

## **Main Line Transit: meets no FTA standards**

The is the story of an HO trolley layout, and how someone who knew nothing about anything got started, has progressed, and what is next; and something about me.

*By Richard L. Allman, MD-to his friends, Rich*

I am a physician; by training my specialty interests are Internal Medicine, Rheumatology, and Medical Ethics. Some of my writings on that subject can be referenced on Pubmed, the National Library of Medicine search engine. I work at Albert Einstein Medical Center, a large inner city hospital in Philadelphia, where I am a clinical educator, caring for patients and training medical students, residents, and post-doctoral fellows to become excellent physicians. I am a native of the Philadelphia area, though I lived in Germany for my junior year of high school, attended college in Lancaster, PA and Boston, medical school in Philadelphia, and lived in the Allentown, PA area for a total of 13 years, interrupted by a year in Boston and a year in Philadelphia. I have been married for 41 years, have 2 grown children, a beautiful 2-1/2 year old granddaughter, and am eagerly awaiting the birth of my first grandson in September 2010. My interest in trolleys has been lifelong. As a small kid, my father took me to ride the P&W Bullet cars, the West Chester Pike trolleys, and when we visited my paternal grandparents in Boston, we would ride the Humboldt Avenue cars to Dudley Station, and then catch the Washington Street Elevated to downtown Boston. I would go outside my grandparents' home to catch the trolley action on Humboldt Avenue. One time I wandered a bit afield at age 4; I walked 1-1/2 blocks to the loop by Franklin Park to see the Mattapan-Egleston cars (Type 4's) whip by, and the Humboldt Avenue Type 5's loop. My father and grandfather successfully retrieved me. Trolley stuff was part of my relationship with my maternal grandparents as well. They lived in the Kensington section of North Philadelphia. I could walk 1/2 block south on Hancock Street to Berks Street and watch the PTC Route 3 cars turning out from under the Frankford El at Front Street and head out Berks Street. The one thing my father and I missed doing in the late 1940's was a ride on the Liberty Bell cars. By the time we might have done it, they were gone. My father bought me copies of Railroad Magazine, and I promptly found my way to Steve Maguire's Car barn Comment. When I was 12 in 1955, the first organization I joined was the Delaware Valley Division of the ERA. Getting to those meetings on the fourth Friday sometimes meant taking the West Chester bus to 69<sup>th</sup> Street, then a Media or Sharon Hill trolley to Lansdowne Avenue. Later, I joined the Metropolitan Philadelphia Railway Association, and as I went through college, medical school and beyond, successively joined the Lancaster Chapter of the NRHS, the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the NRHS, and the Boston Street Railway Association. We returned to the Philadelphia area in 1984. I contacted my dear old friend and mentor Dave Cope who invited me to his home for the September 1984 meeting of East Penn

Traction Club. I joined that night. Since then, I have been a member of East Penn, having been its first elected Vice President from 1987-89 and club president from 1989 to 1991. I again served as Vice President from 2000 to 2001 when Ed Torpey was forced to resign for health reasons and President again from 2001 to 2003. I have been a co-editor of the East Penn calendar since its inception in late 1986. I co-authored the introduction to the East Penn PCC Planbook.



**Rich Allman with a portion of his layout in the background.**

Through the years, I have had the sad honor of writing obituary pieces for the East Penn Newsletter. Since childhood, I have been fascinated by trolley models. When I was 5, my father sort of “kitbashed” a railroad roof trolley from a Lionel coach; for him it was a labor of love. When I was 6, he took me to the old B&O Station in Philadelphia to see the huge O scale public display, which included some trolley operation by some who I later learned were founding members of East Penn Traction Club. Later, I had a Lionel yellow Birney, a Mantua single truck car, and when I was 13, a Pennsylvania Scale Models PCC car, that I painted Boston orange most primitively. From high school on, until my mid-30’s when my five-year-old daughter asked for a HO train at Christmas, my interest in model railroading went to the back burner. I bought her a basic, kid-proof set. Her interest was fleeting, but mine was rekindled. I was drawn to the HO European models, which were exceptional in their detail and quality, and ran beautifully right out of the box. Trolley modeling: too much skill, too much building, too much soldering, too much of everything I could not master. I was content to pursue the traction hobby as a photograph collector-chasing the historic photo treasures and visiting what systems I could. Along the way, I established friendships with some of the best of the traction photographers: Les Wismer, Ed Miller, Dave Cope, Chick Siebert, Bob Lewis, and Jim Shuman. Some of those are also recognizable as superb modelers. I went in a different direction and developed some

very solid darkroom skills, thanks to the tutelage of my longtime friend Fred Schneider, whom I met my freshman year of college. Still, the trolley-modeling itch would not go away. For reasons that can only be described as impulsive and not well thought out, I started buying HO trolleys. The madness accelerated: I started to have the cars painted. At some point, these very nice cars would need to run somewhere. I began looking for layouts. Several layouts in the **Traction Guidebook** by Mike Schaeffer (Kalmbach-1974) sort of captured my imagination, but most were either too small or too large. Finally, in the early 1990's, I settled on taking two layouts from that book and combining them into one. I took the layout on page 116-Indiana Terminal Railway and the one on page 117, Liberty Bell Traction, both figure eight layouts, put wye switches on the figure eights, and planned to put those two 9 by 5 foot layouts at a 90 degree angle and join them with a single track, roughly six foot run. I bought a bunch of lumber, made some benchwork with Homosote mounted on it, then stood back and assessed the carnage I had created. I had failed to put plywood under the Homosote. I thought I could do it on the cheap and bought a lot of brass rod for poles. I sort of had an idea regarding how much girder rail I would need, and with some gentle guidance from Dick Orr, sort of learned what I would need, including the dreaded Dremel tool. I surrendered my stinginess and bought a bunch of poles from Jason's Poles. A lot of people, including Tom O'Toole gave me advice about frogs and hangers, which I began to stockpile. I made a million excuses for the delay in construction, some legitimate, some just that-excuses. But, after the 1995 East Penn Meet, I had run out of excuses. After fits and starts, bits of laying track, I decided that even if I make errors, how many errors cannot be unmade? Also at that time, into my life came a wise, helpful, skilled and very patient alter ego, Bob Dietrich. He showed himself to be an amazing problem solver and patient teacher. Together we got the needed plywood under the Homosote, quickly got the damage to the track repaired from that retro fix, did the cookie cutter work for the grade on the layout and the necessary bracing, and over the ensuing months, got the track down, most of the gauging issues worked out, got the paving done for the girder rail (initially with the wrong stuff, that in early 2003 I dug up and replaced with more user friendly wallboard compound), gradually got the line poles screwed into place, and where needed, proper switch machines installed. By early summer of 1997, we were ready to hang overhead! Here again the gentle, patient presence of Bob Dietrich was indispensable, as was that of Gary Reign. We started the hanging on a summer night. Gary showed me the essentials of soldering hangers, placing frogs, the endless tweaking. Rather than simply do it for me, Gary forced me to learn it-and learn it correctly. Jack Spedden urged me to add more pull-offs and span poles in critical locations and by Labor Day, 1997, the layout ran! That was when I learned another bitter lesson: far better would have been to do much of the scenery before hanging wire; I did it backwards. The few odd structures on the layout were random and lacked any unifying themes. This was pointed out to me by my wife, who

made most unfavorable comparisons of my layout with Bob Dietrich's-by this time our families had become very close friends. With the passage of time, I learned several things: I love to go down and run the layout, I am borderline addicted to building new cars, I have a zero tolerance for dewirements, and I needed a theme. How I have addressed the things I have learned will occupy the remainder of this story.



**Boston Type 4 streetcar passes LVT Lightweight 1030.**

Love of operation above all else: this is my difference from Bob, whose great love is building and scenery. I have done a lot of scenery construction, but all in the service of providing background for operation.

Car building-guilty as charged. Currently I have two cars near completion, a Baltimore Brilliner 7501 and a Custom Traxx Boston ex-Dallas PCC. Like everything, much is on hold until I recover from my fractured right shoulder. I have begun very preliminary work on a Custom Traxx-Miniatures by Eric CLRV. I am awaiting the arrival of a Miniatures by Eric Pacific Electric PCC, after which I can claim to have modeled every double-ended PCC in North America. When John Kennedy of KND Enterprises releases his LVT 701 and also, the LVT 700 series deluxe cars, I will do one of each, powered with the Bowser drive with 34-inch wheels. The same applies to John's proposed Red Arrow 40 series Jewett car that I rode as a little kid. Then, Bowser is hinting of a possible Cleveland St. Louis-built PCC with the roof monitor and the elaborate paint scheme-I'll have one, please! Then a Bowser Johnstown PCC-why not!? Then, if Custom Traxx does a St. Louis 1700 series PCC-hmmm-St. Louis? Shaker Heights? San Francisco? all of them? Then if anyone does Boston Commonwealth, Tremont, or all-electric series PCC's...How about a high quality Toronto air-electric PCC? I think you get the picture, plus who knows what else will catch my fancy. Funaro & Camerlengo are threatening to produce a Conestoga

Transportation Company Curve Side car. An awful lot of wonderful Chicago cars could be tempting! I wish I could get better at, or at least learn to like better-or hate less-applying decal striping to cars-for me the traction equivalent of a root canal!

My zero tolerance for dewirements-my best friend, Bob Dietrich has urged me to lighten up, Bob rarely has dewirements on his layout, but when he does, he puts the pole on the wire and life goes on unless a pattern emerges. Not me-one dewirement and I am semi-crazed. Hanging the overhead took 5 evenings and one weekend; tweaking and perfecting it have taken 13 years, but I really have learned a lot. I have had superb advice from Bob, and also from Jack Spedden, Charlie Long, Gary Reighn, Rich Kerr, George Huckaby, and Charlie Pitts. Bob has tried to teach me tolerance and before anything else to check the misbehaving pole. To that end, he has developed a very useful jig for assuring absolutely straight application of the contact shoe or wheel to the poles. Jack taught me about span wires and pull-offs. Charlie Long taught me about use of guy wires at the frogs. Rich taught me to watch what the pole is doing when it dewires. George taught me about pole length and to keep tightening the overhead, this past winter's endeavor. Gary taught me the very basics of hanging overhead which for too long frightened me and which with time I have mastered. Charlie Pitts taught me to follow the rules meticulously and to compensate for improper tip in troublesome frogs. I wish I knew early on what I know now!

The theme for the layout: the two layouts merged as one gave me an opportunity to be thematic. The side drawn from Schaeffer's Indiana Terminal Railway became a late 1940's Pennsylvania small town. The section based on Liberty Bell Traction became a New England village, both acknowledging my roots and a lot of my interest. The two segments are joined by what became a side-of-the-road operation, a lot like I remember on West Chester Pike. Over the years I have become far more attentive to faithfully thematic buildings, nice trees, and other details to make the layout eye pleasing and logical as well as fun for me to operate. Last summer, Bob helped me add a nice backdrop to the Pennsylvania section. A backdrop to the New England section is in the planning stage.



The above photo was taken at Baystate Junction and shows a Boston Type 4 streetcar and a Baltimore PCC car.



This photo is at Keystone Junction and shows a Baltimore Brilliner and a Philadelphia PCC.

The future endeavors for the layout are coming into focus. The first task will be to add a yard for the mushrooming fleet. The yard will join the layout in the back of the New England section. I hope to organize for thematic operation: Red Arrow operation, LVT operation, Baltimore and Washington area operation, Boston operation, all-PCC operation, and all-Pennsylvania operation. A working yard with each theme easily marshaled might work quite nicely. Bob has been on my case to build a module to East Penn standards that could live attached to the yard between meets. Remember my mentioning the loop on Humboldt Avenue in Boston where the Mattapan-Egleston cars ran by? I am poised to build that! I have gotten all the necessary track and switches and hangers. All that I need is the impetus-Bob will provide that.

The work that I do in my profession is my prime obsession. The layout, officially named Main Line Transit is my principal diversion. The friends who help me with it are among my most treasured friends. Soon back to some serious car building!!!! For now, down to operate for a while.