

PART 1 - PROTRAK BASICS

Introduction

In this first part of this document you will learn how to set up a very simple railroad including:

- Creating the railroad files;
- Defining the stations on the core segment (initially there will only be one subdivision);
- Setting up staging yards and a main yard at one other location;
- Defining trains;
- Defining customers;
- Setting up rolling stock;
- Setting up waybills;
- Running a few operating sessions; and
- If cars are not being moved correctly, finding out why and then making the necessary changes.

In the second part of the document we will add a branch line and get trains moving to industries there.

As is the case in most learning situations, it is better to start out with simple things and add things as you go along. It is very tempting, once you see how to do one task (adding cars to the file, for instance), to add everything of that nature. It is much harder to troubleshoot and understand why cars aren't moving properly when you have entered 250 cars, 22 trains, 87 industries, 3 branch lines and 500 waybills, than it is with 20 cars, 4 trains, 5 industries and 30 waybills. With that in mind, let's start creating a new railroad.

First let's talk, in general, about the railroad that we're going to be working with. The railroad is called the ProTrak Demonstrator Railroad (we'll call this our railroad) and interchanges with a class 1 railroad – in our case we'll use BNSF. Since we don't have space to create all of the cities that will ship or receive products that are required by or produced by the industries on our railroad, using ProTrak we'll create staging yards to represent these cities and off line industries.

Figure Intro-1 below is a drawing showing the main elements of our railroad. Starting on the right-hand side is East Staging. Next is Castle Rock where there are four industries. This is followed by JT Junction which is where our branch line will take off, Berwick where there are two industries, Actonvale where there are again two industries as well as a three track yard and finally West Staging.

We've described the stations in the east to west order since that is the way we'll be setting them up in ProTrak.

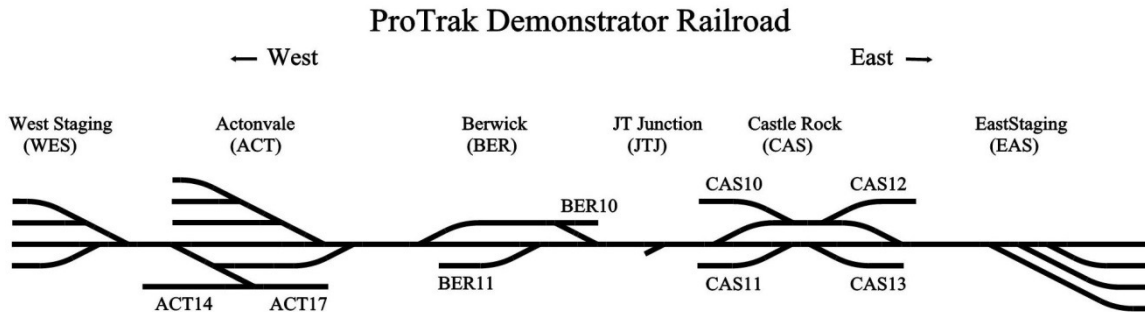


Figure Intro-1

We'll expand upon this as we go, but that's enough information to get us started. A note about terminology here: I've used the term 'industry' to refer to the sidings on the railroad but as you will see as we work through the manual, a siding may actually have more than one industry on the siding. Now let's actually sit down at the computer and start setting things up.

If you have read "The Recipe Book" which has been part of the ProTrak documentation for a number of years, we're going to follow it as we do the setup. Where what we do differs from The Recipe Book, it is because something has changed since it was written, or from other's experience, it seems to make more sense to do it the way we are doing it here.

This manual assumes you are working with a new installation of ProTrak, updated to the build shown in the Forward. As you work through the manual, depending on what version of Windows you are using, you may notice some differences in the look of the various screen shots. Because this manual was started prior to the release of Windows 7, some of the screen shots were taken while ProTrak was running under Windows XP and others while ProTrak was running under Windows 7. The differences are purely cosmetic and will have no impact on the way ProTrak runs.

Before you get started, if you haven't already done so, we recommend that you print off all the tables in Appendix B and the reports in Appendix G and keep them handy.

As you start to work with the various ProTrak windows, you'll see that there are a variety of colors used in the backgrounds of the labels and data fields. A brief description of these and what they signify is shown in Appendix D, along with examples.

A few more notes.

First, in many cases, the window you will be working in will have data displayed in the right hand portion of the window (we refer to it as the right-hand panel). This data will change, depending on which data field your cursor is on in the left hand panel. You may notice a difference between what you see in this manual, and what you see on your computer screen, and this is likely due to differences as to where the cursor was when the screen shot was taken and where your cursor currently is. As long as the data on the left hand side of the window matches what is in the manual, it is safe to proceed.

Second, you will come across text in the manual which is followed by, or preceded by three periods (...). This signifies that there is additional text following (or preceding) the text quoted.

Third, in some cases you may come across a footnote at the bottom of the page which appears to be incomplete. If this happens the balance of the footnote will be on the following page. This is caused by MS-Word trying to keep the footnote on the same page as the footnote reference. If MS-Word is unable to put the entire footnote on page 1 it simply carries over to page 2. Unfortunately, the split footnote issue is not something I can easily control.

Fourth, the data that you see when you first start to work with a subject, stations for example, may not be exactly as shown in the manual. Over time Jim has made changes to some of the default data that is put in place when you create a new railroad so, depending on what build of ProTrak you are using you may see a discrepancy – a different name, a different number of entries, etc. With the exception of Jim, those of us involved in the creation of this manual get no compensation so I've made a decision to leave what appears in the manual as is. The only exception to this rule is in circumstances where Jim has made changes to a particular screen to add additional items. As a result you may need to edit things to delete an entry or to change a name, etc.

Finally, while in most cases, as you follow the steps in this manual you should see on your computer exactly what is shown in the manual, there may be variances, particularly when running operating sessions. This discrepancy appears to be outside our control. A question was asked of Jim early on about this. Here's a paraphrase of the question and Jim's answer:

Q: When a person has read and entered the data as outlined in the early chapters and entered everything correctly as the manual says, when he runs a session will the same outcome result that is shown in the manual?

- A. In theory yes, but based on running parallel sessions with people, no. My experience is that even the first session may be somewhat different.

One of the greatest puzzles, in providing support to ProTrak users is that, if I do "X", and the user does (or at least says he does) "X", why do I get "Y" while the user reports he got "16". This is with me using the data that the user has supplied.

Index. Before we get on with setting up the railroad a word about the index at the end of the manual. Included in the index are references to individual ProTrak windows such as the "Operate on another Railroad" which is the first one you will see in Figure 1-1 below. These references appear twice – once under the displayed window title and once under the group heading "ProTrak Windows". Where the reference occurs under the displayed window title, the entry will end with "(W)" to signify that this is a window and not a word or phrase in the text.

In order to be reasonable in these index entries, normally only the first occurrence of the window will be shown. It does not seem to make sense to record the three different occasions where the "Setting up Station" window occurs in Chapter 2. There are two exceptions to this rule:

- a) If the window has some significant change (new datafields have appeared for example), that occurrence will be shown;
- b) If the window appears in more than one chapter, the first occurrence of the window in each chapter will be recorded.

Two last notes about the ProTrak Window entries. In some cases the end of the window title has been omitted. This situation occurs when the displayed window title includes things that are variable. Things that are variable includes things such as a date or a reference to a record number (15 of 17 for example). The other item to be aware of is that when the displayed window title includes a colon (:) it has been replaced by a dash (-). "Session Windup: Special Car Movements" becomes "Session Windup - Special Car Movements". Since MS Word uses the colon for a specific purpose when doing index entries, it is not possible to use the colon in an index entry.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

From time to time it is likely that you will have a question about something that ProTrak does. Appendix L contains a number of FAQs together with the responses to the questions. In some cases either the question itself and/or the answer to the question(s) will have been edited and merged to make one question and one or more answers since the answer to the question may depend

on the situation. Where possible, an indication of where to look in Appendix L will be given. Regardless of whether there is a reference to a specific section or item in Appendix L, it may be useful, if you come across something you don't understand or are not sure what to do or where something is not going as you expected, to look at Appendix L. Appendix L has its own index so you can look at the index to see if any of the FAQs will help you out. Appendix L also has its own Table of Contents and the entries are specific enough to help find answers.