

Why model the early 1980s?

1982 is a fantastic year for modelers. **First**, all locomotives are capable of running in a push-pull configuration (even old cab diesels can be lashed up in an A-A configuration). This is a huge space saving advantage, in that your layout no longer must contain a way to turn locomotives around (turntable, Y-track, or loop) between runs. All that is necessary is a simple runaround track, which most model layouts should include anyway.

Second, this was the year many (but not all) railroads stopped using cabooses. Not having a caboose both shortens trains length, and simplifies switching. Both are important factors on a typical home layout. Yet because cabooses were still sometimes being run, their is still an option to let them make an appearance.

Third, a few major mergers had already taken place, but most roads were still separate. With only a minor deviance from real life (remember, the PennCentral merger still left a bad taste in the mouths of regulators), you could justify your favorite road remaining independent. Due to this time periods volatility, you could contrarily even believably justify merging railroads sooner, or differently (think of the Rock Island merging for example), than occurred in real life. This was also the beginning of the regional railroad boom.

Forth, the 73-74 Arab Oil Crisis and the 1981 air traffic controller strike are your friends. What if oil prices remained high? What if air traffic remained reduced? Political whim could cut subsidies to trucks and airlines, forcing both to finally compete with the never subsidized railroads on an even playing field. Piggy-back traffic would skyrocket. Intercity passenger trains would again seem desirable. Mail and express would again ride the rails (as sealed traffic though, because with modern post office automation RPOs are unnecessary).

Fifth, there was still a lot of older equipment riding the rails. You might see pre-war coaches on commuter lines. First generation diesels on freights. Trains with a mixture of tiny early 50s rolling stock and huge late 70s cars.

Sixth, Amtrak rostered an intriguing mishmash of passenger equipment, and a few railroads still continued (or had the equipment on hand to continue) operating their own passenger trains.

Seventh, it would be rather common to find both 1920s and 1960s buildings standing side by side. Of course many of the older buildings would be repurposed or neglected, but massive teardowns for new construction was only just beginning to occur. Also, the streets were filled with a wide variety of automobile shapes and sizes.

Why model early autumn?

Early autumn offers a lot of railroading interest. **First**, this is the harvest season. Covered hoppers and ventilated reefers that had been in storage for nearly a year are now needed to be quickly transported to farms in order to collect perishable grains and vegetables. This also means that maintenance equipment traffic will increase, as the railroads send work crews out to revitalize little used sidings or branch lines.

Second, merchandise shipments, including mail and express, are increasing, as businesses start to prepare for the upcoming holiday seasons (Halloween, Black Friday sales, winter inventory changeover, and Christmas).

Third, heavy industries are beginning to stockpile for the winter season. There will for example be large increases in coal and iron ore shipments, as well as a slight upturn in shipping of heating fuels and road salt.

Fourth, passenger traffic will spike. Not only will students be heading off to college, but this is traditionally the season when railroads add extra trains (or unusual cars) specifically to service special and sporting events.

Fifth, trees will still have foliage, but they will start to become far more colorful than they were in the summer.