MODELLING THE RAILWAYS OF QUEENSLAND

CONVENTION 2008

SOUTHPORT

by Peter Woolley and Douglas Cartwright

History of Southport and the South Coast line.

The Beenleigh to Southport railway was opened in 1889 and expanded south over the next dozen years to cross the NSW border at Tweed Heads. The old South Coast Railway is probably the only closed line of the 1960s that is still being written and talked about.

Despite reference being made to "the Southport Branch", Southport was the de-facto terminus for the entire line. The South Coast line was progressively closed during the 1960s as road transport took over, with the Southport line the last to be closed in 1964. I took a series of photos at the time when the tracks had been lifted but the station buildings had not yet been demolished.

Buildings

The station building was originally identical to the old Beenleigh Station, but unlike Beenleigh it was added to and extended several times over the years. The bar is often referred to as if it was an original feature, but I can remember it being built in the late 1940s. At the same time the men's toilet was moved from the platform to outside the track at the terminal end of the bay road. The bay was also relatively new having been developed from the unloading dock for the sawmill. I think all this construction came about because of the decision to raise the platform from its original very low height. The first occasion I can recall the use of the bay was for the Jubilee Art Gallery train in 1951. But surely it was used in some form during earlier peak holiday times.

The goods shed showed evidence of at least two extensions, but was generally a standard QR shed and not very well maintained.

The engine shed always seemed too small for the numbers of engines which could gather there on busy weekends. It was notable for the absence of any easy coaling facility. Coal was shovelled off the ground onto the footplate and then into the tender. Presumably this was only necessary if the engine was going to Tweed Heads, there usually being enough tender capacity to do the 100 mile return trip to Brisbane.

P Woolley

We have put a carriage shed at the eastern end of the layout which was marked on the yard plan and is visible in one or two early photos, but which no local can actually remember. It is a puzzle as to why a shed only big enough for two carriages would have been provided in the first place. One possibility is that up until 1939 the Governor had a holiday residence (*Huntington*) in Southport and that shade had to be provided for the Vice-Regal carriage and another during the period of his stays. Has anyone another suggestion?

Passengers

The most notable aspect of Southport operations was the passenger traffic. As a resort town since its earliest days, Southport attracted enormous numbers of tourists and holiday makers. There were many special trains run at holiday times and long weekends, which would fill the

relatively small yard. When the crowds were leaving the Coast it was necessary to replace trains in the platforms as quickly as possible. Once both platforms were cleared, two new sets of cars were hauled to the top of the grade out of the station and were loose shunted by gravity into the platforms.

On arrival at Southport travellers first saw the Blue and Red Bus Company's co-ordinated busses waiting to convey passengers to places from Burleigh Heads to Murwillumbah. In the days before under-floor storage lockers, the bus crews would struggle on wet days and nights to load passenger baggage on the roof in the correct order of first off last on.

The co-ordinated service was so important for the Southport-Brisbane service that trains would be held for any late running busses. I cannot say what the time limit would be but there could be as many as four busses per train. The local Cream and Green busses from Southport to Burleigh Heads were backed in on the eastern side of Scarborough Street to await their passengers (who had to look after their own luggage).

Goods

In 1945, the entire area we now know as the Gold Coast had a population of only about seven thousand, plus a greatly variable floating population. Unlike the passenger services, which are well-documented, the goods workings happened at night and largely went unnoticed.

Southport had a relatively large goods shed for a station supposedly at the end of a branch line. It was the main centre for the area and therefore became the main goods yard. There was competition for freight, with some being brought from Brisbane by small cargo boats owned by Col(in) Kleinschmidt. And it must not be forgotten that there were goods yards at Nerang, Bilinga and Tweed Heads and other smaller centres.

Johnson and Freeman's sawmill was located opposite the bay platform of the station, with logs railed in from the hinterland being unloaded on the side away from the platform. Exactly how this was done is now unclear. There seems to be little reference to cut lumber being shipped out of Southport, so presumably most of the mill's product was transported by road for local use.

The major outbound freight during the 1940s was bags of rutile (mineral sands). This was an important resource during WWII (rutile is the raw material for titanium). The refined black sand was shipped in heavy paper bags stacked over the bogies on MGW flat wagons. It was for this loading that the simple gantry was originally built over the track beside Railway Street.

QSMEE Collection; Photo late T Leahy in Railways of Queensland Vol 5 p2.

In the mid-1950s, rutile began to dwindle as a mining activity and so did the outward freight, but by then the Gold Coast was becoming the 'in' tourist area. While general freight remained the primary inbound cargo, containers of cement carried on MTWs began to be transhipped through the Southport yard using the old rutile gantry, heralding the start of the Surfers Paradise building boom.

In conversation for this article the question was asked how the mail came in and out. I never noticed mail-bags being put aboard a passenger train. They may have moved on freight services. Perhaps someone can enlighten us?

Motive Power and Rolling-stock

Due to the load limits of several bridges on the South Coast line, the PB15 was the only motive power seen at Southport, certainly in my lifetime. Indeed I used to wonder if there were any other types of engine on QR. The big highlight of a trip to Brisbane was seeing the monster 35s and Standard Goods at Yeerongpilly loco. One blissful day there was a large grey 38 class with a pointed front. There were ructions when I could not have a seat on that side of the train.

Because of the PB's capacity limits, the Southport carriages were a motley collection of old light-weight equipment. I remember once riding in an end platform car which still had rattan flip-over seats: I actually thought it was a new car! From a modelling point of view, such a variety of freight and passenger stock spanning such a spread of years, is virtually impossible to model authentically.

Because of the difficulty of obtaining appropriate models of pre-1964 stock, we have had to content ourselves with a degree of modeller's licence which allows us to suppose that the station survived into the present day with upgrades to allow heavier locomotives and modern stock in to Southport.

Layout Design and Construction

At home, Southport is housed in a compact 6 x 3 metre space. It was always intended the layout should be transportable, both for occasional exhibition outings, and also with the idea that any change of residence in the future should be achievable without totally destroying the layout. The other key constraint on the design wish-list was being able to transport it in a small car.

There are four modules 700 x 1100 mm, plus a balloon loop which unfolds to 1800 x 1200 mm. Each module is fitted at one end with a pivoted drop leg, plus a loose leg at the Broadwater end of the layout. In the folded position, the legs form a carrying frame, allowing the modules to be stacked securely without crushing the scenery. The entire layout including loop packs down to 1200 x 900 x 900 mm.

During assembly, the loose leg is fixed onto the first module to make it self-supporting. The free end of each subsequent module rests on lugs in the previous module while its leg is folded down and locked into place. Perfect alignment of benchtop and trackwork every time is provided by 6mm steel matching pins and holes. A pair of spring clamps holds each join secure.

Materials

Each module is built from a sheet of polyfoam roughly 80mm thick, sourced from the offcut racks of Kool-Foam, a Logan-based polystyrene fabricator. The foam sheets are Liquid Nailed into perimeter frames of 20 x 90 mm finger-joint pine with glued and screwed butt-join corners. In order to keep the joinery simple, it was decided not to represent the 1 in 40 grade out of the station.

A new sheet of 18mm particle-board supported flat and level on saw-horses was used as a construction table, which helped in getting the corners square.

The legs are built from 6mm MDF and 12 x 18mm FJ pine strips glued and screwed and braced using IKEA shelving cross-braces. T-nuts and bolts provide levelling adjustment.

Early experiments showed that the biggest difficulty with the composite timber/polyfoam construction was the tendency of the foam sheets to be cupped and bowed, making it hard to get the top perfectly flat. This was solved by blocking up the FJ-pine perimeter frame members on strips of 6mm MDF while gluing onto the foam slab. Once the glue was set, a custom-made 900mm hot-wire cutter worked by two people was used to cut the foam flush with the frame. An all-over covering of 3mm cork was glued down with PVA.

Track-work

The track-work at Southport was typical of QR practice of the era, being laid directly onto the ground with minimal ballast. The yard area is quite flat, although from a standing start the grade out of the station made the little PB15s work pretty hard. The trackwork on the layout is all Peco 12mm Code 75, laid directly onto the cork. Ballast is a mix of colours from Chuck's.

The points are Peco Electrofrog, modified for DCC operation by gapping across the closure rails. A plate made from Evergreen V-groove styrene provides a mounting-point for a DPST sub-mini slide switch, which is used to simultaneously change the electrical polarity of the frog and physically throw the point blades by way of a piano-wire operating rod. Fitting the assembly under the point only needs a housing cut into the cork and a small excavation in the foam to take the switch and wires. Piano-wire pins anchor the throw-bar, sleepers and switch baseplate firmly together down into the foam baseboard.

Electrical

A two-wire bus is used to supply power along the length of the layout. Foolproof automatic electrical connection between modules is achieved using pins and plates held in contact by powerful Neodymium rare-earth magnets.

The layout is DCC-enabled. There is a master switch that allows a choice of power sources. While DCC is the usual mode for operations, a Clipper controller fitted with Relco electrical track cleaner is regularly used with an analogue loco to burn away any accumulated dirt and dust. There is an isolating switch for the DCC controller power supply if it needs to be reset. Another switch allows the short track behind the engine shed to be isolated from normal operations for DCC Programming mode.

Scenery

The scenery is a combination of painted plaster over a former of carved expanded polyfoam and sprinkled as usual with various scatter materials. All the buildings were scratch-built with styrene using a combination of very valuable reference photos from various publications, and those taken after closure.

---ooOoo---