

Transitioning from a Sequence-Based Operating Scheme to Timetable & Train Order

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Many model railroaders operate using a sequence or a script of trains without regard to time or a clock. Operations of this type are a good first stage for a model railroad and can provide a lot of enjoyment as well as introducing operations to new people. A sequence-based plan certainly worked for my own Clinch Valley Lines (CVL) for a while.

But operations without regard to time or a clock is just not prototypical. Moreover, as the CVL railroad grew and evolved, I found that train control was difficult, crews needed an excessive amount of information, and in the end, I felt the prototypical footing was eroding. How I dealt with this issue and why I selected TT&TO is the thrust of this article.

Here's how I made the transition, along with some tips and suggestions.

Brief History of the CVL

The HO scale Clinch Valley Lines (CVL) is a freelance railroad, set in 1959, based deep in the southwestern corner of Virginia. The Interstate Railroad is the CVL's primary influence, with bits of N&W, L&N, C&O and Clinchfield added for spice. Traffic over the line is roughly 45 percent coal, 45 percent general merchandise and 10 percent passenger.

The railroad occupies an area approximately 425 square feet large, plus two staging areas in adjoining rooms. The mainline, Bluefield, West Virginia to Big Stone Gap, Virginia, is approximately 40 feet long. The Andover Subdivision leaves the mainline about mid-point, forming the base of a "T" and operating approximately 25 feet through Wise and St. Paul to Andover, all in Virginia.

Early Operations

Formal operations on the CVL started about five years ago and were, admittedly, pretty clunky for the first few sessions. A combination of track, engine and rolling stock malfunctions, plus some downright silly expectations on my part all took their toll. But with a concerted maintenance regime, some hard dollops of reality, and the experience gained through multiple sessions, those trouble are now mostly a thing of the past.

About fifteen sessions were held over that five year period, all run on the basis of a "menu" or sequence that eventually grew to 12-13 trains. The actual sessions and their associated car movements were hard-driven by a three-part combination of car-card-and-four-cycle waybills, detailed train instructions that included



Bluefield, West Virginia (the east end). Since this photo, trackage size has been doubled and a run around has been added.



Big Stone Gap, Virginia (the west end) with recently added run around siding and expanded trackage for classification work.