

Open Tech Department Meeting, 1PM July 5 2005; informal notes by Bob Jacobsen

Rutger Friberg: Agenda has 13 items, pretty much standard issues. (Shows slide)
Introduces self as outgoing technical department chair, there will be new one after convention. Had fantastic experience restructuring technical department. Up to 50 officers, will go into more later.

Yesterday heard that Bob Standley of module standards passed away, miss him, contributed a lot to the modular standards. He provided initial standards 1 1/2 years ago, hope somebody will continue.

Any other business to add to list?

Ames: Consumer group?

Friberg: will put in AOB at end

Introduction of attendees:

- Brian Barnt
- Larry Madson
- Joe Brann
- Gene Jamison
- Ed McCamey
- Rich Weyand
- Malcolm Alberry
- Paul Latour
- Ed Majury
- Stan Ames
- Dick Bronson
- Bob Jacobsen
- Didrik Voss “working on the consumer group”
- John Roberts “as an observer, will name Rutger’s successor in short order”

(Address list / signup sheet handed around)

Friberg: Want to finish up by 3PM, as busy then, and convention needs the room.

Report from BOD meeting. (Shows list of current org chart dated 6/2) Will walk through new structure.

DCC IMG has two new coordinators – Brian Barnt and Michael Greene, both former chairs of the Working Group. We then decided to make representatives from industry – Bill Ataras, Fred Severson plus European members David Nicholson & Juergen Linder of ESU. Plus DCC Europe position for Reinhard Mueller because Jan Abbink is changing business and asked to step down. Plus Alfred Capek, a DCC

engineer who wants to start DCC Tech Center. Budget now approved, task now for next Tech department chair.

(Points to Special Standards Organization on slide) Under mechanical, large scale was coordinated by Stan, now Gary Raymond. Trying to make small scale standards a stronger group.

(Show slide of report to BOD) Read through numbers on size of technical department. Major target was stronger central administration, US based. Wanted to get in and out several years ago, but still here. Will go home tomorrow, so this is last session.

(Michael Greene arrives)

Needs to be US based US culture, US English for next year.

(Charlie Vik arrives)

Three tech chair deputies in place. Before he arrived, the previous chair had unexpectedly passed away, so clear that had to rebuild from white sheet of paper. Needed deputies in each position, glad to have knowledgeable people.

Budget administration important, not had real budget in past. Important to budget for tools, etc; must keep up with increasing sophistication of manufacturers.

C&I reinforcement: 5 years ago, huge backlog. Generally better, though some issues due to lack of decisions being executed, asks Mike (Greene) to comment later. Just a year ago, implemented new C&I test policy and new Scale Rails guidelines. Test equipment plans for next budget year from September. BOD has approved investment in test equipment.

Mechanical – strong team in place, revised S1-S4 standards that were 30 years old, due to ongoing changes.

Some work done in large-scale coordination. Not a simple case due to cemented interest in scales, gauges with user communities: LGB, Marklin, etc. hard to unify or even label with letters, etc. Stan has worked on this, people very committed, but so far not much willing to change.

DCC – tomorrow will dig into tech stuff. DCC Europe coordination at full speed, preparing meetings to balance the American meetings. Mostly US here this time, though ZTC, Zimo, ESU expected to visit here. Europe preparing for next year's meeting – manufacturers are lining up to host there, see advertising value in doing that. Next meeting now planned for Marklin, discussions have started. DCC Europe meetings organized by Europeans.

Have temporary Interim Management Group for DCC work, will come back to this subject.

MOROP liaison team in place and discussing. Primary aim is technology harmonization. They've adopted DCC, created some technologies we use. Language is an issue, as is inch vs metric. We have regular people at MOROP tech meetings.

Issues review group: Some start. Track plus flanges; vertical curves. Continuing issue of environmental – what is glue, what is paint, home much emissions. Just the beginning. Maybe some of these issues fit in consumer department.

McCamey: Handbook says issue review group handles joint resources, like Technical Report numbering, etc, and other basic common administration

Friberg: New issues coming up, new questions, get channeled to this group. Even if we haven't used full capabilities yet, glad it's in place.

Investment & budget – finalized 2nd budget, will take back to managers.

Tech handbook – Asked Ed & Joe to handle, appreciate their stepping up. But not done yet. Subject dear to him, wants to pass on effort to next chair. First created in 1940, have had four different handbooks. Just to scan it was a major issue. Starting new effort is major effort. Have come far enough to create new draft. But don't want to just create another historical document. Have typical paternalistic thinking. Why not put on web? Could be one solution, as outgoing chair will not decide this. But he would like this to be a tool to increase membership.

Weyand: Ultimately, web needs members only section for that. (Much murmuring of approval)

McCamey: Now in conflict with executive handbook, e.g. Tech Reports held within Technical Department. Also executive handbook has old standards. Legal issues to work through.

Roberts: Working on this, want to get away from being restrictive

Weyand: Stop playing secret squirrel

Robert: Not recently doing that

McCamey: I was told I couldn't get the executive handbook

Roberts: I'll give anybody the whole book. Why secret?

McCamey: Told that it dealt with other stuff, outside tech dept

Roberts: Well, don't want it going to membership as a whole

Weyand: But if only categories are "Board" and "everybody", you're stuck.

(Simultaneous discussion of various examples from past)

Friberg: Distributed parts of tech handbook already. Holding meeting with MMRs later on today, will hand out some copies. Have more (shows CDs) But doesn't want to cause too heated discussion.

McCamey: Yahoo group was only part of Tech Dept. Files are there, very convenient, but only 26 or 31 people are on there.

Voss: Invited all in tech dept, but only about 50% return. Asked people via Tech Dept alias, etc.

Roberts: Issue of which site to use. NMRA.org list owner won't accept virus risk, but will move this list to new server at Chattanooga that will do attachments.

McCamey: Tech dept needs to communicate internally, but neither system works right now.

Friberg: Moving on. (Passes out a few CDs)

2006 outlook:

- 1) further decentralized function in tech dept
- 2) explore invoice-based C&I services. People send in early version of decoder, get extensive report, fix issues and repeat. Costing them nothing. Got Board approval to explore a more business concept of charging for this
- 3) Explore international tech cooperation. People from Australia, New Zealand have approach him & want to be more involved. Also UK.
- 4) Complete the US-based administration

McCamey: Beyond 2006, international needs to better connect to MRIA and manufacturers outside electrical and DCC

Friberg: Asks Roberts to comment

Roberts: Allen Pollock has been Industrial Liaison for 10 years or more, coordinating on points like you're raising here. Has contact in all the larger companies. He's the guy we should position to act on some of the things outside of DCC.

Vik: Isn't that too formalistic? Look back in history, 3 legged stool: modelers; journalists who were modelers, like Al Kalmbach; manufacturers who were also modelers. But we're driving manufacturer's people out now.

Roberts: Why Allen is doing this? NMRA had nobody talking to manufacturers. Model isn't flawless, but trying to make it work by having Allen working on this. He's trying to put the right people in touch with each other.

Vik: These are not big companies.

Roberts: But people turn over, etc.

Friberg: Asks Michael Greene to talk about C&I.

Greene: Last few years were rebuilding. Mechanical inspection sheets that were decades old, etc. Trying to build standard, repeatable process, starting on mechanical side. 2nd, reduce backlog, which had been 8 months in some areas. All volunteer, but needed something that could be counted on by manufacturers.

Initiative from Scale Rails: Board policy that reviews need warrants. Somebody on Scale Rails staff now doing check-list of inspection for review process, with C&I just doing review of check sheet. Once training in place, went smoothly. Also trying to make new inspection sheets when SR has new item for new scale, etc.

Trying to be careful about conflicts: No financial relationship. No longer get to keep product, etc. Micke had heard stories when he got involved of people requesting a particular road name for testing, etc, now believes that he's gotten that out of the system.

Three products in house for testing now, two of those taking a little long, both DCC. Completely current on mechanical side.

Roberts: Past issue of manufacturer with football on box & start using box for product without warrant.

Greene: Came up again last quarter. Talked to manufacturer. All manufacturers will to work with us on this, and we work it out.

Roberts: Another example of dealing with manufacturers

McCamey: C&I rejuvenated as mostly DCC, but now starting to see more mechanical

Voss: Recent loco review discussed issues about use of decoder in loco where older decoder was OK, newer supersonic decoder was not. Review said talk to decoder manufacturer for resolution. But should it have even gotten a warrant?

Stan: need suppression circuits in locomotive to sell worldwide. Nothing in RP to say where they go, so if you call Bachmann they'll say to cut them off. Some decoders are designed to work with them, some are not.

Friberg: Can we hold specifics for DCC meeting tomorrow?

Alberry: C&I voluntary if you want to carry NMRA logo?

Friberg: I've never heard of anybody requiring that you even put on logo (various nodding of heads)

Bronson: But new bidirectional DCC standards imply you have to have warrant to use that standard. (exclamations of surprise, disbelief)

Greene: Some RPs in process have intellectual property from other places. Way RP is written is that if you get warrant, NMRA can grant license. Otherwise, you need to go to patent holder.

Alberry: But this defeats purpose of RPs

Vik: Completely defeat purpose of RP

Friberg: Some differences of opinion. We want to clean this out. Really related to bidirectional communications.

McCamey: But as policy....

Friberg: Only bidirectional now!

Alberry: MERG builds for hobbyists

Friberg: But there are selling kits, so have some commercial aspects. This meeting has made clear that we need to pay more attention to this issue. Must inform his follower that this is clear.

Roberts: Two patents have been donated, license free if using for model railroad purposes. Ames, Bernd have also donated patents.

(Multiple discussions about terms, too fast to follow, for about two minutes)

Roberts: Still have some flux in final wording on agreements.

Bronson: Control that wording?

Roberts: Not control, but general counsel is negotiating.

Bronson: Made suggestion, didn't hear anything back.

Roberts: Now negotiating. Patent owners don't want money, want to benefit model railroaders, but want some control over how these are used.

Alberry: This has got to come down on the side of the hobby.

Friberg: But cannot ignore their lawyers

Weyand: Some benefit to avoiding tweaking, esp. for people with large market share.

McCamey: issue with RPs as an adjunct to standards beyond DCC. RPs in DCC are “mandatory if implemented”, but not in mechanical. Not just a patent issue, but goes beyond to how we handle RPs

Barnt: Standards are min requirements, RPs are max requirements.

In DCC we say “you don’t have to implement RP, but you can’t violate it”

Mechanical doesn’t have same requirement to “comply with all applicable RPs”

Greene: Looks at RPs in mechanical C&I, but doesn’t consider them in issuing of warrant

Weyand: (comment on how wording should be done, too fast to get exactly)

Friberg: The way mechanical standards work is the way it has always been done. My interpretation is that standards & RPs electrically are much more interlocked. Can’t really separate so well in DCC. In standards, we don’t go much into how functions work, but RPs do.

Jacobsen: Example of boxcar: Mechanical C&I does not need RP25 wheels, but in DCC since it has wheels, they have to be RP25.

Ames: No, it’s based on claims. This is because it’s not obvious what features are included. E.g if you do a feature, you have to do it right.

?: In other words, the wheels would have to be RP25 in that example.

Ames: Well, yes, but...

Bronson: As modeler, expect that seal means everything complies, had been misunderstanding the role of mechanical RPs like RP25.

McC. Right, and cause of much problems, “RP-25 like” wheels. Real RP25 wheels won’t work with some track that meets standards, so often not used.

Friberg: All agree standards must apply. Need to make better understanding of these things. Surprised that this has not been brought forward, (several protests) Please understand that this a volunteer organization, and not all issues are resolved.

Barnt: N scale gauges: Out of them, and die is worn out. Asked two people if they'd review drawings so more can be made.

Also drawing for O scale gauge. Current gauges based on 1979 standards, and there have been changes.

Roberts: Minority scale, in terms of number we can sell. 7K\$ die investment for 300 gauges; consider laser cutting the gauges to save that investment.

McCamey: who's handling future gauges, e.g. proto and fine, who talk to? (Barnt volunteers)

Do we need an official position for "gauges" on org chart?

Friberg: Add to minutes and decide in future.

Barnt: As laser test, made Nn3 gauge. Need those? Other?

McCamey: (Mentions several quickly, rapid discussion of how to review specifics)

Vik: Recognition of defacto standards? Example of Rapido coupler, Microtrains coupler, #5 coupler in HO. This is real world, and we have to deal with that

Friberg: Looked at old minutes. Issue comes up, but nothing happens. Patent has expired. Reason we have new organization is that issues like this can come up and be resolved. New issues can go to issues review group.

Vik: In N scale, to attract people to NMRA, have to address couplers, deep wheels and code 80 rail. Have to address existing marketplace & help people doing modeling today.

Friberg: Requesting N scale provide a document & submit to Kurt Kramke, for him to decide if he has resources.

Weyand: Or just do this in N scale; late HO follow later if needed.

Friberg: Moving to Electrical/DCC/Software. Ask for short review. (Barnt defers to Greene)

Greene: Back in March, Rutger created Interim Management Group membership. Specific request to look at what's going on in DCC space & recommend direction on approach. Just pulled together now, some discussions, but not a lot. Lots of issues.

Trying to move forward some actions in DCC space. Made substantive progress since spring meeting in bidirectional space. Asking for input on more functions now, manufacturers have provided.

Barnt: Issue of electrical connectors for modules, Larry working on it.

Larry: Cinch Jones harder to get, issue keep arising & it is being discussed. New connector now becoming popular "Anderson Power Pole" Up to 45A. Ntrack has proposed changing over to it. Hub Division changed over in two weeks, quite happy. Cinch was spec'd good for 100 insertions, there are better. Wants to propose an RP to use these. Ntrack member has written document with all the needed info. In common use for ham radio, RC batteries, etc. Available at stores.

McCamey: And at same time remove old connectors from standard, so not in conflict.

Friberg: Thank you, but we need to move on

Barnt: Anybody in mind for replacement for Bob Stanley?

Friberg: Not yet, this is his area, but seems enough of a concensus to move forward on RP.

Must add points regarding DCC. IMG not intended to be permanent. Want a normal Working Group in the long term. IMG was necessary so there would be no lack of short term management.

It has been his intention, addressed in letter to the Board about future of Yahoo web. Too many people say they want to quit email group because it involves too much non-technical flames. Proposed five points for rules on how yahoo web (runs). Purely discuss technical issues – all others need to take place somewhere else.

McCamey: That's moved to DCC SIG list

Friberg: Just proposed a way to improve technical development.

There have been rumors that we will not allow users as members. Has not made such a decision; has made proposals on how to deal with growing group. With so many people having a final say, it takes too long. Proposed a way to meet, so that direct conversation can again reach fast decisions.

Need a way to deal with popular group that has people asking to join almost every day.

Last, has received emails saying that there is a movement in Europe to isolate US manufacturers. 25-27 manufacturers in Europe. Have not heard such things, ever. Quite a harmony at the meetings. Meetings are a key, but have in both US and Europe to allow for smaller companies with limited budgets to contribute. Just wrong to think, say, that there's an attempt to split. Everybody wants one set of rules so that users can benefit

Standards & RPs, said enough?

Issues review group have any issues? A little bit in its infancy, but important.

Technical handbook questions?

McCamey: Please review and make comments! Conflicts exist, but still need to be resolved. Should Tech Reports be private?

Friberg: Right time to send a proposal to Ed Liesse for his consideration.

Roberts: Don't want to have things going on here to cause trouble. Stay here until they're ready to be presented. Don't want people to be pushing barbs based on talking points.

McCamey: Drafts have editing issues, should stay with workers. But finished TR should be available to members. 85% of old TRs were in Bulletin anyway, that's how they were re-found.

But please help make comments. Want to make this a process-level document, put details in historical part.

Friberg: Last point – consumer group.

Voss: Want to turn tech expertise from passive operation into active operation for benefit of members. On products with or without warrants. People say standards great, but what have you been doing lately? PR thing, but still important.

Start by collecting info into a database or some other way of keeping the info and making it available in the future. Just start accumulating info, finding issues that recur, moving toward starting to do a Consumers Union thing.

Roberts: (??) suggested something on web site where people can ask questions, advantage to members. Provide a way to get NMRA answers.

Weyand: Have such a thing now, dozens of questions

Roberts: Right or left side, really visible

Weyand: Goes back to user vs member web, etc

Concerned about relations with manufacturers. Has board approved?

(Multiple conflicting comments)

Roberts: Discussed, approved as a project to investigate

Weyand: Does dept have authority to move ahead without Board approval?

Roberts: Yes

Weyand: This is a policy issue. If authorized, he'll ask BOD members to reconsider. Manufacturers aren't members now, and we're going to take the last bridge to them and dynamite it.

Roberts: BOD has not decided that such a proposal can be implemented

Weyand: Can we go public with such a thing without BOD approval?

Roberts: No

Voss: Somewhat public, as in Bulletin already

Vik: Tech dept involves interchange. But this is issues like marketing. Don't want some MMR telling the world that model X stinks, even though he doesn't know what he's talking about.

Standards not done, we're not Underwriter's Lab, and no business moving beyond yet.

Don't want somebody whining "They don't put dates of use"; that's a marketing decision, not something to get into. Kalmbach does, causes somebody at Kato to have to reply & you really don't want to get involved.

Roberts: Make sure your comments get to Didrik

Voss: Issues raised, fine line. But goal is not to complain, but just identify issues for modelers.

Vik: But you're talking about individual user complaints. Hard to really understand cause of these – car, track, expectations wrong?

Friberg: pros and cons of such an initiative, must be looked at clearly. Is this a good service to members or not?

Weyand: Best service is to put modelers in touch with specific person in company so they can work it out.

Vik: Tony Koester's idea of acting as a portal.

Friberg: Portal may or may not be right idea. We may or may not want to be advocates.

Weyand: We don't want to make judgement call as to cause. Once you make that decision, you're in an adversarial relationship.

Vik: Need to pull the manufacturers back into the room.

Weyand: Making standards without manufacturers in the room is already getting off on the wrong foot. He wants it noted that both he and Vik are manufacturers.

Friberg: You're made your point. This is an open meeting that now will end.

Kobel: One any-other-business item. Sent in proposal re 1" and above track standards, heard nothing back. Don't even know if that looked at, not part of inner circle so can't get answers.

McCamey: proposal?

Kobel: definition of track geometry, using ARE as a model by using appropriate definitions and changes.

McCamey: got that, posted to alias, some some responses, mostly "agree in principle" but important criteria is modeling definitions that have specific meanings. Most disagree. Will send those to you.

Kobel: Generally, how get answers?

Friberg: Send to Kramkee, who's in charge of mechanical.

End that topic, any other business?

Thank you for your attendance

(Adjourned at 3:17PM)