

Splitting Long-haul Passenger Trains at a Junction

Typical smaller layouts are almost completely filled with track and structures supported by the railroad. However if you look for a railroad in the real world, you are often hard pressed to find it due to the quantity of non-railroad scenery in the area.

This simple living room sized shelf layout explores the minimalist track concept, with train watching within the surrounding scenery, rather than the servicing of industries, being emphasized. As such it would be a good layout for persons whose interests lean more towards scenery building and structure detailing. There are no freight destinations or locomotive service facilities, only a single track main line with long staging yards on each of the ends. In fact the only railroad structure is a small passenger station with uncovered platform, that is mostly there as an office and lounge for railroad employees.

The focus of the layout is the splitting and re-combining of long-haul passenger trains at a Junction. A single track coming from the West splits at a Junction into East and a Southeast single track segments. Many trains will merely pass though, but some long-haul passenger trains will use the station as a place to divide their train into separate smaller East and Southeast Trains. On their return these separate trains will again recombine here to complete their trip West.

This processes though is not always straight forward. Often cars have to be reshuffled, and sometimes cars like Diners may have to be added or left behind. Upon splitting, a locomotive needs to be added in order to pull the new train. A lone stub track is available to park a locomotive in readiness for hauling a splitting train, or for use as a place to hold a car that was dropped for adding into a different train.

Layout curves were formed from the largest sectional track pieces available, both so that the passenger cars look less toy-like on the curves, and to give the unoccupied junction a flowing visual appearance. Any 3-rail equipment could be run, as there are no curves on the layout that are tighter than O54, and there is at least one path across the layout from each staging yard that has no curves tighter than O72.

Plenty of room was made available for large freestanding non-railroad structures. Several tall dividers hide the off-stage exits to the staging yards, and the entire viewing area is intended to be backed with a suitable backdrop. The staging yards themselves are in open view, but they could be hidden behind a flip-down screen if desired. It is suggested that the baseboard under the staging yards be covered with low-pile carpeting, as there is sufficient space between the tracks to "fiddle" cars, and carpeting offers some slight protection in case of spills.

A special visual treat occurs on the East junction. The track passes between slightly obscuring scenery on the near side, and denser scenery on the far side. An example of slightly obscuring scenery might be an electrical sub-station, whereas the denser scenery could be separate small buildings. Visually the train will now appear to fade away into the scenery rather than abruptly disappearing. It also distracts from the track curving, so that the track appears to continue to be heading far more Easterly. This is also why the station building is positioned where it is, so that the track appears to head more Westerly.

Another visual treat is at the junction itself, where a #5 turnout forming the split gives the impression of the junction being a high speed thoroughfare. The Southeast leg is formed entirely from the largest sectional track curves, and due to its unobstructed layout edge location, it acts much like a "scenic curve". It is STRONGLY encouraged that the junction be flanked by signals (but these can be dummy signals for appearance purposes only).

Although a staging-to-staging design, this track plan could easily be converted into a continuous run oval by connecting the yellow Western and Southeastern staging tracks together with an O72 or wider curve.