try a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Arduino system?



If you use power routing turnouts, then blocking for train show modules can be simplified to those in Figure 2.

Searchlight signals can be used in place of the standard 3-light signal heads. Semaphore signals can replace light signals, but will require additional Arduino sketch coding to control the motor.

Whether commercial or DIY, if cost is an issue on larger layouts consider breaking up installation and hence purchases into phases.

If you haven't worked a lot with Arduinos, part of the cost comparison might include perceived DIY complexity versus complexity of commercial signalling.

Consider signalling as one of several animations that can enhance operations on your layout. Other animations include grade crossing signals, street lights, outdoor and indoor building lighting, vehicle lighting and sound.

To compliment this article, Douglas did a presentation to the Eastern Canada Division's monthly series in November 2025

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjTcRR0XMh8>

(photo credits – Lou McIntyre at Lake Louise and Banff Alberta)

Achievement Program

We have followed **Fergus Francey's** build of the Mira Gut bridges for the Sydney & Louisburg Railway Museum – it was quite a project! Congratulations to him on receiving his **NMRA Merit Awards** for the Mira Gut bridges.

These are a part of his journey toward Master Builder-Structures



Speaking of the Achievement Program, how about the Golden Spike?

The easiest way to get started in the NMRA Achievement Program is with the **Golden Spike Award**. If you have a home layout, or module, chances are you have already done some, if not all of the things necessary to qualify.

The Golden Spike requirements are structured along the same lines as the more in-depth AP certificates.

The modeler needs to: lay and ballast track; wire it so it works; build cars and perhaps a locomotive; and build some structures and scenery. Commercial components are fine for the track and wiring, and kits are okay for the cars, locomotives, and

structures. Upon completing these requirements and having the work evaluated by two or three fellow NMRA members, the member can apply for the Golden Spike Award.

Several of our ECD members have already received their Golden Spike Award, so why not give it a try. See the NMRA website for details:

<https://www.nmra.org/education/achievement-program>

Click on the highlighted Golden Spike Award to download the Application Form



Ronald Grandmaison's TV debut

Ronald Grandmaison's layout was featured at the end of the broadcast on January 29 on the Radio Canada French channel, *Téléjournal Acadie*. The video starts at the 41st minute of the broadcast



<https://ici.radio-canada.ca/tele/le-telejournal-acadie/site/episodes/1144581/episode-du-29-janvier-2026>

Sad News

It is with sadness that we let our model railroad community know about the passing of **Victoria "Tory" Eisenhauer**. She was member of the Eastern Benders and Maritime Federation of Model Railroaders, and fiancée of MFMR president Andrew Reid. Arrangements are in the care of the Colchester Community Funeral Home in Truro. Our sincerest sympathies go out to Andrew and the entire family



<https://colchesterfuneral.frontrunnerpro.com/book-of-memories/5690151/Eisenhauer-Victoria/index.php>

Events

Amherst, NS – March 21

*****New Venue*****

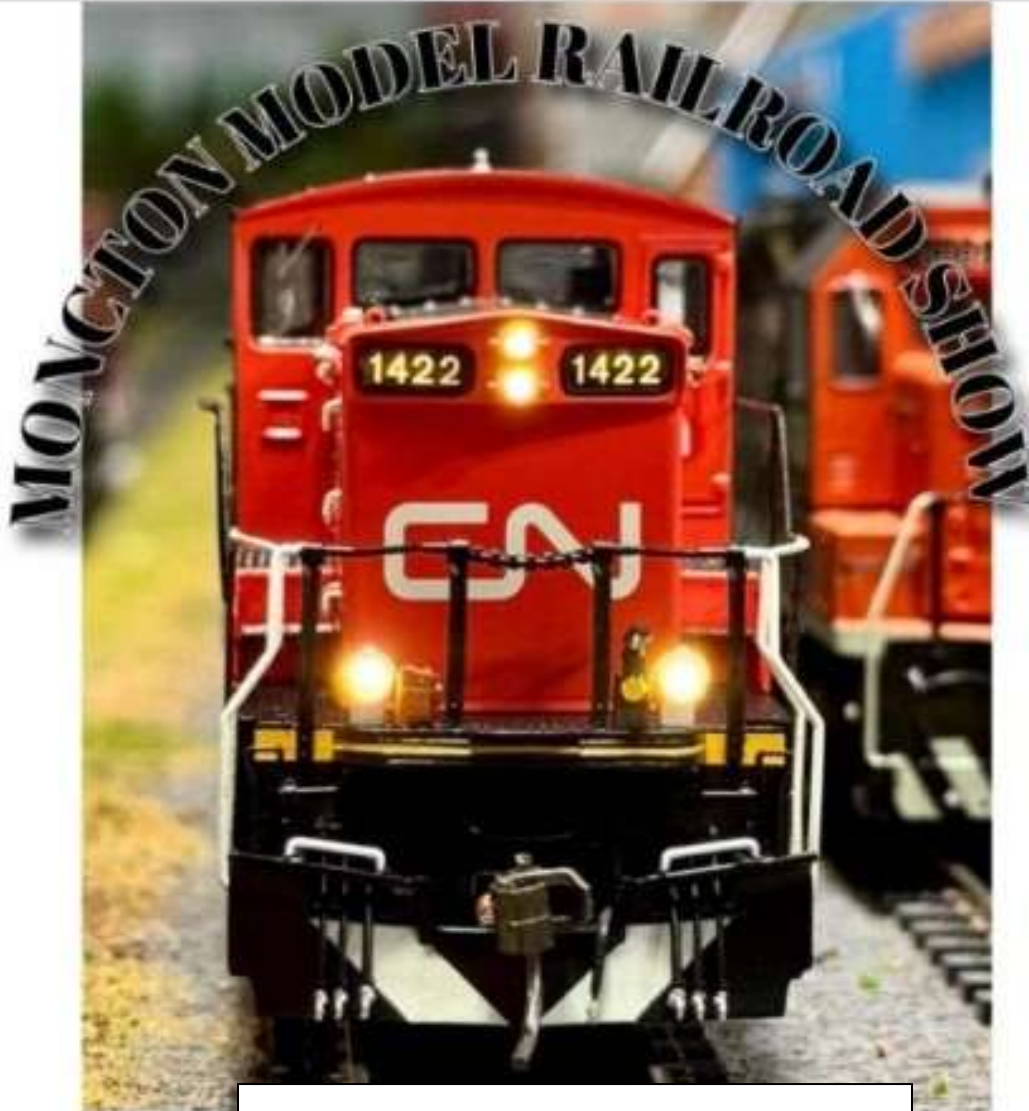
Amherst Lions Club

located at 9 Electric Street.

The show opens at 9 and runs until 4.



Moncton Riverview



APRIL 4 2026

9 AM TO 4 PM

**COVERDALE REC CENTER 50 RUNNEYMEADE RD
RIVERVIEW N.B.**

**DISPLAYS: HO SCALE, N SCALE & LEGO
SALES TABLES & MODEL DISPLAYS**

Contact: Louis leblanc (506-383-9425) louispleblanc@gmail.com

Modelling Day – Saint John

Saturday, April 11, 2026

**River Cross Church, 61 Forbes
Drive,**

Saint John, NB

09:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Cost \$ 20.00



**All are welcome! Bring some models and a few
tools!**

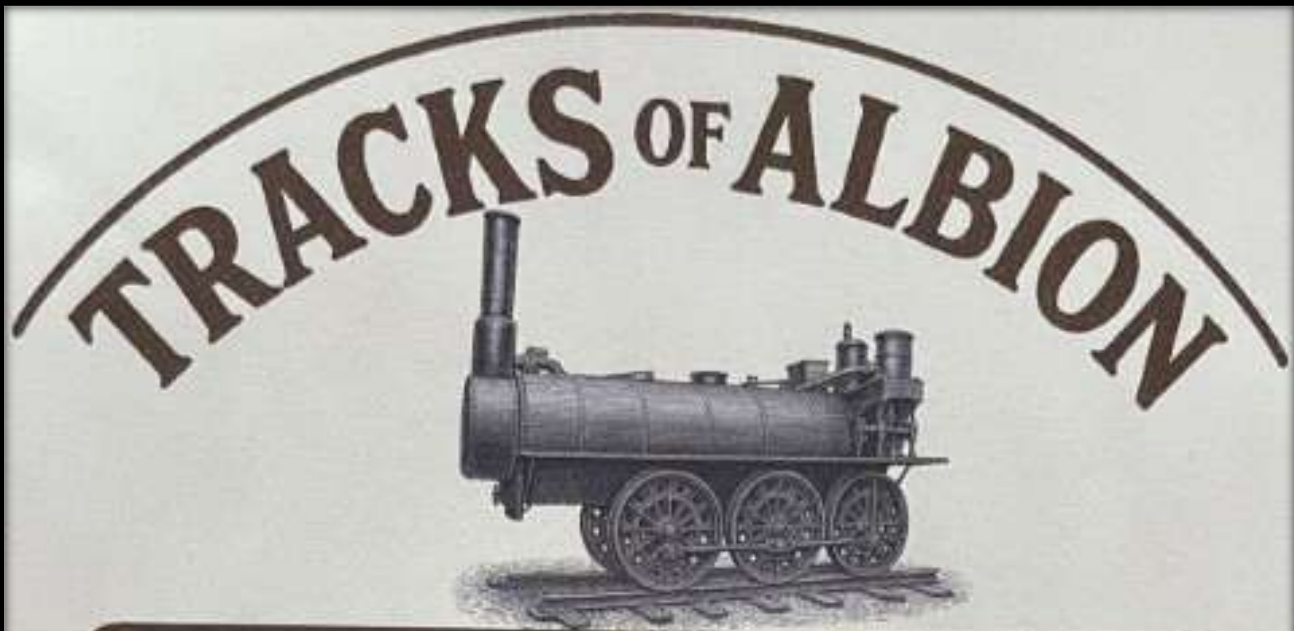
For more information:

jawhatley@bellaliant.net

Sponsored by:

**The Eastern Canada
Division of the NMRA**





STEAM, STEEL & COAL

May 22-24 2026
Stellarton, NS

MFMR Convention & Public Train Show

Join us as we explore Nova Scotia's rich industrial and railway heritage! Enjoy a weekend filled with engaging clinics, MFMR-Exclusive behind-the-scenes tours, and all the great events you've come to expect from our annual convention.

Hotel booking details and Convention Registration will be available soon — mark your calendars and plan to join us for an unforgettable weekend in Stellarton!



McAdam 125

The **Saint John Society of Model Railroaders** is making preliminary plans to join with the **McAdam Railway Station** on June 20 and 21 to celebrate its 125th anniversary. Stay tuned as plans are finalized



The Staging Yard

This is a **new** feature of the Hot Box featuring **your work**. Show us what you have been working on, big or small, finished or under construction. Send photos to the editor at louismca2012@gmail.com

Ronald Grandmaison – Campbellton NB
Fuel loading facility



Mike Gerrits – Chance Harbour NB
3D printed wharf

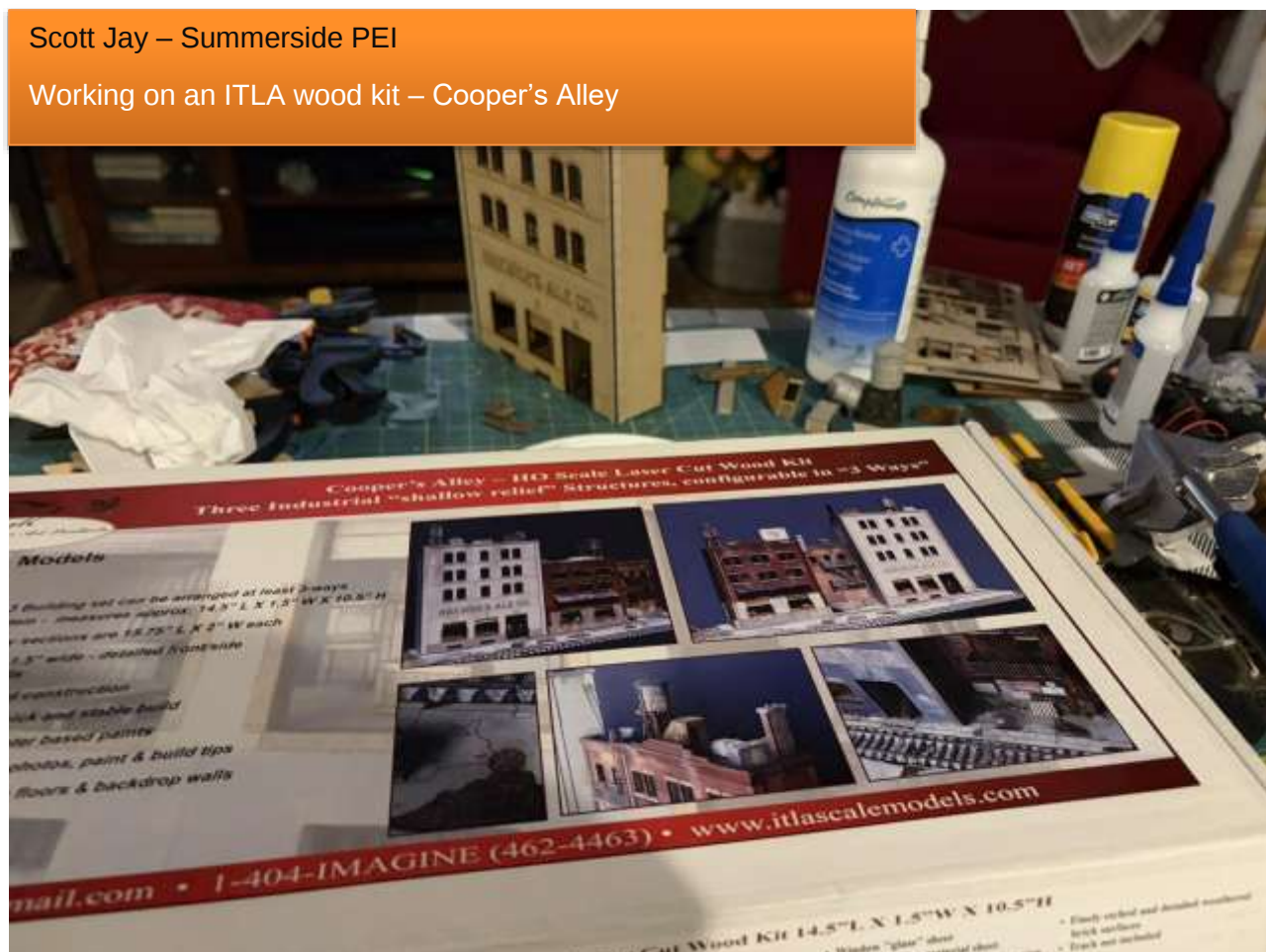


Steve O'Brien – Saint John NB

Box Cars being modified for Bangor & Aroostook woodchip service

Scott Jay – Summerside PEI

Working on an ITLA wood kit – Cooper's Alley



Railway Signalling Simulations

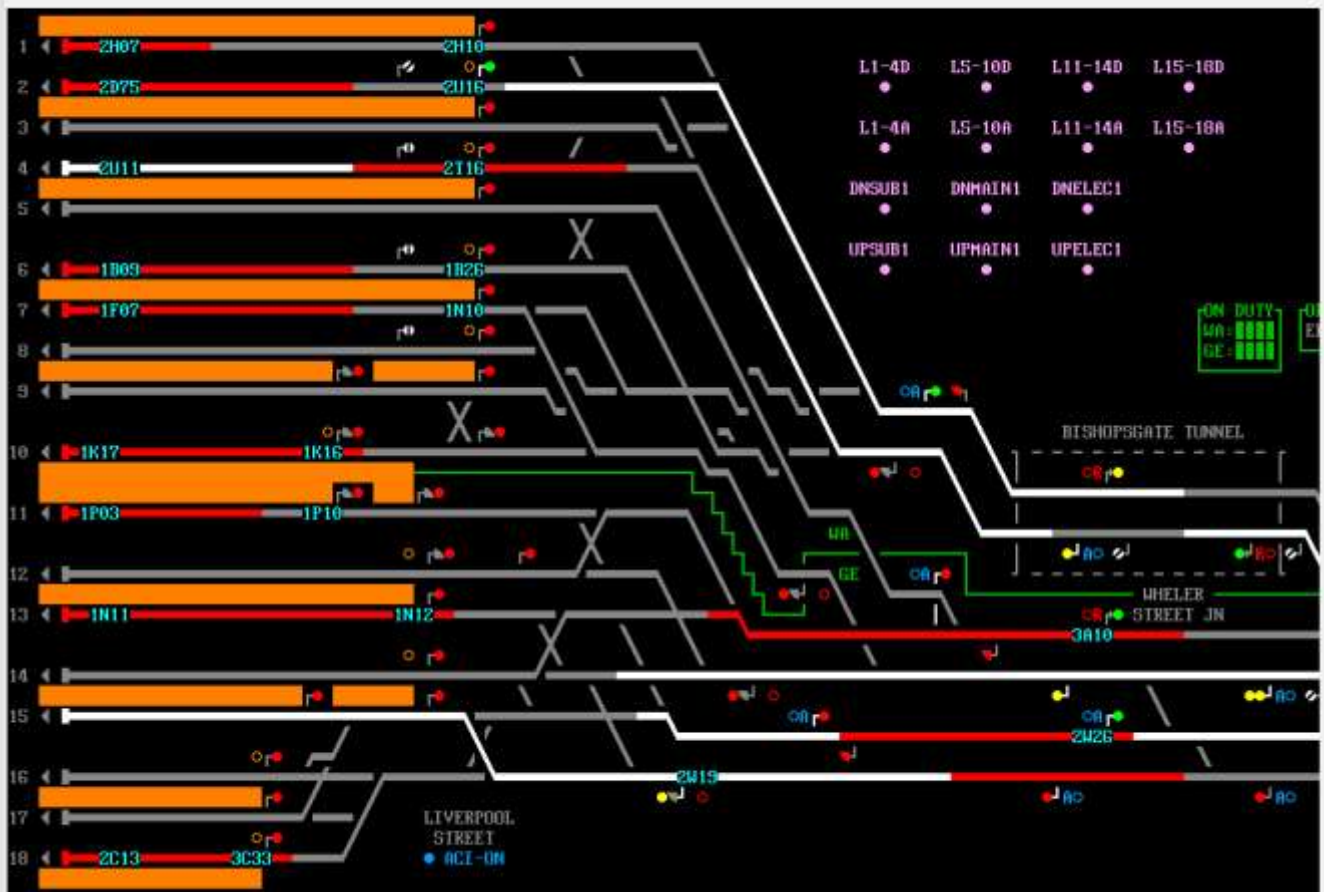
On theme with **Douglas Margison's** story of automatic block signalling, **Dave Barraza** posted this signalling simulation game to Facebook

"What Dave does when Dave is stuck in a hotel? Kings Cross railway station in London has been doing "more with less" for decades before the birth of the term. First time I've found a sequence at 7pm where some trains wait a little bit but no one waits very much. Usually its a parking lot. (playback is 2x speed)"

<https://www.simsig.co.uk/>

Here's a sample - the Liverpool Street station in London UK

What does it look like?



We extend a warm welcome back to **Jeff Skaling** of Canning NS

The F.R.E.D.

This is an excerpt of a message from **Steve Hill**. “There are several files covering gear repair of Bachmann On30 equipment which many of us have been or are likely to be plagued with.”

If you have an On30 Shay, Climax or Rail Truck in need of gear repair, contact either me at louismca2012@gmail.com or Steve Hill at haffyhunter@gmail.com and we can send you the .zip file.



During a recent Zoom chat, someone said they had found the “holy grail” of model railroad search engines – find anything, any author, any road name – in 58 different publications

<https://rrmagazineindex.com/>



CN Track Inspection car



See **Holly Whittaker**'s review of the Broadway Limited CN Tack Inspection car

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrltM2i4N54>

We need your input! If you want stories or history from your local area, it's up to you to share them. We also have the new feature, The Staging Yard where you can contribute photos any photos of projects you have underway or completed Send any projects, stories or reviews you want to share to us at our e-mail address: easterncanadadivision@gmail.com or to louismca2012@gmail.com

