



The Delaware & Lehigh RR

An HO line with working interchanges

BY BOB LUTZ

THE Delaware & Lehigh RR is a small point-to-point system carrying a light but steady bridge traffic. It demonstrates a practical method for actually moving cars off the railroad, rather than just simulating interchange. I've imagined that the prototype D&L was built to carry traffic from the Delaware & Atlantic RR over the hills to the Lehigh Western Ry. These connections, even as fictitious as the D&L itself, are heavy trunk lines.

The locale is the Delaware River Valley between New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and though I've taken considerable license with geography and place names, it captures the spirit of the area. The D&A corresponds to the real Pennsy at Trenton, N. J., and the LW Ry. to the Lehigh Valley at Easton, Penn. These prototypes are very large and the Delaware River is quite wide, hence the fictional license to fit them all into a small space.

I chose a point-to-point schematic as most representative of the D&L's purpose. It also requires a lot of switching at the terminals, which compensates for the short runs over the 46-foot main line. All the turnouts are well within arm's reach and can be manually operated. The two 12" turntables could also be manual, geared to small cranks in the layout face. I decided that I could tolerate the narrow aisles and the liftout section to achieve the many operational features this little hill country railroad has to offer.

As in the real Delaware River Valley, the scenery would be mainly trees on rolling green hills. I would set the 0" base elevation — water level — at 48" above the floor to provide a better side view of the trains. Some structures could be stock kits, but most would have to be kitbashed or scratchbuilt as they are only false fronts (and backs) against the backdrop.

The time is late 1950s/early 1960s, with the little D&L still using steam power and earning a modest profit. The road buys

used engines and cars and shops them itself, as new equipment would break the budget. The Bachmann Reading 2-8-0 with its wide Wooten firebox would be a good freight engine for a touch of local color.

The company-owned Coles Coal Mine is the D&L's major revenue source, but there are nine other small industries. All of these receive or ship via the two interchanges. Through or "bridge" traffic, interchange to interchange, is also important.

The industry sidings and the two interchange tracks have a total capacity of 28 40-foot cars. Still, I'd operate the D&L with no more than 18 cars on line at a time. This would leave room to maneuver, and after all, industry sidings on the prototype are never all full at the same time.

INTERCHANGE BOARDS

Interchange becomes a reality at Delaware City and Lehigh Jct. with the use of a simple gadget which I call an "interchange board." This idea can be used in any scale, wherever an interchange track runs to the edge of the layout. The drawing shows how I'd make the interchange board. Various materials could be used, and though it could be longer, as shown it holds three 50-foot cars. Don't make it too long — you might drop an armful of cars!

To use it, plug the interchange board into the layout as in the application drawing. Hold the board with one hand while you roll cars onto the board with the other. Remove the board to a storage shelf and interchange is a reality. Next time pick another board and the inbound cars won't be the same ones that went out.

The interchange board is a fiddle yard without turnouts or multiple tracks, and it gives you a way to use a lot of rolling stock without having too many cars on the track at one time. Make as many boards as you need, but always keep at least two empty.

The mine uses interchange boards too, for loads-out/empties-in operation. There could be 12 hoppers, 6 always loaded and 6 identical cars always empty. Four 3-car boards would let you rotate the loaded and empty hoppers on and off the layout.

All coal would be shipped off line, and after the D&L delivers loaded hoppers from mine to interchange, you'd roll the loads onto the board. Empty hoppers would be moved in reverse order: board to interchange, road freight to mine, and mine to board.

While freight is the D&L's lifeblood, I like to think that a railroad represents people going places. D&L operations can include a modest but frequent scheduled passenger service, with a combine-and-coach local and a gas-electric mail and express run. All in all, there's a fair amount of traffic to keep this small railroad busy. ♡

