



The Engineer's Cab: Bob Bunge

It is September, time for another column! There is a lot happening, or about to happen in Bantrak. Later this month, some of us will make the annual trek to Altoona for N Scale weekend. Rarely will you see so much N Scale in one place. Small and large vendors, many layouts, including a Bantrak N-trak layout. It is just a great chance to geek out for a couple of days. For those you who can't usually make this for transportation reasons, we have one enterprising new member who can't get a car ride, so he will be taking Amtrak up where we can pick him up at the station.

From the email responses I got, members seemed to enjoy the August "field trip" meeting to the Baltimore Streetcar Museum. Of course since I'm a traction geek and have spent much of my summer learning how to operate the cars at the museum, it was fun for me to show off this somewhat hidden crown train jewel of Baltimore. I was recently talking to a non-train-related friend who teaches high school history; she was not only familiar with the museum, but was able to speak with knowledge about how streetcars were an important part of the development of Baltimore for 100 years. I've enjoyed the meeting field trips so far. Dave Betz is coordinating another that will be at a local home layout. Stay tuned.

The October scale show will feature T-trak and FreemoN layouts. Many thanks to Alan D. and Tim N. for stepping up to coordinate. Bantrak FreemoN continues to mature, and grow. I foresee a day when the Bantrak FreemoN layout will outgrow our current space at the show.

Work has continued on the Bob Mohr city modules. Several of us have been involved in planning the build out of new roller carts that will store these modules and other pieces of equipment in the trailer. I'm excited about this, because it should result in less lifting and carrying during setup, reduced tripping hazards, and a more standardized tear down that will hopefully save time and our aching backs. Most importantly, it will result in the regular display of a very fine set of modules built by one of the club's most impressive modelers. Please see Eric Payne if you are interested in getting involved in the work on the modules or with the carts. If all goes well, the modules might be debuted at the B&O museum. Thanks to Freddy for organizing the saving of these modules and Eric for hosting them in his basement and hosting various work sessions.

Alan D. has been in contact with the B&O museum and they appear to be excited about hosting us once more this year. Many details need to be worked out, but it appears we will be asking for runners on several evenings during Polar Express runs. Last year, these were fun and an opportunity to show our modeling skills off to a different audience than normal.

Bob

August Meeting Recap: Bob Bunge

On August 17th, about a dozen Bantrak members attended the monthly meeting, held at the Baltimore Streetcar Museum. Located in the city on Jones Falls Road, the museum boasts one of the most complete collections of streetcars for a specific city; the museum has examples of all but two or three of the different cars operated in Baltimore from about 1880 through 1963.



Upon arrival, members were given a demonstration of how many streetcar switches were aligned by the car operator/motorman using a Switch Iron, a 3-4 foot long rod. They also learned the history behind Baltimore's unique 5 foot 4 ½-inch gauge. This is the widest gauge used in streetcar service in the US and one of the reasons the car collection is so complete. Only a single Baltimore car is at another museum where the car is in storage and can't be easily modified to run on standard gauge. Members were also given a tour of car 554, a product of Brownell Car Company of St. Louis, built in 1896. This "open" car has no sides, bench sitting and has hand brakes. It is one of the oldest streetcars in regular service in the country. Once inside the visitors center, members explored the exhibits, including a timeline history of traction in Baltimore and a robust collection of Baltimore traction models.

The business meeting was held in the center's auditorium. After the meeting, President Bob took the members on a ride on the museum's 1948 St. Louis built PCC car that came to the

museum from SEPTA/Philadelphia in 2004. Because Philadelphia used a 5 foot 2 inch gauge, it isn't overly difficult to regauge these cars to run at Baltimore. Because Philadelphia lacks a museum, a dedicated set of Philly fans arranged for the donation of the car, helped to restore it to operations and maintain it. One of Bob's instructors has operated these cars in Philly for 30 years.



Bantrak members were given a brief talk about the history of the car, a demonstration of how it operates and an overview of the history of the right of way used by the museum. The ROW was originally used by the Maryland and Pennsylvania RR. MA & PA abandoned the ROW in the early 1960's, and museum volunteers started to lay track in 1966. The visitor's center was built in 1970. Along the museum's ROW is the remains of the Ma & Pa standard gauge roundhouse, used by the City to store road salt for decades. The museum is currently in negotiations with the city over the use of the roundhouse and most recently received a \$165,000 grant to help stabilize the building.

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Back at the visitor's center, members were given a brief tour of the car barn that houses the car collection. Space in the building is very tight, but members could see original two horse cars, the operational, but only used for special occasions car 417, built Ca. 1888 where it started as a horse car, was converted into a cable car trailer and then converted into an electric hand brake car.

Another interesting piece of equipment was a 1952 overhead line truck made by Autocar. This truck was used by the Baltimore Transit Company and donated to the museum by MTA in the 1970's. Still operational, it has been used to work on the overhead wires at the museum as recently as a few years ago.



Bob joined the museum last year and in the spring attended a class to learn how to operate the cars. Over the past three three months, he has been a student revenue operator and recently gained his qualification to operate the SEPTA PCC car. The trip with Bantrak members was his fourth solo run.

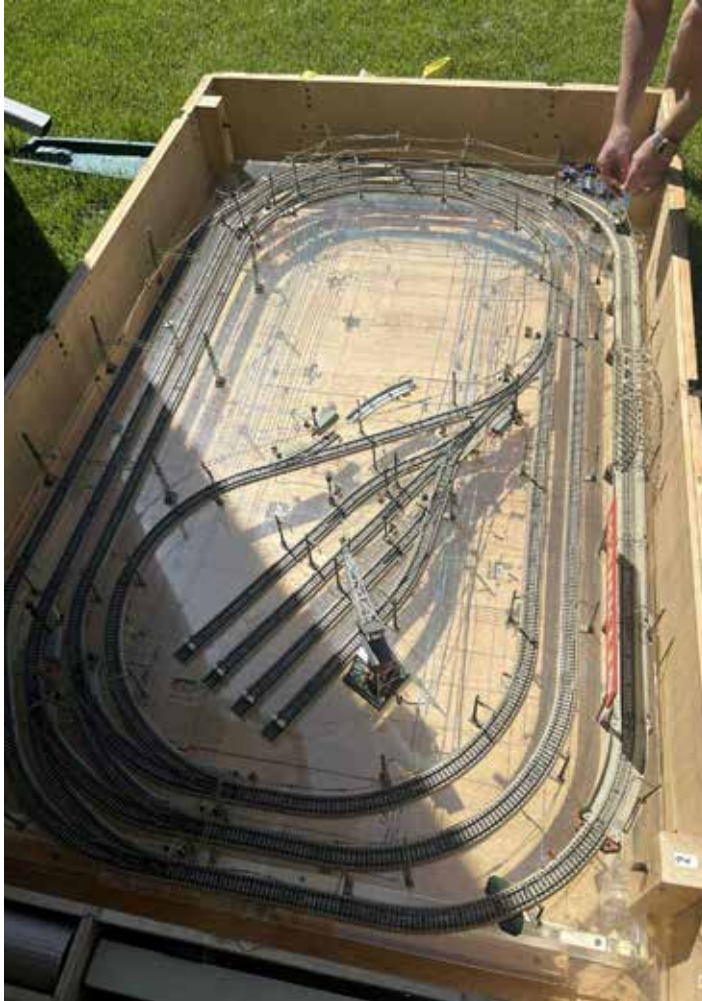


He is working to become certified on several other cars in the collection and is slowly collecting clothing that matches what car operators wore in Baltimore. The museum is always looking for volunteers to help, from operating the cars and interacting with the public, to restoration of the cars to staffing the museum's gift shop. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Bob at bbunge@ladyandtramp.com.



Late '60s Märklin: Freddy Mitchell

From N to Nostalgia: Hitting Pause with a Late '60s Märklin HO Store Display



Märklin Store Display in its shipping crate from Western Germany

I've been collecting N scale model trains for most of my life, but my model railroad heart has always had a soft spot for the charm and craftsmanship of old Märklin trains. One of my earliest memories as a kid is watching my dad and uncle running Märklin trains together. My father grew up collecting Märklin and often shared stories about visiting the local hobby shop with his aunt. One story that stuck with me was how he saved up to buy a Märklin railbus (Item #3016) by paying in installments. Each time he made a payment, the shopkeeper would let him admire the railbus behind the counter—until the day he finally took it home.

Back then, Lionel may have been the most recognizable model train brand in the U.S., but in the

Northeast, Märklin was king.



*Märklin Catalog Cover from 1965,
<https://www.stagniweb.it/maerk15.htm>*

Known as the world's oldest model train manufacturer, Märklin truly hit its stride in the era between the late 1950s and the late 1980s, with their innovative AC-powered train systems. Unlike most other model trains, Märklin's use of signals, working catenary systems, and a center stud "third rail" (similar in concept to Lionel) made their systems unique. Their precision and engineering set them apart—and still do today.

Even while serving in the Navy in the early 1990s, my dad kept up with his Märklin hobby. He and my uncle would visit hobby shops during overseas port calls, including a favorite stop in Hong Kong, to add to their collections. Eventually, family life and career took priority, and my dad shifted toward his other passion: modeling streetcars. After I graduated college, my own interest in Märklin reignited, fueled by childhood memories. I started a small collection of my own. Years later, after retiring, my dad gifted me his entire Märklin collection. But like him, I eventually stored it away, focusing instead on my N scale projects.

Fast forward ten years—BANTRAK received an email about a Märklin display layout that needed a new home. Around the same time, my wife Samantha and I had just moved into a new house, one with a room specifically intended to become my train room. While Samantha showed the room to her brother, he jokingly asked, "Where are the trains?" That comment stuck with me. When I heard about the layout, I thought—why not finally set up the Märklin collection and use the layout to display it?

A few weeks later, I connected with Scott from Hobby Works and arranged to pick up the layout. Chris Quinlan, my work friend Adam, and I headed to Laurel to retrieve it. When we arrived, we were stunned by the sheer size of the shipping crate. It took all three of us to get the layout to my home in White Marsh. Once inside, we carefully unlatched the crate and revealed the layout, mounted on clear plexiglass

Late '60s Märklin: Freddy Mitchell



The Märklin Layout in its original shipping crate

(Perspex), which allowed a full view of the complex wiring underneath. I set up two folding tables and placed the layout on top.



The Märklin Layout on the folding tables

Over the next few weekends, I began inspecting the layout and making a list of repairs and restorations. Tasks included replacing a few broken switches and signals, realigning the catenary system with the track, fixing damaged track segments, restoring a non-functional crane, and chasing down some electrical shorts. Thankfully, I had a healthy stockpile of spare parts—signals, tracks, and wiring. However, some components like vintage catenary masts had to be sourced from Germany.

While working on the layout, I reached out to Märklin experts worldwide for more background. We eventually identified the layout as an official Märklin store display—Layout Display #0463—featured in a 1968 vendor catalog. Märklin used to market display layouts to hobby shops and toy stores, with shops like FAO Schwarz in New York using them to capture the imagination of young visitors.



Märklin Display Ad for Shops for Layout 0463, Stephen Cook Collection

Layout 0463 is designed to run three trains simultaneously, each controlled by its own signal. It also featured Märklin's then-new three-way switch (Item #5214), placed in the yard area. Typically, catalog display layouts came with scenery and buildings, but this version was uniquely built on plexiglass, with no scenery.

After some time and help from friends in the Märklin community, I got the display running again!



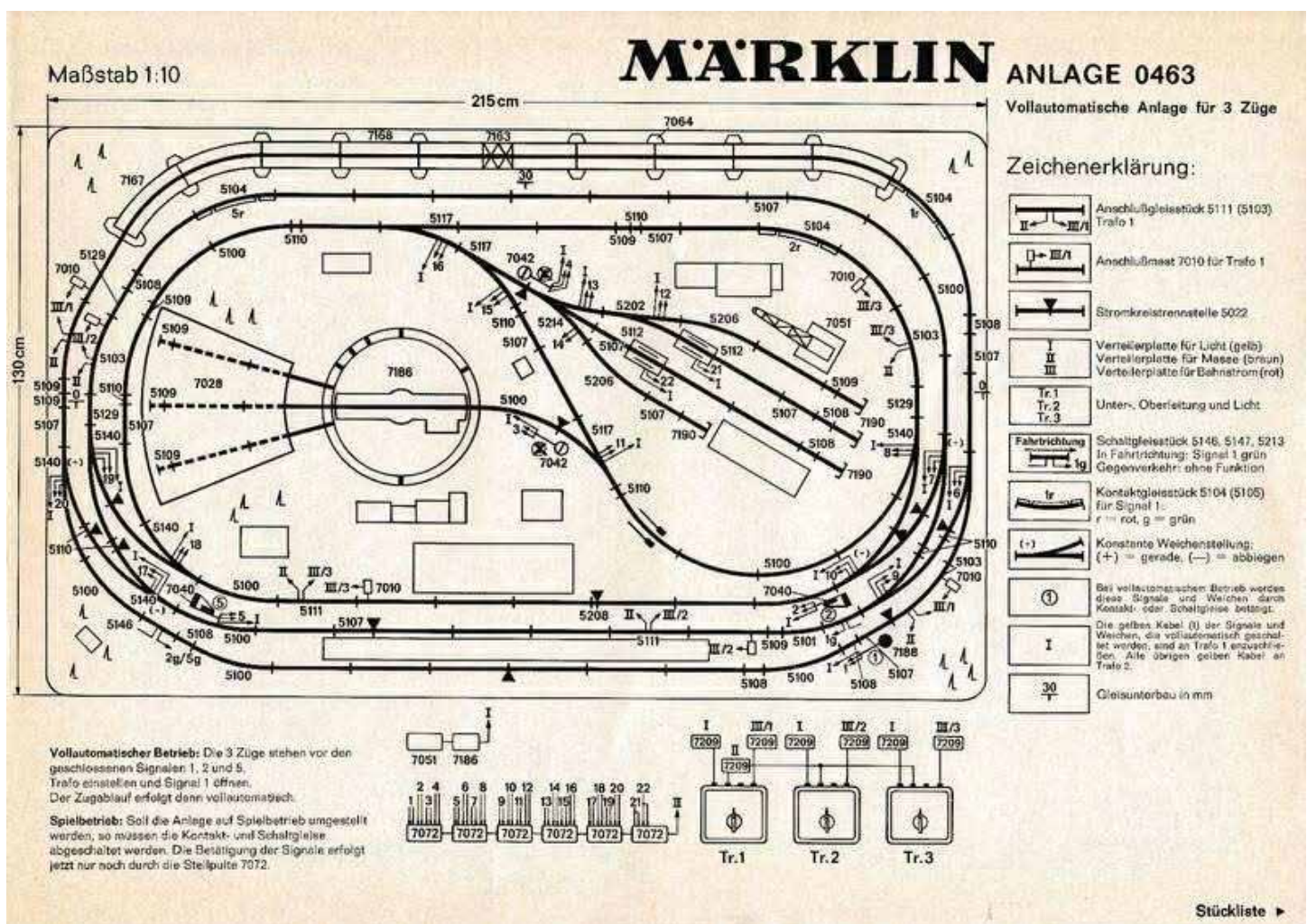
Märklin display powered on

One highlight was restoring the crane. After disassembling and cleaning it, I brought it back to life—it now rotates 360 degrees, raises and lowers its hook, and activates its electromagnet to lift specially made loads. The layout now also includes a turntable and roundhouse. Luckily, I had those in my collection and was able to install them as well. Future plans include adding lighting under the layout to highlight the wiring and details, and illuminating the roundhouse area.

Late '60s Märklin: Freddy Mitchell

Just last weekend, my wife invited a coworker over with her family, making them the first guests to see the Märklin display in action. Aside from a single locomotive losing its traction tires, everything ran smoothly. Seeing it all come together brought me a huge sense of satisfaction and reignited my love for Märklin. But don't worry—I'm still loyal to N scale too—but there's something magical about seeing those classic Märklin trains running again.

A big thank you to Scott from Hobby Works, Chris Quinlan, Adam White, Stephen Cook, Till Vesper, Tim Schmutzler, Scott Housman, and the entire Märklin community for all your help and support in bringing this vintage display back to life. I couldn't have done it without you—it's now running just like it should!





BANTRAK 2025 Calendar

October 06, 2025

Newsletter content deadline

We need content, please submit your articles by the deadline.

September 20 & 21st, 2025

Altoona N-Scale Weekend

Blair County Convention Center

1 Convention Center Drive,

Altoona, PA 16602

Coordinator: Martin Myers

September 27, 2025 12:30-4:30 PM

David Vaughn's Open House

13732 Lakeside Dr

Clarksville, MD 21029-1345

Coordinator: David Betz

October 25 & 26th, 2025

Great Scale Show

Timonium Fairgrounds

Setup is Friday October 24th

Coordinator: Tim Nixon

BANTRAK Membership: Eric Payne

BANTRAK does a significant amount of charitable activity, although we rarely think of it that way because we get pleasure out of it. When you think about it, that is as it should be with all giving from the heart.

What is our charitable activity? Our major participation is in the B&O Museum's (which is a charitable organization) Annual Festival of Trains. Our display has been a major draw for people to come to the Museum for many years, both recent and in the past. There are plenty more examples, this is just one.

Please contact Treasurer [Tim Nixon](#) for more information regarding your membership status and roster questions or contact [Eric Payne](#) with general questions.

Member Benefits:

- Sharing of your knowledge (railroading and modeling) with others of similar interests
- Access to railroading and modeling knowledge of other members
- National exposure and recognition of your endeavors in modeling
- Hands-on activities: Club modules - track, wiring and scenery. Raffle layout - track and scenery Members' layouts
- Recognition as being part of a Nationally known club.

Train Spotting: Ed Kapucinski



BANTRAK was founded in 1983 as the Greater Baltimore N-Scale Associates. Begun as a “round robin” group to share skills and experiences, we have expanded our focus to include participation in many diverse activities to promote model railroading in general and N-Scale model railroading in particular. Activities include participation in local, regional and national shows, meets and conventions. BANTRAK membership includes membership in the national NTRAK organization.

The BANTRAK Newsletter is the official publication of Baltimore Area N-TRAK (BANTRAK), Inc. This is **your** newsletter! Please send articles, photos, and suggestions to newsletter@bantrak.net
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