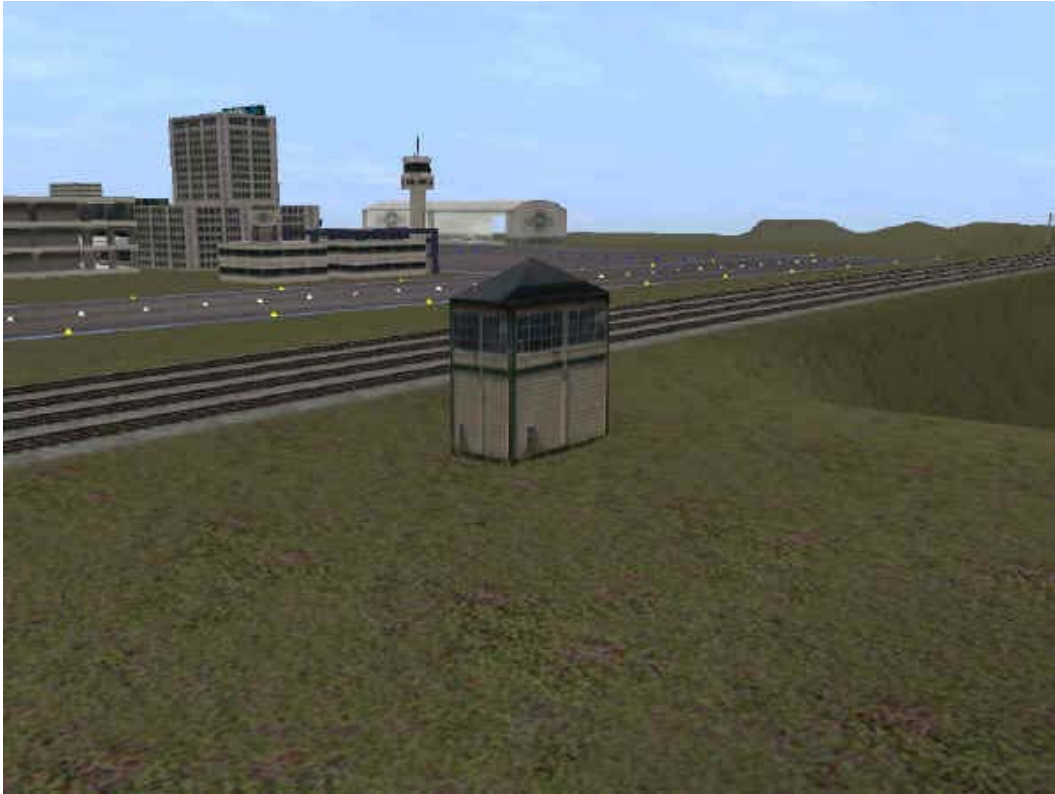


Thinking inside the box

By John D'Angelo



Trackside signal box.

Many of us railroading enthusiasts would love to spend the day watching trains pass by from the comfort of a signal box, as it is known in England. Here in the states we call it an interlocking tower. The building contains the equipment for directing the movement of trains through the area that is under control of the signal box. Some older signal boxes have large levers that are pulled by the operator to throw switches and set routes. Newer signal boxes change routes with the touch of a button. There may be a map of the track system that will indicate the position of trains as they pass by. All in all, a signal box is a great place to be when you want to watch the action. What is really great is that you can do this when running Trainz.

Jetstreamsky has created a signal box that you can be inside of and operate from just like the real thing. It is available from the Trainz Download Station (DLS) as KUID:2:4468:9497. Be sure to download the pack that includes the interior view (KUID:4468:55503) and the signal box clock (KUID:4468:39502).

The secret behind Jetstreamsky's signal box is that he has created the building as a locomotive! This allows you to use the cabin view to see the passing trains from inside the building. Setting up the box takes a few steps, but it is not a very difficult procedure. Like any locomotive, the signal box needs to be placed on a track. Since we do not want to see it sitting on a track and want it to look like a building, we need to use invisible track. TRS2004 has invisible track available built in and listed as "track_invisible". Other invisible tracks are available from the DLS, but I like the wide red line of this track that you can see when you are in Surveyor. It makes object placement very easy.

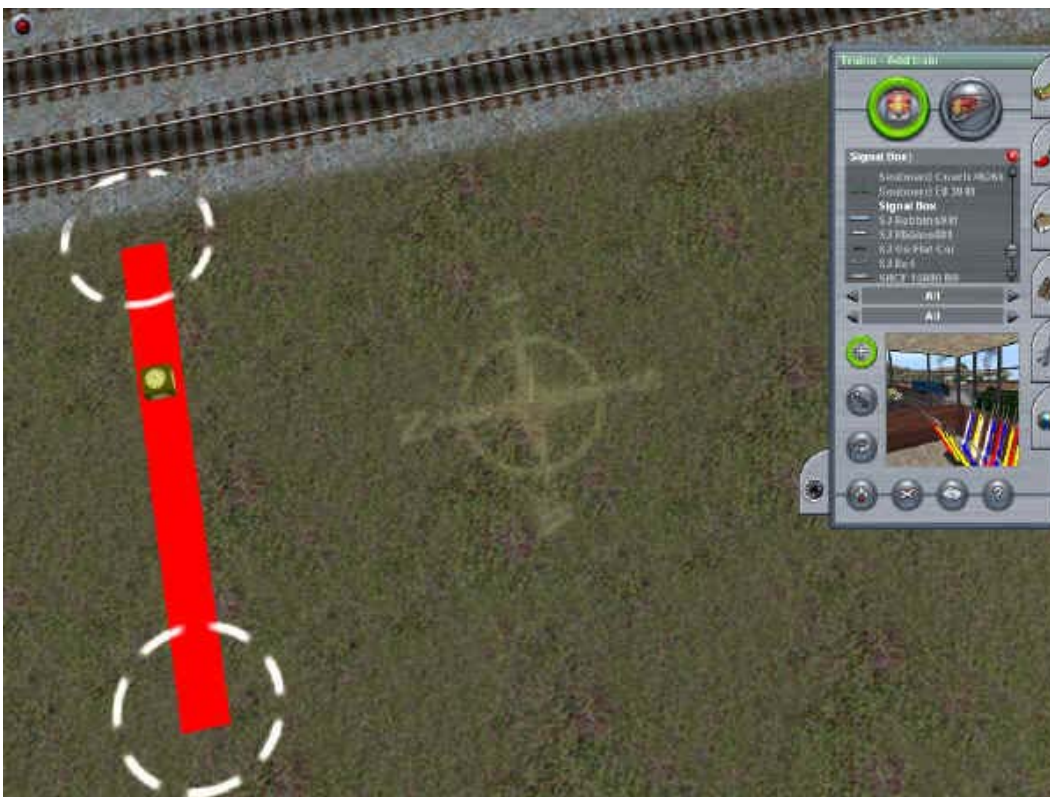
When you place your signal box, try to place it in an area where there will be a good amount of action. It isn't much fun to spend a day in a signal box when no trains are coming by! I decided to set up this signal box on my Metropolis route. I designed the Metropolis route to allow me to run passenger trains continuously on a four-track main line. The route is not completed yet, but the main line is ready for operation. I decided to place the signal box on the four-track main line across from the municipal airport. There will be plenty of action here!



Placing the invisible track.

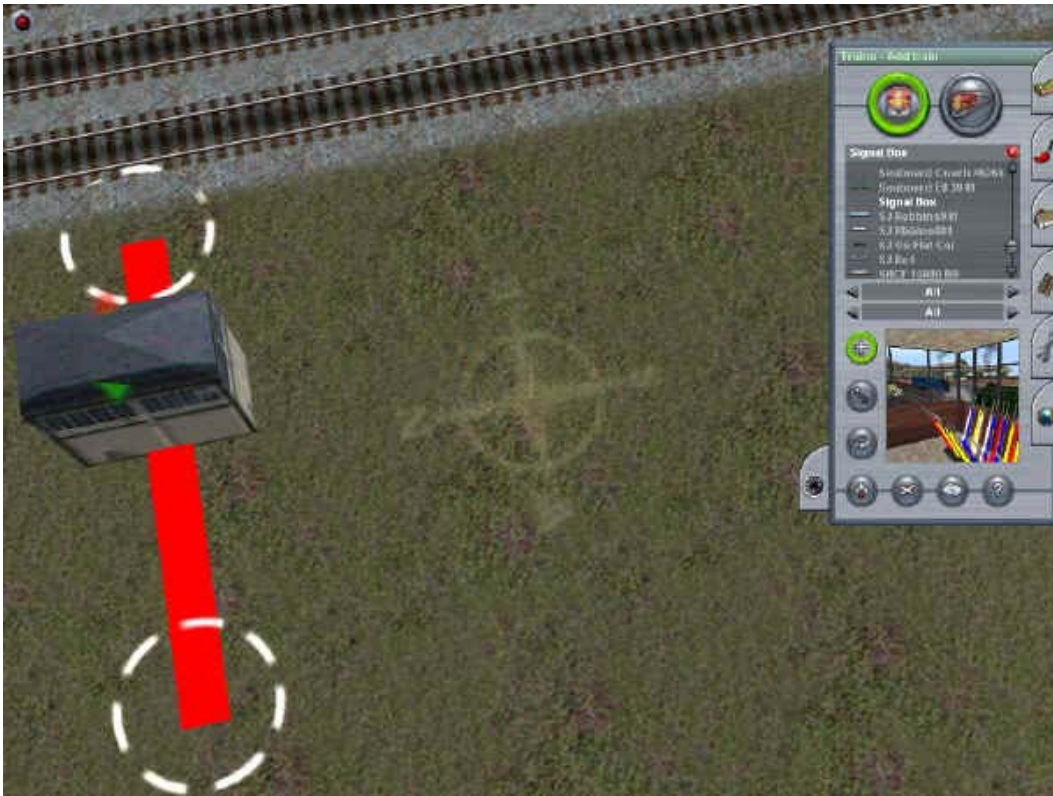
As you can see in the screen shot, I ran the invisible track at a right angle to the track. The signal box is not square, and the front and back walls are longer than the side walls.

With the orientation this way, the front will be facing across the track. If you want the view to be along the track, run the invisible track parallel to the main line track. After the invisible track is laid down, you should next place the Signal Box Clock. There are two purposes for the Signal Box Clock. It is an animated clock with a second hand that moves, but with no hour or minute hands. It is also a sound effect, or should I say a non-sound effect. Since the signal box is considered a locomotive, this sound effect masks the locomotive idle sound and gives the building an empty hollow sound. It's hard to really describe the sound; you just have to hear it to understand it. The clock is a scenery object and is placed as a scenery object.



The clock has been placed.

It is necessary to be sure to place the clock right where you will be placing the signal box so the clock will appear in the interior of the signal box and the sound effect will work. Note that it has been placed right in the center of the invisible track.



The signal box is placed.

The signal box has been placed. Remember it is considered a locomotive and will be found in the rolling stock listing. Also note that when it was placed, the green arrow was facing away from the main line. Inside the signal box, the switch levers are in the front of the box. If you wish them to be in the forward view you will need to turn the box so the green arrow faces toward the main line tracks.



The signal box has been rotated.

That completes the installation of the signal box. Now it is time to run the route and view the action. For today's run I have four trains running; two leaving from Metropolis Terminal and two from Union Station. Since the route is in construction, only basic texturing has been done at Union Station.



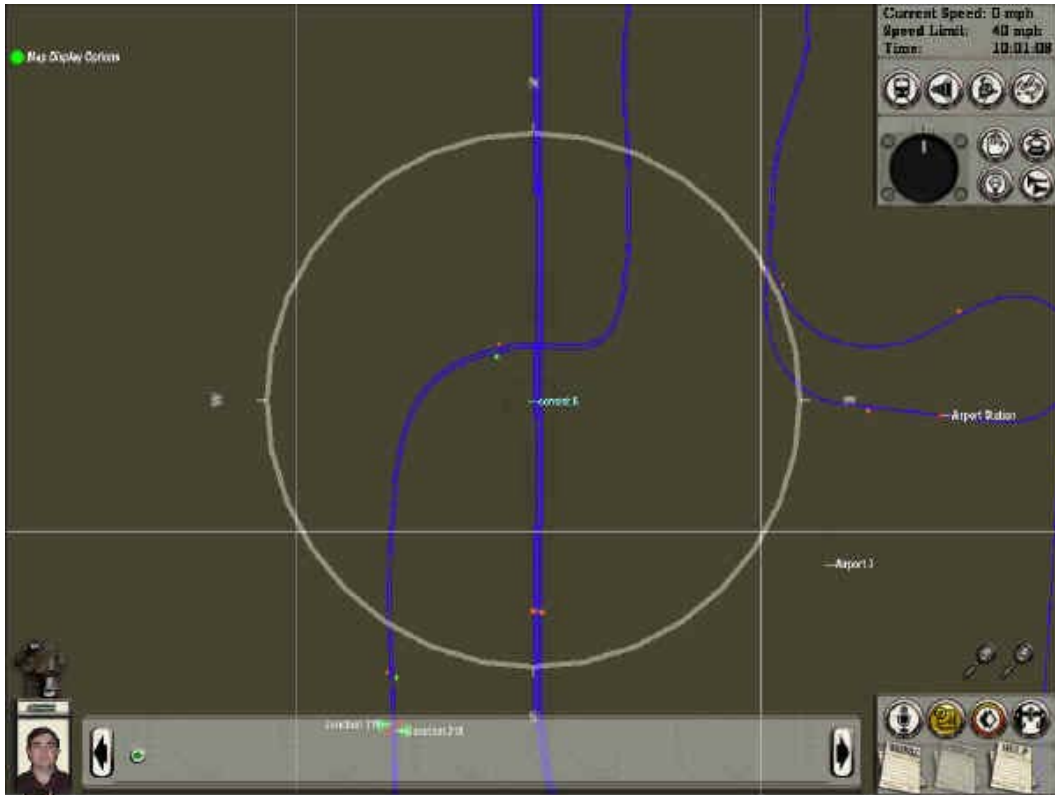
All aboard! Above at Metropolis Terminal; below at Union Station.

Two trains will come from the east and two trains will come from the west and pass by the signal box.



Flight 595 departs.

Using cab view you can pan around to see the outside world from inside the signal box. Note that since the signal box is considered a locomotive, all the locomotive controls are there, but you don't want to go anywhere! I use F5 to clear up the view. Note the clock.



Map View.

Using the Map View you can use the signal box as a switching center operating the switch tracks from the map. Note that the signal box is centered in the circle (SP2). The map will indicate the oncoming traffic just as the real map would in an actual signal box or interlocking tower.



20th Century Limited on the move.

Using the signal box has become a major enjoyment for me. I have placed it on other routes of mine. On some routes I use the signal box to view main line traffic like this route. On other routes I use the signal box as a junction center to manage and route trains to new routes as they enter the operating area. Many times I have set the time of day for nighttime and the weather conditions to snow. It's a cozy experience to sit in the signal box and watch those headlights come out of the snow as the trains head on their way. On my computer I have an audio feed from a multiband radio. I'll activate the radio to a favorite music station and then have it play just like someone in the tower would use a radio to help pass the time. By the way, I think the signal box would be just the thing to have in AI's Northeastern Junction route. It's only a download away!



Have fun thinking inside the box!

John

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