Let's talk about OPs

by Joe Fugate

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Introduction to Track Warrants, part 1

If you want a more realistic method for routing trains, Track Warrant Control (TWC) is one simple way. Yes, track warrants look intimidating at first glance, but they're actually straightforward once you understand the logic behind them.

I used track warrants for approximately 20 years of monthly operating sessions on my Siskiyou Line 1 layout from 1995 to 2016, and I can tell you from experience: they become second nature with a little practice and they add tremendous realism to train movements.

A track warrant is a short form with pre-defined statements about train movement. Instead of writing out lengthy train order instructions, the dispatcher simply dictates which boxes to check.

Understanding named points

Track warrants use a term called "named points." Most towns on your railroad have passing sidings alongside the main track.

But here's the key question: when a track warrant says "Proceed from Roseburg to Dillard," exactly which siding track switches does your authority include? The railroad has specific rules:

A. First Named Point
When a station name designates the first named point, authority extends from and includes the last siding switch. Authority extends from the station sign if no siding exists.
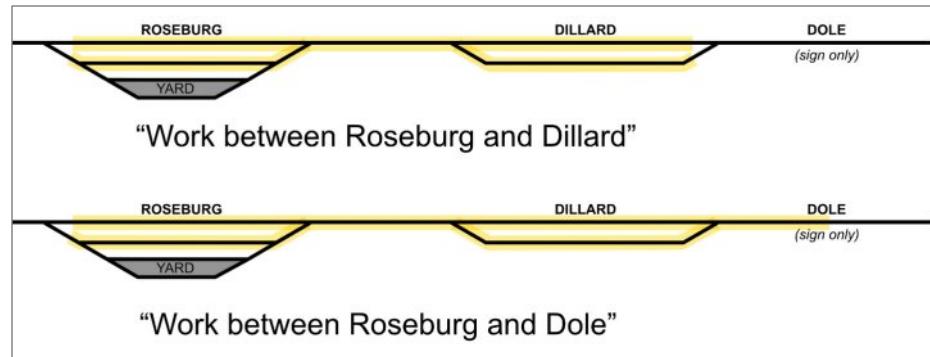
1. A key concept with track warrants is the idea of a "named point." As you can see illustrated here, you only get access to one siding turnout at each named point, you do not get both siding turnouts. If you need both turnouts such as you need at Dillard to switch the town, then you need a named point beyond Dillard, which here is "Dole" – a location on the railroad that is a sign post only.

B. Last Named Point
When a station name designates the last named point, authority extends to and includes the first siding switch. Authority extends to the station sign if no siding exists. At the last named point, authority extends to but does not include the last siding switch when the track warrant states, "Hold main track at last named point."

Here's the essential takeaway: **the track granted between two named points A and B doesn't include the turnouts at both ends of the siding at each location** – only the turnouts that face each other at each end of the named point sidings, but *not* the switch at the far end of the siding at each named point.

To grant access to *both ends* of a siding at a named point, the dispatcher needs to select a named point *past* the location where they want to permit full siding access at both ends. This keeps tight control on siding turnouts and prevents trains from quietly wandering off further down the main by accident – which is the whole point.

In part 2, we will look at a sample track warrant and how to get authorization from dispatch with it. ☑

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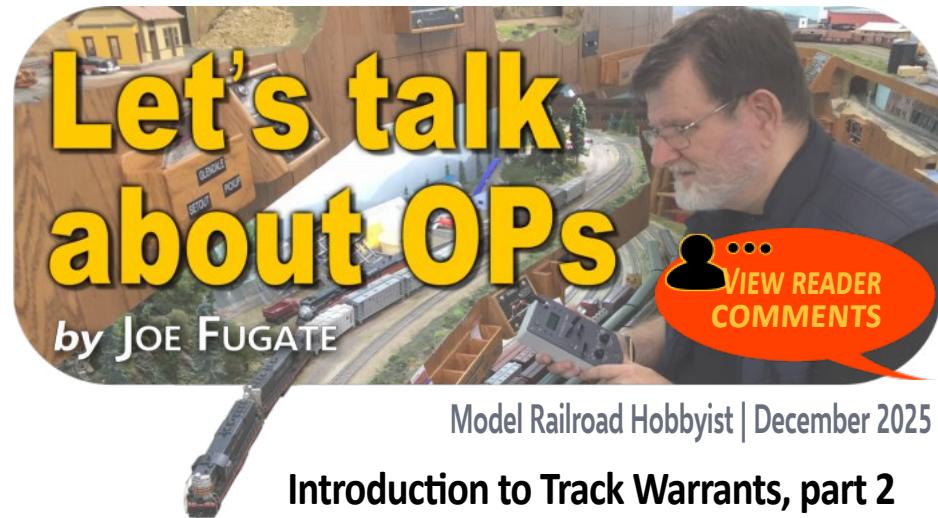
Model Railroad Hobbyist | December 2025

Introduction to Track Warrants, part 2

LAST TIME I INTRODUCED YOU TO TRACK WARRANT FORMS AND the "named point" terminology that's used. This time let's get into the track warrant form [1] and how to request authorization from the dispatcher.

The crew caller assigned you a train in Eugene destined for Medford on my layout. It's a two person crew with a conductor and engineer.

Requesting a track warrant

Conductor: "Roseburg Dispatcher, this is Conductor Smith in Eugene, requesting clearance for SP 4408 to depart westbound, final destination Medford. Over."

Dispatcher: "4408W, this is Roseburg Dispatch. Tell me about your train. Over."

Conductor: "Dispatch, we have 4 locos, 4408, 4411, 4302, and 4407. We have 28 cars and a caboose. Over."

Dispatcher: "Okay, 4408W, are you ready to copy a track warrant? Over."

Conductor: "Affirmative, Dispatch. Ready to copy. Over."

Dispatcher: "This is track warrant number 101, Date, September 5, 1980. To: 4408W at Eugene. Check box 2. Proceed from Eugene to Roseburg. Check box 9. Clear main track at last named point. Over."

1. Here is the track warrant form that I used in op sessions on Siskiyou Line 1.
I adapted this form from an actual Southern Pacific track warrant form, simplifying it slightly. The form reproduced here fits four up on a standard 8x10 piece of paper.

Conductor: "We have track warrant number 101, Date, September 5, 1980. To: 4408W at Eugene. Check box 2. Proceed from Eugene to Roseburg. Check box 9. Clear main track at last named point. Over."

Dispatcher: "That's OK at 12:13pm. Dispatcher, JDF. Over."

Conductor: "OK at 12:13pm. Dispatcher, JDF. Copied by RWJ. Over."

Dispatcher: "Roseburg Dispatch, over and out."

Conductor: "SP 4408W, over and out."

We used FRS radios to communicate. You have a track warrant form on a clipboard and you fill it out as dispatch tells you what to write. That makes reading the warrant contents back to dispatch quite easy, validating a good copy. ☑

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