NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION
SOUTH MOUNTAIN DIVISION - FEBRUARY 2026

WHEEL REPORT

From the Desk of the Superintendent:

By Dan Mulhearn

What a wonderful time of year it is to see the snow on the cornfield and the trees shaking in the frigid breeze. Of course I am seeing that out my window as I sit and put road number decals on my Walthers Amtrak passenger cars. It really is a good time of year to be inside working on the railroad. I was remiss in last month's column in that I didn't thank Rick K and his lovely wife for hosting us in December. The snacks which we enjoyed were much appreciated. Rick's layout, which is being built, was most impressive. What Rick has done do far is very well constructed and his plans for what is to come are also well thought out. Rick is contemplating utilizing Layout Command Control (LCC). LCC is a great concept and is as revolutionizing as DCC was for the hobby. Thank you Rick.

The January Division meeting was held at the Western Maryland Historical Society in Union Bridge. Their collection of WM data is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the WM and the area they served. Thank you Jeff A for facilitating our visit. At the January meeting there was discussion of the Division's participation in the 2027 regional convention. One of the venues suggested is Gettysburg, which is in the Susquehanna Division area. I have reached out to Susquehanna Division Superintendent Alan Mende concerning what his Division might think of the location.

There was some mention of the staffing of the convention by our members; main desk, the celebration (contest) room, facilitating the clinic rooms, and other duties of hosting. I have reached out to Laura Bateman, Region convention chair, as to what the Region does and what is expected of the Division hosts.

The Chesapeake Division has informed us that they will be presenting a Zoom clinic on operations. The presenter will be Paul Weis, VP of the Operations Special Interest Group (OPSIG). The clinic will cover many facets of operating our model railroads in a prototype manner. Operating is my favorite part of the hobby. The presentation will be on February 6th at 7:30PM EST. Chesapeake Division will post the Zoom link, meeting number and passcode as the meeting gets closer [Watch SMDNMRA.org for meeting details-ed].

In the meantime, see you at the February meeting.

NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION
SOUTH MOUNTAIN DIVISION - FEBRUARY 2025

WHEEL REPORT

February Meeting:

The February SMD meeting will be hosted by Dave T in Winchester, VA. Contact southmountaindiv@gmail.com for his address and directions.
Dave's 30'x15' layout represents the Pennsylvania Railroad somewhere along the Middle Division during the steam/diesel transition era. Several distinguishing features of the PRR include a four-track mainline, stone-arch bridges, PRR towers, and a set of prototype signals. The unusual track plan includes a continuous-loop 4-track mainline running through a lower 10-track staging yard, two helixes within mountains, and a branch line.
The Wakanda Valley branch line runs in the foreground of the PRR mainline and features a yard/servicing facility, station connected to the PRR, two villages, several mines and industries, a coal processing plant, and an interchange with the locally famed Barneytown & Scupperville RR. The layout is about 63.5% sceniced.
Following the business portion Dave will present his recent investigation into using switch lists to control operations.
As usual, the meeting starts at 2:00 p.m.

Reminder:

SMD membership meetings are always the 2nd Sunday of the month at 2 p.m. The only exception is due to Mother's Day in May, which will take place one week later, on the 3rd Sunday.
Please consider hosting a meeting sometime during the 2025 - 2026 program year. Email southmountaindiv@gmail.com. We try to avoid back-to-back repeat visits so if you have never hosted, or it has been a year or so since you did, give it a thought.

Meeting Hosts Needed:

As of this writing we do have a tentative meeting host signed up for April of 2026. We need volunteers to step up as hosts. Your layout doesn't need to be large, or finished, or even operational. Without hosts we cannot hold our meetings. Repeat hosts (within the past year) are okay but we really would like to see some layouts that we have not visited for a couple of year or never seen at all.
If you would like to host, or have any questions concerning hosting please contact your Division superintendent at southmountaindiv@gmail.com.

Mini-Clinics:

It has long been the policy of the SMD to present mini-clinics at each meeting. In some cases clinics are conducted by the host. However, not every host is in a position to do so. We are asking for members to volunteer to develop and present mini-clinics at meetings to fill these gaps.
If you can to do a mini-clinic please contact your Division superintendent at southmountaindiv@gmail.com.

Elections:

Hard to believe but it is time to be thinking about our Division officers for the next program year. We need to vote on new officers at the April meeting, which means the slate needs to be introduced at the March meeting. We are seeking nominations for all positions: Superintendent (president) and Clerk/Paymaster (secretary/treasurer). This link https://portal.smdnmra.org/2024/12/08/division-job-board/ provides a list and description of Division leadership roles, as complied by Alex P (who will not be able to continue as acting clerk during the coming program year).
If you want to lead or nominate someone please contact your Division leadership at southmountaindiv@gmail.com.

2027 MER Convention:

The SMD is getting set to host the October 2027 MER convention. The exploratory committee has identified potential hotels in both Hagerstown, MD and Gettysburg, PA. While Gettysburg has nice facilities, it is both outside of our Division (Susquehanna) and a longer distance from most of our members. This could create an issue with layout tours.
We are taking a survey to determine what layouts would be available for convention tours and operations. If you would be willing to open your layout please contact your Division leadership at southmountaindiv@gmail.com.

NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION SOUTH MOUNTAIN DIVISION - FEBRUARY 2026

WHEEL REPORT

Notes from the Editor:

By Ron Polimeni

This month we are introducing two new columns for your Wheel Report. This newsletter is intended to be a place for SMD members to share as a community. Our shared interest in model building and railroads has brought us together. In the interest of expanding the scope of the Wheel Report we will be instituting a Q&A column where members can assist each other in solving problems. Have a problem that's vexing you. Send it in. It will be posted in "The Rerailer". Those who feel they can be of help can send their responses. The response will be published in the next issue of the newsletter. Among the membership of the SMD there is a wealth of talent in information. Hopefully, through the Wheel Report, we can make good use of it.

We will also be instituting a column to be known as "Tracks n' Trains", devoted to the sharing of modeling tips, techniques, projects and anything rail oriented that members would like to share. Whatever you're currently working on or doing, take some pics, write it up and send it in. In this manner we can all share in what other members have been up to. Model railroading is really about sharing the hobby and the camaraderie to be found in sharing the hobby with others.

Changing topic, I will be contacting various members in the interest of setting up shows such as that which we held at Hobbytown last year. The purpose of these shows will be to replace the Mini-Con with a means to engage the public. Most folks have no idea what model railroading really is. If we can engage the public that can only be a plus for the hobby. Thoughts and questions can be directed to me.

Contact Ron and Bob through the Division email, southmountaindiv@gmail.com.

Wheel Report Content:

We are always looking for Wheel Report content from the membership. Articles addressing prototype railroading (including your experiences while visiting a prototype location) and model railroading (how you designed / built your layout, modeling structures, model railroad operations, etc. All of this adds interest to your Wheel Report and builds membership enthusiasm.

Going forward we are introducing two new recurring columns that address various aspects of the hobby.

NATIONAL MODEL RAILROAD ASSOCIATION SOUTH MOUNTAIN DIVISION - FEBRUARY 2026

WHEEL REPORT

Wheel Report Submission Guidelines:

If you would like to submit an article please email southmountaindiv@gmail.com. Wheel Report editor Ron Polimeni would like articles formatted in a Microsoft Word compatible file or pasted into the body of the email. Please do not submit PDF files. Pictures for articles should be attached to the email, with their corresponding captions clearly labeled with each picture's file name so they can be matched to each image. Do not paste images into a Word document. All submissions and pictures must be the property of the author to be considered for publication.

Renew On Line:

You can renew your NMRA membership on line at the following link;
https://www.nmra.org/store/membership
Remember that your National membership automatically includes membership in both the Mid-Eastern Region and the South Mountain Division and you will receive the NMRA Bulletin electronically on a regular basis. Membership is a requirement for insurance purposes but guests can attend one or two meetings without joining. There is also a trial membership category available at a reduced cost.

SMD Officers and Officials:

Superintendent:	Dan Mulhearn
Clerk/Paymaster:	Ray Price
Webmaster/Digital Assets Manager:	Tom Fedor
Wheel Report Publisher:	Bob Johnson
Wheel Report Editor:	Ron Polimeni
Wheel Report Assistant Editor:	Andrew Dodge, MMR
Division Achievement Program Coordinator:	Jane Clarke

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SOUTH MOUNTAIN DIVISION - FEBRUARY 2026

WHEEL REPORT

ReRailer:

From time-to-time various members of the Division have been asked "how do I do that" questions by other members. The purpose of this new column is to provide a forum where members can ask questions of the entire Division. Submitted questions will be published and any Division member can respond. The answers will be published in the following month's Wheel Report and at SMDNMRA.org for the edification of the entire Division.
It is asked that both questions and answers be submitted not later than the 15th of each month. Questions/answers submitted later than that date may not be printed until the following month. When the staff was discussing the concept of the "Rerailer" a couple of questions that they had been asked were brought up, so we are presenting them here to get things started.

1. How does one make smooth transitions from a grade to a flat surface and vice versa so that cars and engines stay coupled and on the track?
2. I live in an apartment, so what is a good ground cover material that does not make a mess like plaster?
3. Do all H0 scale couplers work with each other?

If you can help answer any of these questions please submit your responses to southmountaindiv@gmail.com. We all have questions and this is your opportunity to help your fellow Division members.

Tracks N' Trains:

A Weekend Trip to Marysville PA – Submitted by Jane C.

For My husband's birthday we spent the weekend at the Bridgeview B&B in Marysville, PA. If you are not familiar with that town, it is just outside of Harrisburg, PA near the Enola Yard. The inn is located almost under the famous Rockville bridge. It caters to railfans of all ages. There is a heated sunroom which faces the bridge where you can watch trains from a comfortable chair. They even supply binoculars!
We shared this space with two pairs of dads with sons and a couple of single men. The young guys spent most of the time outside; the rest of us were content inside. The kids were keeping track of how many Heritage Units they had seen. The Erie one came by while we were there. You can track them with the Heritage Units app on Google or Apple Play.

SUPPLEMENT

Draft Meeting Minutes – 11 JAN 2026

Division members met at the Western Maryland Historical Society museum in Union Bridge, MD. Superintendent Dan Mulhearn called the meeting to order at 2:23pm with 21 members in attendance. The Superintendent thanked Jeff A and the Museum staff for hosting the Division.

- December minutes were approved with a correction to old business (Pete and Jane Clark were incorrectly cited as hosting the January meeting rather than the March meeting).
- Paymaster provided his report on the treasury, but the amount was not recorded. No significant changes from December's report, regardless.

Old Business

- Ron Polimeni makes a motion to formally elect Alex Polimeni as clerk for the remainder of the year. The motion is seconded and carried. SMD will still need to elect a new clerk before the 2026-2027 year begins, however.
- Bill M raised the issue of the 2027 MER convention, which SMD has been asked to host. Bill, Alex P, and Steve K had previously volunteered to scout possible venue locations. Bill provided a comprehensive report, citing a catch-22 that hotels require more information than we can provide before gathering enough information to vet a hotel.
- Bill asks if Gettysburg is too far outside of the Division, as Hagerstown is our center point. Discussion followed that Gettysburg is outside of SMD's boundaries. Consensus appeared to be that the Convention should be in SMD territory. It was also discussed that Gettysburg is more than an hour's commute from Hagerstown.
- Previous MER convention hotel in Hagerstown has been renovated and split into two hotels, and the convention center on the east side is in good shape.
- Discussion follows about parsing out what responsibilities lie with the Division and with MER. Gary Brown and Kirk Bateman(?) are cited as good points of contact with MER.

New Business

- Superintendent called upon AP Coordinator Jane Clark to provide a report. Jane reported that there has been chatter about an AP category for modules.
- SMD publisher Bob Johnson raised ideas for Wheel Report newsletter content. Suggestions included a "help line" with a single person responsible for sourcing answers from Division membership, as well as articles based on former Mini-Con clinics.
- It was also mentioned that articles can count toward AP certificate progress.
- Articles can be submitted to the Division email address.
- Discussion followed of what constitutes a good article, including prototype historical articles.
- Discussion of remaining SMD meetings and hosts concluded the meeting.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded, and carried at 2:55. The Superintendent then yielded the floor to the museum for self-guided tours.