

Here is an example of how you can envision a layout

IMAGINEERING WHAT I SEE:

I work at the lake front of a city like Cleveland, in a world that never was, but I am imagineering it to be. It is late morning on a warm Indian Summer day in the latter third of the 20th century. A light breeze carries to me the slight acrid odor of steel mills, and a vague hint of Lake Erie. The distant sound of traffic and other types of activity, reminds me that commerce and industry is happening all around. I lean out from my upper floor window, which faces north across tracks towards the lake. Although I cannot see the lake directly, due to some intervening seasoned buildings, to me the view is none the less magnificent. That's because in my opinion as a rail buff, this is the perfect place for train watching.

The city and the lake funnel heavy amounts of rail traffic along the lake shore. All day trains of every description, both passenger and freight, pass by in a continuous slow moving parade as they roll to and from their urban destinations. The view here hasn't changed much since the Kennedy era, where still in use 1920's era buildings stand side-by-side with their modern era counterparts (city sponsored urban renewal never occurred here, so individual property owners were the only ones making any changes).

Far to my left I see the tall downtown office and retail buildings, which hide from my view a massive Union station. At the very edge of my view though I can see the stations' passenger yard. That's great, because unlike passenger station tracks or freight yard tracks, both of which are usually fairly empty, passenger yards are parking lots. All sorts of passenger equipment, local and long-haul, are continuously being shunted about, for cleaning, servicing, and temporary parking. What a thrill to watch!

Futurists keep predicting the end of mass transit, but because oil companies have never gotten all the subsidies they desire, gasoline has never become "cheap". For this reason this city has always had a vibrant mass transportation system for commuters. A mish-mash of private 24hr busses ply the streets along side a few vintage light rail routes in the older parts of town which are still flourishing. Various commuter trains regularly pass by on the tracks in front of me, sharing rail space with the comings and goings of our nations still profitable medium distance passenger trains (only long distance train routes face any real competition from the fuel gulping airlines, but this has recently become significant).

Fuel prices also had an interesting historical effect on railroad motive power. Class 1 railroads continued to regularly operate steam equipment well into the late 1960's, alongside their growing stables of diesels (even now, you can occasionally find a third-hand steam locomotive operating on an insignificant branch line). Outdated pre-war steam engine fueling facilities were long ago replaced by modern equivalents, such as FM Automatic Coaling Stations and City Water fed Water Columns; and even though these are no longer needed due to diesel-electric supersession, many remain standing.

The railroads themselves are still going strong. Because Commercial Airlines and Long Haul Trucking were never government subsidized, and have had to pay their own way just like the railroads, many industries continue to find the railroads to be the cheapest method for transporting their goods over medium distances (which is why long haul truck trailers are so frequently seen piggybacking on trains). Just witness all the railroad serviced businesses in the view from where I am standing. But I digress...

From my far left the obscured multi-track main line enters my field of view , passes along side the passenger yard, then proceeds past several closely packed commercial businesses as it heads towards me (real estate is both tight and expensive over there, so businesses, and the railroad, maximize the use of available real estate). Looking now towards my right, I see the tracks passing light manufacturing businesses. Real estate over there is starting to decrease in price, as several warehouses, and even one or two smaller lake vessel docks, have been built. That area was an older urban settlement, which morphed into a mixed use dingy-residential / industrial zone. Off in the far right distance the main line again becomes obscured, as it travels eventually past an unseen freight classification yard. Although the tracks in front of me are main line, and through to local, passenger and freight traffic travel upon them, to my delight the urban environment forces all of these trains to move at the same very slow speed.