

The Pike City Belt Line

An 8 x 12-foot HO switching layout on a shelf

By Richard A. Nelson

Here's a compact model railroad that provides a lot of interesting switching opportunities in a metropolitan setting. The Pike City Belt Line's linear design packs in four distinctly different switching locations and a small staging yard. A variety of scenic dividers separate the scenes and make the railroad seem larger than its 50 square feet.

This railroad is designed for a 10 x 12-foot room. One side fits against the long wall with the short leg extending out into the room. A 24" aisle provides access to the 25th Street Yard.

For portability, the railroad can be built in three sections 18" wide and 72" long following David Barrow's domino construction methods which were published in the September and October

1996 issues of MODEL RAILROADER. However, the railroad will need to be fairly tall so the double-sided structures can effectively separate the 25th Street Yard from Oakton.

This plan is designed for easy construction using Atlas flextrack and Peco small-radius turnouts. These turnouts are made with switch point toggle springs – ideal for manual operation.

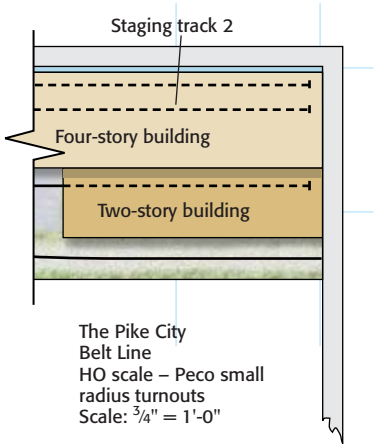


ILLUSTRATION BY KELLIE JAEGER

Alliance Appliances should be large and busy-looking with a variety of roof lines showing additions through the years. It is more than 48" long to conceal the staging tracks along the wall. Where the track enters the building, a small section of loading dock detail can be used to mask the empty interior.

A two-sided building-and-scene divider separates the 25th Street Yard from Oakton. The Pike Furniture factory faces the Oakton side, while the opposite side of the structure represents the alley view of three other businesses, which aren't serviced by the railroad. This large structure also provides a three-dimensional transition into the city backdrop that divides the rest of the peninsula.

Enhancing realism

The quantity and sizes of the industries on the PCBL enhance its realism and believability. Three businesses – Pike Furniture, Alliance Appliances, and the Pike City Eagle newspaper – are large enough to require daily switching. The beverage distributor, paint warehouse, and frozen food plant will need less frequent switching, while the other remaining small industries are worked only about once a week.

Naming all of the different locations on the railroad also enhances its realism. The "Oakton" name sounds like a suburb or city neighborhood. In typical prototype fashion "Thacker Avenue" refers to an area near a city street or some other similar landmark. "Alliance" comes from the name of the major customer at that location.

Using these names in reference to train movements will add prototypical flavor to an operating session.

Most switch jobs have an official job number or name, but many prototype railroaders create their own nicknames for these runs. Some typical names for the PCBL's switch job might be the 25th Street Switcher, the Thacker Avenue Job, or the Oakton Turn. The "turn" reference in the name means the switch job goes out, works, and then returns to its starting point.

A day on the PCBL

Let's follow a PCBL switch crew as they go to work. Their engine, five cars, and a caboose are spotted on staging track two, which represents the main PCBL yard in another part of Pike City. This eliminates the need for an engine

terminal and allows you to use a variety of switchers or Geeps.

The engine pulls its train past the abandoned interlocking tower and into the 25th Street Yard. There, the cars are sorted and organized for delivery as both facing and trailing point switch moves are involved.

Next, the crew begins visiting the various industries to pick up the outbound cars. A caboose is necessary to provide a safe platform for the crew as cars are shoved across busy streets.

While the switcher is away from the yard, a transfer run pulls in from staging track one. It arrives on the front track so the engine can escape. After the runaround move is done, the transfer job shoves its cars into an empty track and the engine is parked in the pocket track while the crew heads for lunch.

When the PCBL switcher returns, it gathers the outbound cars for the transfer job. By then, the transfer crew has returned so they couple onto their train, make a brake test, and depart into staging track one.

Next, the PCBL crew sets two cars and the caboose on the front track while the switcher runs through the escape track to get behind them. It now shoves the train, caboose first, across Lee Street and into Alliance. Then it reverses direction and pulls the cars across Lee Street again and around the curve into Oakton. The caboose is left on the Lee Street curve while the crew shoves the two cars across Thacker Avenue and spots them at Excel Electronics and the Leonard Paint Co.

When it returns to the yard, the switcher gathers its outbound cars. An air test is made, and then the train clatters across the diamond and heads into staging track two. Between operating sessions, you'll need to back the trains out and rearrange their consists with extra cars that are stored nearby.

Optional additions

There's space to add a third staging track within the appliance plant to intensify operations. However, expanding the number of industries may be counter-productive. You don't want tracks to fill every bit of real estate. Instead, I'd change a few industries to ones with higher volumes of traffic that need more switching.

As it is, the PCBL will give you an idea of what switching is like in a metropolitan area. The layout will provide many hours of excitement and constantly changing switch moves that will challenge both newcomers and veteran model railroaders. ♣

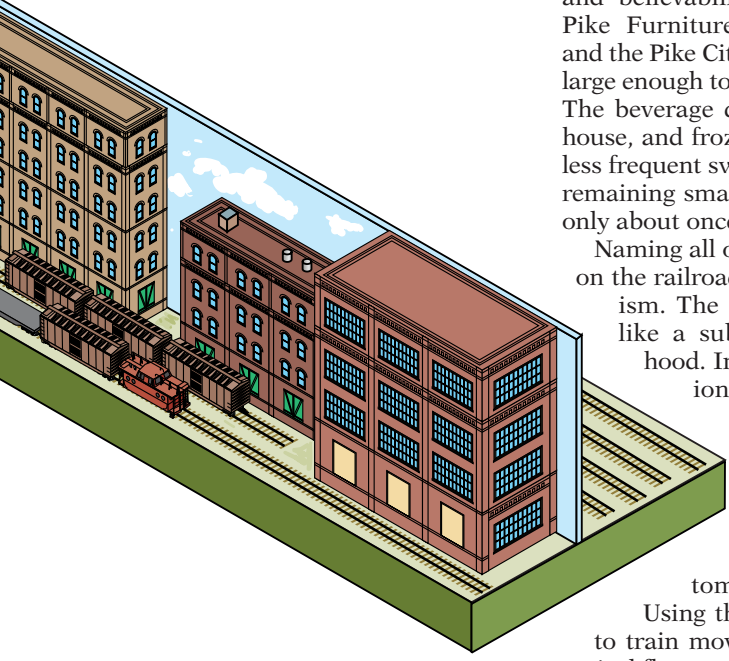


ILLUSTRATION BY TERRI FIELD

Scenic challenge

The major challenge in building this layout is in modeling the industries served by the PCBL. The structures located against the walls and scenic dividers can be simply built as flats. However, the appliance plant and furniture factory, both large structures, need some three-dimensional areas to look convincing.

Note: The 3d illustration is in error, being reversed from the actual track plan.