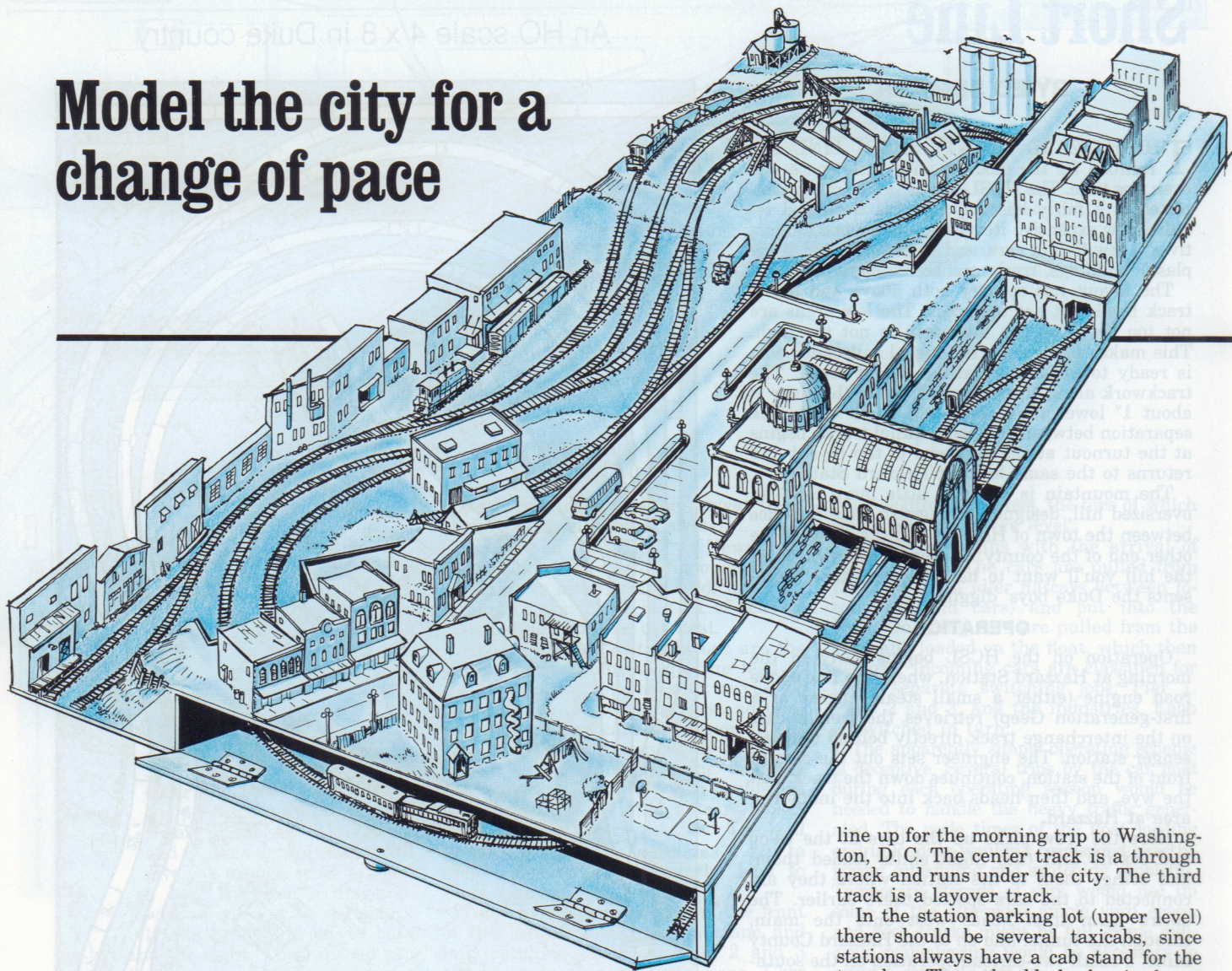


# Model the city for a change of pace



An HO scale 4 x 8 using Atlas Snap Track

BY ED SUMNER

**I**T SEEMS that with model railroaders, wherever there are tracks, there are also mountains. Admittedly, this type of scenery is impressive and beautiful, but frankly, when you've seen one mountainous layout, you've seen 'em all.

Living in Baltimore, Md., a major port city and rail terminal (but no mountains), I get to see the inner city almost daily. On several occasions I've thought to myself, why not design a track plan which allows for the type of operations seen near a city, rather than the wide-open spaces? That's what this is.

## PASSENGER TRAFFIC

I'd suggest building the urban side of the layout on a box-like structure of re-

taining walls with a piece of 1/8" Masonite on top. Access to the hidden tracks is through hinged flaps as per the drawing. Cover the retaining walls with stone wall paper or plastic sheet (such as made by Vollmer) and go heavy on the weathering. Dirty it up as much as you like; there's no such thing as too much here.

In designing this track plan I borrowed a lot from Baltimore. On the urban side you have a station not unlike the real Penn Station. Like its prototype, the station sits above the tracks, which must be reached by stairways coming down from the waiting room. The station building itself may have to be scratchbuilt, since I know of no manufacturer who makes a structure of this type. I have arranged the track similar to that of Penn Station, with the closest track being where RDC commuter trains

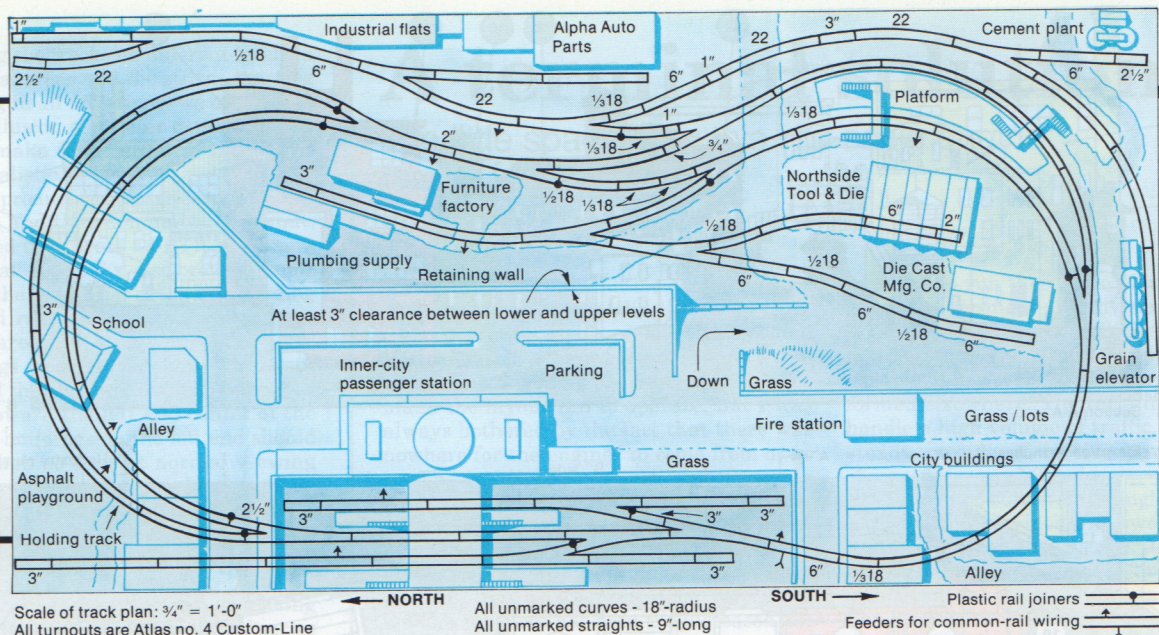
line up for the morning trip to Washington, D. C. The center track is a through track and runs under the city. The third track is a layover track.

In the station parking lot (upper level) there should be several taxicabs, since stations always have a cab stand for the travelers. There should also be city buses on the streets leading into or near the station. Cars and people on the sidewalks are the order of the day too, along with street-lamps, mailboxes, trash cans, fire alarm boxes, and an occasional phone booth.

You can make your own choice of buildings. I suggest the Con-Cor Courthouse Square, Magnuson Victoria Falls Townhouses, Life-Like Belvedere Hotel, or any other buildings which look like inner-city buildings. City streets are a dull gray color, and the lines in the street are white and faded. The streets are also full of potholes, ruts and cracks, oil spots, and other weathering.

At the south end of the layout are rows of city buildings, residential and commercial. At the north end of the layout there is a school building and an asphalt playground behind it. This is typical of many of our urban centers. So are filthy alleys and weatherbeaten old structures. If you really want to model the inner city, board up some of the buildings and print graffiti all over the sides of the buildings, or maybe break a window or





### Track required

- 9 no. 261 no. 4 left-hand (Atlas Custom-Line Mark 2)
- 4 no. 262 no. 4 right-hand
- 3 no. 260 wye
- 15 no. 150 9" straight
- 29 no. 152 18" curved
- 4 no. 153 22" curved
- 9 no. 822 6" straight
- 7 no. 823 3" straight
- 2 no. 847 Snap-Track Assortment
- 5 no. 834 1/2 18" curved
- 6 no. 835 1/3 18" curved

two. Grates over basement windows at street level are also commonly used to prevent break-ins.

### FREIGHT TRAFFIC

There is another side to this layout: freight operations. It's on this side of the layout, opposite the passenger station, through which the railroad's real lifeblood flows. There are lots of kits on the market that you can use for industries over here, and these are prime candidates for kit-bashing and heavy weathering.

There are two industrial areas to be switched by two small switchers, perhaps SW1500 types or a road engine small enough to fit. They deliver cars a cut at a time and set them out at their proper industry, removing the cars already in place. Judicious use of the passing siding at the southeast corner of the layout is needed to shuffle loaded cars out and empties in, and all of this without fouling the main... which brings us to our next topic.

### OPERATION

You say that a 4x8 doesn't have much operation? Well, I beg to differ. This one does, if you're careful. There's not a lot of track here, so you need to use what you have wisely. I envision a typical operating session to start like this...

**6 a.m.** The RDCs are humming on the siding, preparing to take their loads of passengers to work. They are scheduled to leave at 6:15, if all goes well.

Over at the freight yard, the first switcher comes in with one car each for Die Cast Manufacturing and Northside Tool & Die. The engineer has 10 minutes to get from the yard to the industries without fouling the main for a southbound passenger train.

Carefully, he edges the throttle up to yard speed. The aging Geep growls a bit, and the engineer mutters a curse under his breath, recalling the problems he had with his last shipment to Northside. Can you imagine that? Complaining to the main office because he was late by a lousy 5 minutes! Edging onto the main, the skilled engineer brings the train to a halt while the brakeman uncouples for a run-around. Checking his watch, he finds that he's still 6 minutes to the good. Maybe he'll get it in on time this morning.

**6:05 a.m.** The southbound *Silver Streak* pulls into the station on its way to Florida. There are only five cars in this train because it's summer and not too many people want to go to Florida right now. (The train's abbreviated consist comes in handy when you hide it on the storage track underneath the school, which is where it just came from.)

**6:10 a.m.** Its 5-minute stop complete, the train hustles southbound, past the grungy industries and into a second tunnel (the holding track that it came from a moment ago).

The switcher has just eased into the industrial area now, and the hogger thanks the Lord that this morning he made it. It isn't always that easy with the old Geep. The maintenance boys do their best, but this baby is old with a capital O, and the company says it's too expensive to get something better.

**6:15 a.m.** The engineer of the commuter run slides the throttle forward ever so slowly. The *Silver Streak* is long gone by now, but with the lousy track between here and the Capitol, well, he can't pick up too much speed without his

passengers losing their breakfast from being tossed side to side like a ship in rough seas. Once through the tunnel at the south end of the station, he'll stop at the various stops between Metropolis and the Capitol.

(When the commuter train has finished its run and has pulled into the tunnel on the holding track behind the *Silver Streak*, you open the hatch and remove the Florida-bound train. Place a couple of the passenger cars on the long spur and use a switcher to move them into the station area.)

**6:25 a.m.** The switcher from the yard is just bringing in cars for a northbound commuter run. It'll be ready to go by 7 or so. (Continue periodically placing cars on this track until you have a fair-sized commuter train, but no more than six cars and an A and B unit.)

Over in the industrial area the second switcher is ready with a short cut for the cement plant and the grain elevator and also for a pickup at Alpha Auto Parts. The first switcher can make a pickup at the plumbing supply warehouse: a boxcar full of toilets.

Or can he? Well, he can if the evening run yesterday took out that flat of lumber for the furniture factory, and that depended upon whether or not they got it unloaded before 5 o'clock last night. If they didn't, he'll have to move the flat, pick up the boxcar load of toilets, and put the flat back so that the day shift can finish unloading it when they come in. All of that switching around will make him late. It could foul up the main for the 7:15 northbound commuter run... but then that's railroading in the big city.

### TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

I think you get the picture. There's a lot more to this layout than you might think, especially if you use the clock and a card-order system. Urban modeling is easy and fun, it doesn't require a whole lot of skill at making scenery, and it's a great change of pace from the country. Try your hand at it sometime; you might find that you like it! ☺