

Reciprocal Switching on a Railroad



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There are Many Types of Switching on a Railroad

- **Intra-Plant** - movement within an industry (Spot 1 -> Spot 2)
- **Intra-Terminal** - movement between two industries on one railroad within defined switching limits of one station
- **Inter-Terminal** - movement starting on one railroad and terminating on a second railroad within defined switching limits of a one station or terminal
- **Intermediate** - a “bridge” movement that involves moving a railcar between interchange points of two other railroads
- **Reciprocal** - see definition below

Definition of Reciprocal Switching

Reciprocal Switching is the practice by which two or more railroads serving the same station, “open” industries on their line to service by other carrier(s). The owning line receives the car on its interchange track from the other carrier, spots the car at the customer for loading/unloading, pulls the car from the customer and interchanges it back to the other carrier.

How does this happen?

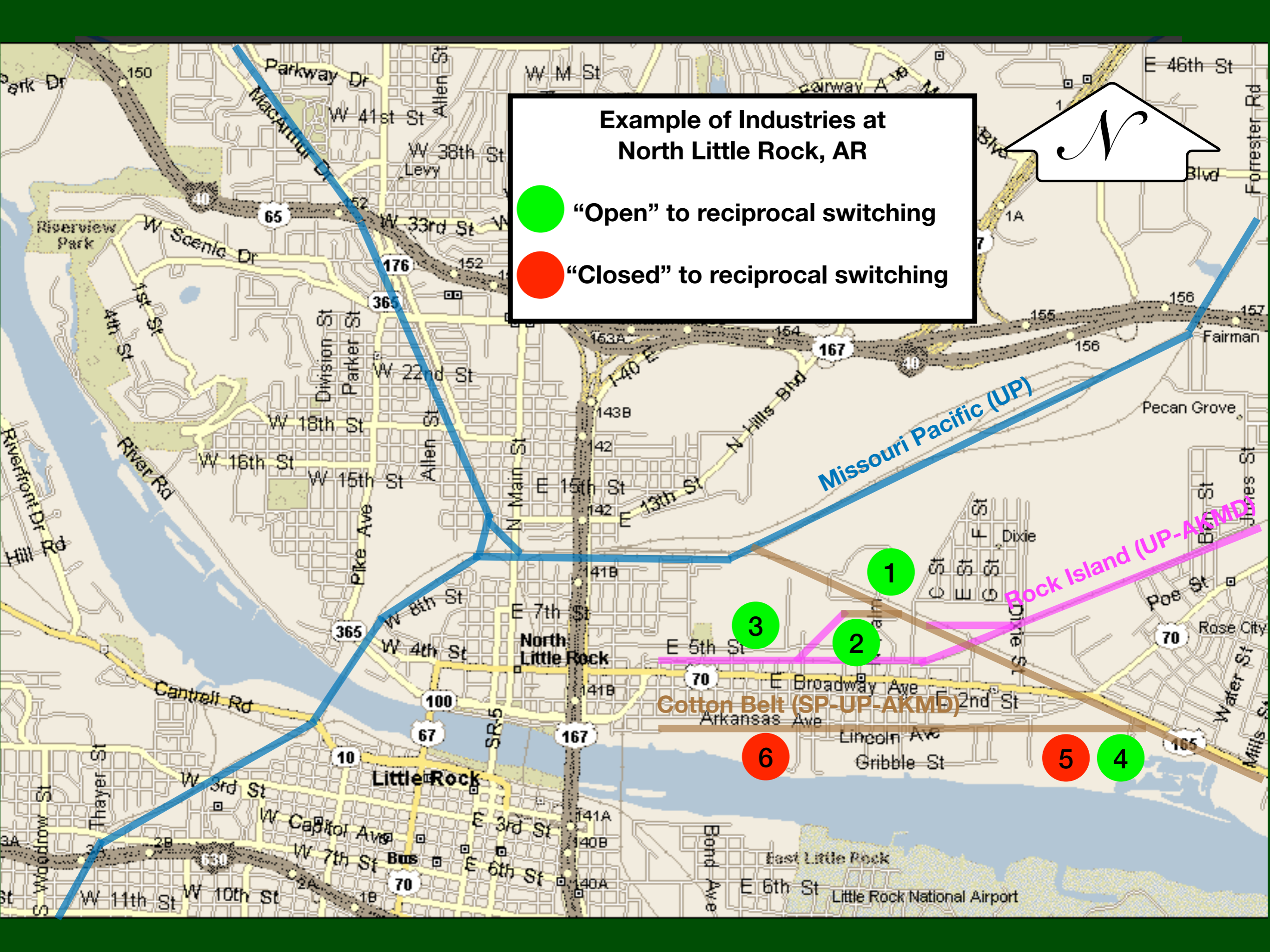
- Requires an Agreement between carriers normally negotiated by their Marketing/Commercial departments
- Carrier identifies in its Freight Tariff whether specific industries are “open” or “closed” to reciprocal switching
- Car is switched for a fee that is either “absorbed” in full or up to a specified dollar limit
- This is a **very** competitive situation between railroads

Why is Reciprocal Switching Important?

- Industries require/demand access to other carriers at the same station or terminal (not always granted)
- Usually there is something each carrier **reciprocally** receives in turn (i.e. “if you give me access to Company A on your line, I will give you access to Company B on my line”)
- It is a way for a railroad to get additional business
- There is quite a “dance” that goes on here between railroads

Example of Industries at North Little Rock, AR

- "Open" to reciprocal switching
- "Closed" to reciprocal switching



Missouri Pacific (UP)

Cotton Belt (SP-UP-AKMD)

Rock Island (UP-AKMD)

1

3

2

6

5

4

How Switching Can Enhance Model RR Operations

Prototypically, you can Switch:

- Reefer cars to/from **Icing Racks**
- **Overloaded Cars** to a siding or yard track to be reduced by contractor
- Boxcars to/from **Clean Out Tracks**
- Flat cars to/from **Team Track “Circus” Ramps** to load/unload tractors, etc.
- Tank cars or covered hoppers between **Storage Tracks/Yards** and industries
- Cars between **Door Spots or Different Tracks** within a Customer’s Plant
- **Bad Order** car in train to nearest siding

On My RR, I Spice Up Operations With “Switching Opportunity Cards”

If things are going too smoothly, I walk around and arbitrarily hand out “Opportunity Cards”. Prototypical examples:

- Best Foods’ Warehouse Mgr just called - they are out of corn oil and facing a plant shutdown. Go to Best Foods and spot them a tank car ASAP.
- The Dock Foreman at Weyerhaeuser reports that the boxcar you just placed on their track is not lined up with the door and they cannot load it. Go back and re-spot.
- The passenger conductor on the commuter train reports their engine is dead. Find out their location, get your train off the main, and take one engine to the passenger train immediately. The local Freight Agent will transport you back to your train.

RECIPROCAL SWITCH



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The Association of American Railroads has an excellent 13” video on YouTube with a simulation about Reciprocal Switching. It can be found at <https://youtu.be/pH0oafZKiDY>