



News from Houston N'Crowd



# THE ORDERBOARD

January/February 2022

## This issue: Spotlight on the Metroplex



*Trains and more trains in the Metroplex! Above, T-TRAK draws a crowd at the 37th Annual Dallas Area Train Show. Below, Amtrak's eastbound Texas Eagle departs Dallas Union Station, while a Trinity Railway Express train awaits its next run.*



# "GREEN EYE" - CLEAR BLOCK

by Naz Hally, President

## Welcome to 2022

"All Aboard for 2022! The BC&G Express, reserved coach and sleeper car service, now departing for the following destinations: the Greater Houston Train Show, an updated club layout at Papa Ben's, 'how-to' clinics, new product reviews, operating sessions, and more...". Hmmm, sounds like an interesting itinerary, doesn't it?

After more than a year of Zoom meetings, masking up, social distancing, jabs and booster jabs, and limited club activities, we are seeing some signs that the pandemic conditions are easing. So, we're planning club activities that will help bring back some of the fun, imagination, learning, fellowship and challenges that make our hobby enjoyable.

We're off to a speedy start to 2022. In this first column that I've written as your new club president, I'll summarize what's in store for the N'Crowd over the next couple of months. I'll also share with you a few ideas we have on activities you may enjoy participating in this year.

First stop: On Saturday, Feb. 12, our club will exhibit at the Greater Houston Train Show at the Pasadena Convention Center. We'll set up a T-TRAK layout about 32-feet long using members and invited guests' modules. The layout will accommodate both DC and DCC trains. We'll also have our usual multi-scale test track table set up for visitors to test locomotives they've purchased at the show.

I hope that many of you will be able to join us by signing up for a time slot to help staff our exhibit and test table.

Like many club layouts, our BC&G has evolved and grown with members' contributions to track work, scenery, locomotives and rolling stock. With all the changes that we can see, it's easy to overlook some of the layout infrastructure that we can't see - particularly the electrical and mechanical aspects - that enable our trains to run as well as they do.

Turnouts and switches, wiring buses and drops, LocoNet connections, power distribution panels and boosters and command stations have all seen a lot of action over the years. Our layout needs some work to eliminate known trouble spots and generally improve the train running experience.

Sometime in March, we're planning to shut down the layout - perhaps for as long as a few weeks - to make improvements and do some general cleaning and neatening up in the layout room. This work will also make future operating sessions easier to set up and carry out for all participants.

While the layout is down, we're planning to hold some 'how to' clinics at Papa Ben's. Topics we are developing so far include: basic track work, JMRI and working with decoders, weathering and painting, speed-matching locomotives, and LED lighting accessories. If you have something related to our hobby that you'd like to learn about, chances are one of our members knows a lot about it. Let's hear your suggestions for topics and we'll see what we can do.

We'll also do our best to maintain some ability to run trains - possibly point-to-point - while the repair and improvement work is ongoing. We're looking at how some sections of the layout might be powered up while adjoining sections are powered down. There will be more on this as the project timing and scope of work is finalized. We're trying to identify all the existing trouble spots on the layout, but we may not have captured everything. If you're aware of a layout problem, let me know and I'll make sure it's added to the list.

Last stop: Model railroaders are always on the lookout for new products. Have you purchased a new locomotive? Installed a new DCC decoder or downloaded a new sound file to it? Tried your hand with a scenery product or structure kit? Worked with a new throttle? If so, let's hear about it. I invite you to share a review of your experience with a product that we can publish in our newsletter. Also, if you've taken a cross-country trip by rail or have ridden on a sightseeing train, please tell us about it. And, hopefully, you took lots of pictures!

That's all I have for this run. Now, it's your turn - let's hear from you!

Naz

nazhally@houstonncrowd.org



**N'Crowd Wednesday Membership Meetings:**  
January 19 / February 16 / March 16 / April 20 / May 18  
Meetings start at 7 p.m. at Papa Ben's Train Place.

**N'Crowd Test & Tune Sessions: First Wednesday of odd-numbered months.** 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Papa Ben's.

**N'Crowd Even-Month Ops Sessions: February 6 / April 3 / June 5 / August 7 / October 2 / December 4.** Operating sessions subject to change or cancellation.



# It's show time!

Despite the ongoing pandemic, model railroad organizations are planning a full schedule of train shows in 2022.

In the Houston area, the Train Collectors Association Gulf Coast Chapter kicked off the new year by hosting the TCA Lone Star Division Winter Meet and Toy Train Show. The show took place January 8 at the Hilton Houston Westchase, and it was well-attended. While primarily a Lionel/tinplate show, a smattering of N and HO scale items were on offer.

To our north, the North Texas Council of Railroad Clubs organized the 37th Annual Dallas Area Train Show over the Jan. 15/16 weekend. For the past five years the council has sponsored two annual "Plano shows" as they are known. Our report on the recent winter show begins on page 4.

The next show in our immediate area is the San Jacinto Model Railroad Club's long-running Greater Houston Train Show, returning this year to its usual day, the second Saturday in February. N'Crowd will be participating in the Feb. 12 event at the Pasadena Convention Center with our multi-scale test track (now able to test both DC and DCC locomotives) and a T-TRAK layout.

We'll need volunteers to help out at the show, so please attend our Jan. 19 membership meeting at Papa Ben's Train Place to sign up. Watch your email for more information on our show activities.

Other shows within reasonable driving distances will be taking place during the year; see the list at right for information on some upcoming shows and events.



*The tinplate crowd showed up in force at the TCA Lone Star Division Winter Meet in Houston. Despite the focus on Lionel, your editor was able to spend a few dollars on some N-scale freight cars.*

## Upcoming Train Shows & Events

**Feb. 12:** Greater Houston Train Show, Pasadena Convention Center

**Feb 26-27:** San Antonio Model Railroad Association 46th Annual Model Railroad Jamboree, Garden Ridge Community Center, Garden Ridge, Texas

**April 9-10:** New Braunfels Model Train Show, New Braunfels Civic Center

**May 21:** Train Collectors Association Lone Star Division 44th Annual Train Meet, Garden Ridge Community Center, Garden Ridge, Texas

**June 15-19:** 2022 National N Scale Convention, Nashville, Tennessee

**August 12-14:** National Train Show, Collinsville, Illinois (St. Louis area)

**August 27-28:** Austin Train Show, Palmer Events Center

**September 17:** 2022 Galveston County Model Railroad Club Train Festival, Texas City Museum

**September 17-18:** 40th Annual Temple Model Train Show, Mayborn Civic Center, Temple

**October TBC:** 6th Annual Fall Plano Train Show, Plano Event Center

**October TBC:** New Braunfels Model Train Show, New Braunfels Civic Center

**November TBC:** East Texas & Gulf RMA 2022 Model Train Show, Port Neches

**August 21-26, 2023: NMRA 2023 National Convention and Train Show, Grapevine, Texas:**  
[www.2023texasexpress.com](http://www.2023texasexpress.com)

## Houston N'Crowd 2022 Officers and Volunteers

President ..... Naz Hally  
 Vice President ..... John Sweigart  
 Secretary ..... Bill Busch  
 Treasurer ..... Eddie Aycock  
 Board Member (2022) ..... Allan Melton

Board Member (2023) ..... Ray Byer  
 Board Member (2024) ..... Randy Ollett  
 Immediate Past President ..... Tom Marsh  
 Layout Master ..... Randy Ollett  
 Editor & Webmaster ..... Tom Marsh

# “The Plano Show”: Big Deal in Big D

by Tom Marsh

Known informally by many as “The Plano Show” due to its long run in the Dallas suburb, the annual Dallas Area Train Show has for many years been the state’s largest such event. That top spot was retained with the 37th annual show, held January 15-16 at the Plano Event Center.

As always, the show featured a variety of exhibitors and vendors, with something for everybody with an interest in model railroading or trains in general. In addition to plenty of beginning and die-hard model railroaders, including a number of Houston N’Crowd members, the show attracted families with kids of all ages. Stroller dodging techniques came into play, particularly on Saturday morning.

Vendors seemed to be doing well, judging by the activity around the ATM and the number of shopping bags with recent purchases seen. Your editor was not

immune, finding ways to be parted from his money despite his resolve going in that no newly-purchased N-scale cars or locomotives needed to accompany him back to Houston.

Clinics for both beginning and experienced model railroaders were presented both days of the show. Topics included modeling with geodesic foam; building wooden structures; designing a model railroad for operations; building more railroad in less time; and more. To top off the weekend, 10 home and club layouts were open to the public.

The Dallas Area Train Show is organized by the North Texas Council of Railroad Clubs. In addition to the January show, the group has for the last several years organized the smaller Fall Plano Train Show in early October. The fall show also takes place at the Plano Event Center.

*Three below, a good crowd turned out Saturday morning at the Dallas Area Train Show in Plano.*







*N-scale was well-represented at the Dallas Area Train Show by T-TRAK and NTRAK modular layouts. The color-coded staging yard above is operated by North Texas NTRAK. Below, a scene along the TNT Lines (Trinity NTRAK).*





*T-TRAK is fun for train lovers of all ages, as can be seen in these views of the North Texas T-TRAK Modular Railroad Club's layout at the 2022 Dallas Area Train Show.*





Below, this year's Dallas Area Train Show layout tour featured four club and six home layouts. Notable among the club layouts was this multi-organization HO Free-mo setup that included participants from Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado and Missouri.



At left, the Free-mo standard allows construction of scenes with wide sweeping curves and plenty of detail. Below, steam scene and poultry car on Mark Krause's HO GNW Railroad.



Below, two views of the nicely-done diesel service facility on the HO Texas Northern Model Railroad Club layout.



### Recognize this guy?

We ran into former N'Crowd member Michael Gulino running trains on the HO Texas Northern Model Railroad Club layout. Michael recently moved to the Dallas area to take a job with Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART).



# The Metroplex: Passenger Rail Hotspot

by Tom Marsh

Unlike other Texas cities, the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex has embraced passenger rail to help ease traffic congestion and provide area-wide transportation options. Light-rail and heavy-rail systems are integrated with extensive bus services to serve the roughly 6.5 million people living in the region.

Regional and local commuter rail services are provided by Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Trinity Metro, Denton County Transportation Authority and McKinney Avenue Transit Authority. Amtrak connects the Metroplex to its national network via the daily *Texas Eagle*, and provides daily service between Fort

Worth and Oklahoma City via the state-supported *Heartland Flyer*.

All of this action provides railfans with a variety of trains to chase and photograph. Amtrak and Trinity Rail Express (operated jointly by DART and Trinity Metro) offer conventional heavy-rail trains, while other services are handled by electric and diesel multiple-unit light-rail vehicles. Also in daily service are both modern and heritage street cars.

With planning, all of these services can be seen in one day, although for this story we took the two days before the Dallas Area Train Show to get our photos.

## DART

Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) is a regional transit agency serving 13 cities in a 700-square mile area. DART's light rail system is 93 miles long and serves 65 stations. DART operates 163 electric multiple unit light rail vehicles. Revenue service began over the first 11.2-mile system segment in June 1996.

## Dallas Streetcar

On behalf of the City of Dallas, DART also operates the Dallas Streetcar, which serves six stops over a 2.45-mile route linking Dallas Union Station with the historic Bishop Arts District. The Dallas Streetcar system operates every 20 minutes, seven days a week, from 5:30 a.m. to midnight. The service is handled by four modern streetcars.

*Right top, Dallas Union Station offers a lot of action with DART, TRE and Amtrak arrivals and departures. Freight trains also pass by regularly.*

*Right middle, a DART light rail vehicle glides into Dallas Union Station. The car has been modified with a low-step center section to facilitate boarding for wheel chairs, strollers and bicycles.*

*Bottom right, a modern Dallas Streetcar, operated by DART.*





### “Metroplex” explained

According to Wikipedia, “the term metroplex is credited to Harve Chapman, an executive vice president with Dallas-based Tracy-Locke, one of three advertising agencies that worked with the North Texas Commission (NTC) on strategies to market the region. The NTC copyrighted the term ‘Southwest Metroplex’ in 1972 as a replacement for the previously-ubiquitous ‘North Texas’, which studies had shown lacked identifiability outside the state.”

### Amtrak

The National Railroad Passenger Corp. serves the Metroplex with the daily *Texas Eagle* (Chicago - San Antonio) and *Heartland Flyer* (Fort Worth - Oklahoma City). Due to the pandemic, *Texas Eagle* service is reduced to three times per week.

### M-LINE Trolley

The McKinney Avenue Transit Authority (MATA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1983 to return heritage streetcar service to Dallas. MATA began operations with a single car in July 1989, and now operates seven cars and provides over 600,000 free rides per year over 4.6 miles of street trackage. The service links the residential/retail/leisure area of Dallas known as Uptown with downtown and DART’s light rail system. Trolleys run daily from morning to late evening (midnight on weekends).

*Dallas Union Station and Fort Worth Central Station are easily accesible locations for photographing Amtrak trains serving the Metroplex. Right top, Amtrak’s eastbound Texas Eagle prepares to depart Dallas.*

*Right middle, at Fort Worth, Amtrak’s Heartland Flyer is being readied for its 5:25 p.m. departure for Oklahoma City. The train at distant right getting all the attention is the westbound Texas Eagle. Moments before this picture was taken, the Amtrak agent announced that the train was being annulled due to mechanical problems. Passengers were put on busses for the journey to San Antonio.*

*Right bottom, MATA welcomes visitors to its trolley barn in Dallas’ Uptown district. Rosie at right, built in 1909, is the oldest trolley in daily service in North America.*





### Trinity Railway Express

TRE is the state's only heavy-rail commuter system. A joint operation of DART and Trinity Metro, TRE serves 10 stations along its 34-mile line linking downtown Dallas with downtown Fort Worth.

TRE trains run push/pull, with nine locomotives, eight bi-level cab cars and 17 bi-level coaches supporting the service. Ridership was 1.3 million in 2020. Service began in December 1996 over a 10-mile portion of the line out of Dallas Union Station. Service to Fort Worth began in December 2001.

### TEXRail

TEXRail, which is celebrating just its third birthday this year, is the newest commuter rail service in the Metroplex. Service began in January 2019. TEXRail serves nine stations over its 27-mile length between Fort Worth T&P Station and Dallas Fort Worth International Airport's Terminal B. The commuter line is solely owned and operated by Trinity Metro, which is considering a 2.1-mile extension of the line from its current terminus at Fort Worth T&P Station to the Fort Worth Medical District.

*Right top, Trinity Railway Express trains prepare to depart Dallas Union Station. The bi-level cab cars were built by Bombardier in 2003 for TRE.*

*Right middle, later in the day an eastbound train from Fort Worth has just arrived at Dallas Union Station, while on the adjacent track the next westbound departure is just a few minutes away. TRE No. 121 is an F59PH built in Canada by GMDD in 1988 for Ontario's GO Transit. No. 569 is an F59PHI built by GMDD in 2001 for TRE.*

*Right bottom, a TEXRail conductor monitors activity on the platform prior to his train's departure from Fort Worth Central Station.*







*Above, having boarded passengers, the TEXRail train seen on the previous page departs Fort Worth Central Station enroute to Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. TEXRail's Stadler FLIRT diesel multiple unit (DMU) vehicles are capable of 59 mph operation. Stadler delivered the eight DMUs rostered by TEXRail in 2017 and 2018.*

### The A-train

Operated by the Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA), the 21-mile A-train commuter line connects Denton and Dallas Counties via transfer to the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Green Line at Trinity Mills Station in Carrollton. The A-train operates Monday through Saturday, serving five stations along its route. Service began in 2011 with leased TRE Budd RDCs. The Stadler DMUs seen here entered service in 2012.

The A-train fleet consists of 11 Stadler Rail GTW 2/6 diesel-electric articulated light-rail vehicles. The cars are equipped with multiple-unit control for up to three vehicles and a crash energy management system. As such, the vehicles are the first lightweight DMUs certified to operate concurrently on a rail corridor with traditional railroad equipment.



*Above, a northbound DCTA A-train stops at Old Town Station in Lewisville. Below, a southbound A-Train accelerates away from Old Town Station trailing diesel exhaust. These days, diesel-belching commuter trains are out of favor; does this one need a tune-up?*



DCTA and Stadler sought the certification from the Federal Railroad Administration because the A-train shares trackage rights with the Dallas, Garland and Northeastern Railroad for about 10 miles along the commuter line. In a written statement, Stadler said,

“The approval of the DCTA/Stadler waiver request demonstrates that the enhanced crashworthiness and passenger protection systems inherent to DCTA’s new rail vehicles meet the latest and most stringent safety standards in the U.S.”



# LCL

*Less than Car Load: a few notes from your editor*

**Improve your prototype photography:** Here's a link to an informative article published a few years ago on the B&H Foto & Electronics website. It's worth looking at for good advice and some great train photos. Check it out at:

[www.bhphotovideo.com/explora/photography/tips-and-solutions/15-tips-for-better-train-and-railway-photos](http://www.bhphotovideo.com/explora/photography/tips-and-solutions/15-tips-for-better-train-and-railway-photos)

**What do you think?:** I need submissions from members in order to make *The Orderboard* informative and useful. Without your contributions, the newsletter is unsustainable in its current format. One alternative would be to scale back to a bare-bones publication with only club announcements and the calendar. Let me know your thoughts on what you want from *The Orderboard*.

## HOUSTON N'CROWD 2022 TIME TABLE - SUBJECT TO CHANGE

See page 3 for upcoming train shows.

### January 5

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

### January 19

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### February 6

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

### February 12

Greater Houston Train Show, Pasadena Convention Center. We'll have our multi-scale test track and our T-TRAK Division will have layout space. Volunteers will be needed to assist.

### February 16

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### March 2

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

### March 16

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### March 18-20

Indian Nations 2022 Layout Design and Operations Weekend, Tulsa, Okla. Info: <https://tulsanmra.org>

### April 3

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

### April 20

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### May 4

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

### May 18

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### June 5

N'Crowd Operating Session **To Be Confirmed**

### June 15

N'Crowd Membership Meeting, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 7 p.m.

### July 6

N'Crowd Test & Tune, Papa Ben's Train Place, 4007-E Bellaire Blvd, Houston, 6 p.m.

## THE ORDERBOARD

*News from Houston N'Crowd*

N'Crowd Model Railroad Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization incorporated in the State of Texas.

### Tom Marsh, Editor

Published fairly regularly for members and friends of

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Send newsletter contributions to:  
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Please note: We reserve the right to edit any and all submissions for clarity and length.

### Visit our Web site:

[www.houstonNcrowd.org](http://www.houstonNcrowd.org)

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